

The largest group of voters in NC can't be trusted to help run elections? That's just wrong. | Opinion

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One ought never be surprised by the hypocrisy of the Democratic and Republican parties, but they can still get you at times. The latest doublespeak appears in Ned Barnett's Oct. 15 Opinion column about the need for both parties to appeal to unaffiliated voters — now 36% of the state's voters, eclipsing both Democrats and Republicans. Both Anderson Clayton, the state Democratic chair, and Michael Whatley, her Republican counterpart, touted how their parties value and welcome independent voters.

What they did not mention, however, was that their parties continue to fight together to keep unaffiliated voters from any meaningful role in running elections. Their actual message is we really, really want your vote, but we certainly do not want you on an elections board.

While the Democratic and Republican parties may squabble about lots of things, they've long agreed that voters who choose to register independent — the only voters who refuse to pledge allegiance to a political party — should have no say in setting precinct lines, deciding polling places, selecting voting equipment, choosing precinct workers, approving ballots, reviewing petitions, adjudicating candidates' qualifications, hearing election protests, certifying results and deciding the winners of elections.

Those are the jobs of county boards of elections and the North Carolina State Board of Elections, and it is not by accident that all 505 members of those boards are Democrats or Republicans. The two major parties have fixed state law forever to keep anyone other than their own party members off election boards. Despite their differences on so much else, Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper and state Senate Leader Phil Berger and House Speaker Tim Moore (both Republicans) have found common ground in vigorously opposing a federal lawsuit to open election boards to unaffiliated voters.

In short, neither party wants to entrust election administration to the largest single group of voters in the state and the only voters who have not committed themselves to favor one party or the other. These are the same parties that regularly boast about wanting to restore public confidence in elections. Do they really believe public confidence is enhanced by keeping election boards exclusively within the control of the Democratic and Republican parties? Do they actually think the public feels better about elections because the outcomes are determined by party activists rather than people who are not pledged to a particular political party?

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Do the parties think we are so stupid as to believe that they are interested in election integrity rather than keeping themselves in power? It is a shame that Clayton and Whatley were not pressed on their appeals to unaffiliated voters. Perhaps they have an explanation we've just not heard yet for why they want independent voters to support their parties but cannot trust them to help run elections. Not a single one of the 2.6 million unaffiliated voters on a board of elections?

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