

**State House State Government Committee  
Testimony of David Black  
June 22, 2023**

My name is David Black, I live in Cumberland County and I am the retired CEO of the Harrisburg Regional Chamber & CREDC, the Chamber of Commerce and Economic Development Corp serving the Capital Region, Dauphin, Cumberland and Perry Counties, a position I held for 20 years. Prior to that I spent over 20 years in government, serving in the Ridge Administration at the Departments of Community Affairs and Community & Economic Development and prior to that as a County Commissioner and Row Officer in Clarion County.

In retirement, I remain involved our local community serving on both business and not-for-profit boards. I also currently volunteer time on two "Good Government" issues. One, American Promise, working to eliminate the problem of Dark Money in political campaigns and today's issue Ballot PA, hoping to make the case to move legislation that will allow independent and non-affiliated registered voters vote in primary elections.

Since the day I turned 18, I have been registered to vote. Up through the 1990s, had you asked me how I felt about independent registered voters voting in primary elections, I would have said, "No, registered voters need to pick a team!" Over 25 years later, I have evolved, as has the world we live in, to the point I not only to agree that these independent registered voters should be able to vote in primaries, but to be an advocate for legislation that we are discussing today to become law to permit independents to vote in primaries as 41 other states do.

Things have changed dramatically over the last 25 years as the core of both major parties have arguably moved to philosophical extremes. I have noticed more of my colleague's in the business community moving to or considering moving to independent or non-affiliated voter registration. Many of these are folks are involved in small to mid-sized companies whose focus is on survival and hopefully, profitability while providing their service and/or product to those who need and want it, not on political ideology.

More and more these folks do their best to stay out of the active political fray, neither talking about, nor advocating positions, particularly on national political issues and/or personalities, but at the same time closely following the actions of government through organizations like Chambers, NFIB and trade associations on laws, regulations, taxes and other issues that could not only impact their bottom line, but also the number of people they employ and how much they can pay to retain and attract new talent to their organizations.

Last summer, about this time, we hosted a breakfast with business folks here in the Harrisburg Region to talk about today's issue. Former LG Mark Singel and David Thornburgh spoke explaining the issue in some detail, followed by a Q & A session. Good questions and good insights were added, all thought allowing independents to vote in primaries made sense. They were also all stunned to find out Pennsylvania was one of only 9 states not to allow it.

These folks are faithful in exercising their right to vote, they don't want to get involved in public arguments about national issues and personalities in politics and government, they don't want to be labeled red or blue. They care about offices from President to the State House to the County Courthouse to the local School Board. They don't want to have to change their registration

every time a candidate they like is registered in the "other" party, but they value the right to participate in the election process.

Last month, we had a municipal primary election here in Pennsylvania nominating candidates for Judgeships, County Officials, Municipal Officials and local School Boards. 1.1 million registered Pennsylvania voters could not vote in those primary elections for people seeking these offices. Add the fact there were countless numbers of primary races within a few votes making the difference in victory or defeat.

External to today's discussion, our country is a period rapid change and advancement in innovation and technology in all aspects of our lives, including the business landscape, where technology and workforce challenges demand innovation, technology and new collaborations and inclusivity in order to remain competitive.

Open primaries, allowing independent and non-affiliated voters to participate in primary elections regardless of their party affiliation, is a logical extension of all of the changes and innovation surrounding us daily, simply put, it's inclusive. Today, many in the business sector find themselves to be more moderate than either major party, with their focus on the health of their business, the well-being of their workforce and their quality of life issues and the ability to attract talent in a competitive workforce environment. They do not want their business to be judged by their voter registration, they have enough other things to be concerned about.

Open primaries will also allow candidates the potential to attract support from a broader base of voters, which hopefully will result in policies and proposals that resonate with a wider spectrum of citizens. This diversity in political representation ensures that the interests of the business community, which comprises a diverse range of industries and perspectives, are adequately represented in the decision-making process.

Furthermore, open primaries foster a culture of moderation and compromise within the political arena. This balanced approach is usually good for businesses, as it promotes stability and predictability in policymaking. Open primaries can play a role to pragmatic solutions to pressing economic challenges.

Open primaries also strengthen civic engagement and increase voter turnout as voters feel a greater sense of ownership and involvement in the political process. Engaged citizens are more likely to stay informed about policy issues, advocate for their interests, and actively participate in local and state affairs. This heightened civic engagement creates a more informed and educated electorate, which is crucial for a healthy business environment that relies on transparent and accountable governance.

We believe, as do many Pennsylvanians that open primaries offer numerous benefits not only to the business community, but to our Commonwealth and our Democracy.

Mr. Chairman and Republican Chair, I thank you for holding this hearing today. I look forward to further discussion today and this committee's action to move this legislation to the full House floor in the near future.

## ***Dave Black Biography***



**David E Black** has nearly 45 years of experience in executive leadership, organizational culture, strategic planning, economic development, political insight, government processes and strategic, goal orientated executive navigation skills.

Whether serving as a leader in the process of merging two Departments of State Government; working to create innovative community and economic development programs in Pennsylvania; reshaping a state-wide/ state-affiliated not-for-profit organization; guiding and growing a combined Chamber of Commerce/not-for-profit Economic Development Corporation through challenging times; working with business leaders to build communities and address business challenges; or helping to bring fresh perspective and

technology to a rural Pennsylvania County, Dave has always strived to build positive organizational cultures and most importantly, leave things better than when he arrived.

Dave retired June 30, 2021 from the **Harrisburg Regional Chamber & CREDC** (Capital Region Economic Development Corporation) after serving as the organization's President & CEO for 20 years, which included economic development projects, managing membership businesses, inspiring and coordinating two large Boards, a professional staff, government policy issues at the Federal, State and Local levels and managing the organization with successful results.

Dave is currently working as a Strategic Advisor in a limited capacity with **Dame Leadership**, a Strategic Planning & Leadership Development Company for businesses, not-for-profits and government organizations. He is a member of the Board of Directors of **Penn National Insurance**, based in Harrisburg. He also serves on a number of not-for-profit Boards including Board Chair of **Harristown Development Corporation**, The **Joshua Group**, the **Harrisburg Area YMCA**, the National Advisory Board for **American Promise** and a volunteer for **Ballot PA**.

Prior to the Chamber & CREDC, he served in leadership roles in the administration of Governor Tom Ridge as Deputy Secretary at the **Department of Community & Economic Development**, Acting Secretary at the former **Department of Community Affairs** and Chief Operating Officer at **Team Pennsylvania**.

Dave served as a **Clarion County (PA) Commissioner**, as well as a County Row Officer and has work experience in sales and public finance. He continues to be active in his community and causes he believes in.

Dave is a native of Clarion, PA, a graduate of **Westminster College** and nearly completed his Masters in Public Administration from **Slippery Rock University**. He and his wife Shirley live in the Harrisburg area and are **parents to 2 children and proud grandparents of 3 grandchildren**.

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