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Testimony of Jeremy Gruber, SVP of Open Primaries
Joint Legislative Action and Elections Committee
May 29, 2025
AB597– Nevada Open Primaries

Chairs and Members of the Joint Legislative Action and Elections Committee,

My name is Jeremy Gruber and I am the Senior Vice President of Open Primaries-a nonpartisan non-profit organization dedicated to more open and inclusive election systems. I want to thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in favor of AB 597.

There are more than 840,000 registered nonpartisans in Nevada, making up about 36 percent of registered voters in the Silver State, far more than either major party. But they are barred by law from voting in partisan primary elections. To put that in context, Nevada bars more voters from participating in its partisan primary elections by virtue of being independent than exist of all political persuasions in over half a dozen states, from Rhode Island to Alaska. There is no context where that isn't a crisis in democracy.

Nevada's nonpartisan voters are not going away. They are the fastest growing group of voters in the state by far, having surged in numbers over the last ten years. Denying the fastest growing group of voters in the state the ability to participate in taxpayer funded elections is simply unsustainable.

Who are nonpartisan voters? They are a cross section of citizens, but some groups stand out. That starts with our young people. Over 50% of millennial and GenZ voters-now the largest group of voters by age in the country-are not affiliated with a political party.

Half of our military veterans-49% of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans in particular-are independent. They fight for our country, and come home to an election system that shuts them out.
40% of Asian Americans, 37% of Hispanics, 30% of African Americans and 20% of Native Americans are independent. These are the voters being shut out in closed primaries; who are denied a say in who represents them and how they are governed. It's a massive act of voter suppression.

That increasingly matters, because general election races in Nevada are becoming more and more uncompetitive. That means the state's primary elections are where the real choices and real opportunities to have a meaningful impact exist for voters.

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All the research shows that voter participation goes up in open primaries. The Bipartisan Policy Center among others issues reports that consistently find that to be the case. If you let more people vote, participation goes up-that's simple math. What's less appreciated is how broadly voter participation goes up. Because it's not just the primaries. Studies show that voter participation goes up in the general election as well. That's because once you establish a culture of voting-every election is impacted. That's why when Colorado adopted the same form of open primary envisioned by AB597, voter registration in the state surged, and the state shattered records for participation.

Nevada is in poor company as one of only 14 states that continue to maintain a closed partisan primary, with 36 states having open primaries. In the past five years alone, Alaska, Colorado, Maine, and New Mexico have opened their primaries, as well as the cities of St. Louis and Washington, D.C. New Mexico is the most recent, following the passing of a bipartisan reform bill earlier this year granting more than 330,000 independent voters the right to vote in that state's primary elections starting in 2026.

Primary elections are not private elections. They cost Nevada taxpayers millions of dollars every election year. They are held in government buildings, run by government employees and administered by the Secretary of State, yet they remain closed to many of the taxpaying citizens that fund them. It's a modern version of taxation without representation.

Some folks say well then independents should just join a party. Imagine if the state of Nevada told Democratic voters they had to register Republican to vote in the primary or vice versa. That is what the current system asks of nonpartisans-to join a party whose agenda they don't align with in order to vote.

That's why AB597 is such an important bill. Everyone benefits from a healthier, more inclusive political system. It is a solution that enjoys broad, bipartisan support among voters. It's time to tell everyone in Nevada: No more taxation without representation. No more closed primaries that shut out the largest group of voters in the state from exercising the franchise. AB597 would let all voters vote in primary elections, it's that simple and that profound. I hope you will lend your support to it.

Thank you again and I'm happy to serve as a resource to the legislature as you debate this important bill.

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