

Democrats step up campaign to block third parties

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The Democratic Party is intensifying its effort to prevent third parties and independent candidates from getting on the ballot and challenging President Joe Biden this year, according to reports by *Politico*, the *New York Times* and other media outlets.

The report in the *Times*, published April 29, notes the vast resources that right-wing independent candidate Robert F. Kennedy Jr. has been compelled to expend in his push for ballot status:

The effort has already cost his campaign hundreds of thousands of dollars, and a supporting super PAC at least \$2.4 million more, federal campaign finance records show. It has involved a number of professionals who specialize in getting people on the ground with clipboards and petitions and helping candidates navigate the complicated process. Their success is what will make or break Mr. Kennedy's campaign.

Kennedy has paid a single firm with expertise in ballot access, Texas-based Accelebrate2020, \$689,000 for "campaign consulting," and the campaign is advertising for full-time petition signature collectors in New York state, offering \$40 an hour on Craigslist.

While Kennedy himself is a multi-millionaire, his campaign is being financed by billionaire Timothy Mellon, heir to a banking fortune, and his running mate Nicole Shanahan, the ex-wife of Google founder Sergei Brin, one of the 10 richest Americans.

The politics of his campaign are thoroughly reactionary, a combination of right-wing demagoguery about slashing the federal deficit and eliminating corporate corruption of the Democrats and Republicans, all-out support for the Israeli genocide in Gaza, coupled with opposition to the war in

Ukraine, and support for cutting military spending overall. Add to this Kennedy's signature preoccupation with denouncing vaccination, including essential protections for children, as well as the vaccines against COVID-19 that have saved millions of lives.

Neither his right-wing nostrums nor his famous name have protected Kennedy from attack by both the Democrats and more recently Trump, with both sides in the capitalist political duopoly fearing any outlet for popular discontent outside the two-party system.

A follow-up report in the *Times* Tuesday outlined the many obstacles created by the Democrats and the Republicans to make it more difficult—and in some states nearly impossible—for candidates outside the two-party system to run against them.

Some states have rules against people coming in from out of state to help a campaign procure signatures; others have rules that restrict a campaign's ability to hire paid canvassers instead of relying solely on volunteers. Some states allow months for independent candidates to gather signatures, while others have short windows. Some states require a vice presidential nominee on the petition. The work of actually gathering thousands of signatures, and ensuring that all these rules are met, is grueling and often costly.

The *Politico* report, published May 3, gives considerable detail about the internal discussions among Democratic-aligned super PACs after their success in pushing the "No Labels" group of conservative Democrats out of the election. The right-wing group, financed by billionaires Harlan Crow (real estate) and Michael Smith (LNG gas), recently declared that it would

not nominate a candidate for president, largely because it had failed to convince any prominent corporate politician to challenge Biden and Trump.

The coalition of pro-Biden fundraisers “is now turning its sights on Robert F. Kennedy Jr.,” *Politico* wrote, “message-testing” anti-Kennedy advertising and monitoring Kennedy campaign events in order to collect negative information on his campaign. This could include a multimillion-dollar ad campaign, depending on where Kennedy obtains ballot status, particularly in the so-called “battleground” states.

The effort to suppress any challenge to the two-party monopoly already involves considerable resources. According to *Politico*:

To date, the campaign against Kennedy has largely focused on research and legal challenges. The Democratic National Committee hired veteran staffers to coordinate their push back against Kennedy, particularly through media stories about Kennedy. They’ve also filed Federal Elections Commission complaints against Kennedy’s allies. The outside groups, like Clear Choice PAC and American Bridge, are diving into opposition research and messaging. MoveOn, a 10 million-member organization, reassigned staffers from No Labels-focused efforts toward Kennedy, as well as bringing on additional staff.

Kennedy has ballot status in Michigan after gaining the nomination of the Natural Law Party, a political formation established by the transcendental meditation religious cult. The party was largely disbanded in 2004 but retains a ballot line, only in Michigan, by means of third-party campaigns for minor offices where it was the only alternative to the Democrats and Republicans on the ballot.

The Kennedy campaign claims it has obtained and filed enough petition signatures to get on the ballot in Nevada, New Hampshire and North Carolina. It is currently petitioning in Arizona, Georgia and Pennsylvania, and has announced plans to do the same in Wisconsin. All these states are expected to be closely contested in November, and in all these states the Democrats will challenge Kennedy’s petitions.

The Democratic Party campaign to deny ballot status to third parties and independent candidates is by no means

limited to Kennedy, the *Politico* report notes. It includes Green Party candidate Jill Stein and independent Cornel West, a former “left” Democrat and supporter of Biden against Trump in 2020.

In March, it was widely reported that the Democratic National Committee had set up a special unit with a sizeable budget to coordinate efforts to force third-party candidates to “play by the rules,” which means making use of various anti-democratic legal technicalities to prevent political opponents from obtaining ballot status.

Most of the legal challenges to Kennedy, and presumably to Jill Stein and Cornel West, are likely to fail. But they have the additional benefit, from the standpoint of the Democrats, of diverting time and resources which these independent efforts would otherwise devote to campaigning.

Similar methods have been employed by the Democrats against the Socialist Equality Party in previous election campaigns, notably in Midwestern states like Ohio, Michigan and Illinois, where Democrats mobilized lawyers to check nominating petitions and seek to invalidate thousands of signatures on spurious grounds.

Both the Democrats and Republicans have already engaged in such sordid tactics this year in two congressional campaigns in Michigan. In one case, the Republicans challenged petitions by Democrat Curtis Hertel in the district which includes Lansing. In the other, Democratic incumbent Shri Thanedar challenged a prospective primary opponent, fellow Democrat Adam Hollier, in the district that covers much of Detroit and the Downriver suburbs.

Both challenges are anti-democratic, seizing on supposed errors in paperwork. The Republicans claim that Hertel made “fatal errors” in his candidate affidavit and nominating petitions by listing the office he is seeking as “US Congress” rather than “US House of Representatives.”

Thanedar challenged 791 of the 1,555 signatures filed by Hollier to meet a requirement of 1,000 valid signatures, claiming that the signers are not registered or registered at a different address, are duplicates, or live outside the district or the signatures are forged (based on claimed similarities in handwriting).



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