

# Declare Your Independence! Independent Media, Independent Political Movements, Independent Electoral Activity

Work for the Real Change we Need

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If I had to pick one word for Americans who want real change, it would be independence.

Not only because the United States was founded on the idea of independence but because those of us who work to try and change the country for the better and have studied American history have learned this has always been the critical ingredient for real change.

First, we need independent media. Web based outlets like this one are a critical ingredient to the success of advocacy efforts. Like so many businesses in the United States, the media is controlled by concentrated group of corporations. A handful of companies own all the hundreds of television stations on your cable TV. The same is true of radio stations. More and more newspapers are part of syndicates. These conglomerates has resulted in homogenized that only reports a concentrated corporate perspective.

The media does not report on the incredible activism taking place all around the country. They don't want America to have another Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, Ralph Nader and so many others who in the past helped to move the United States in part because the media reported on their activities. Now we only hear about corporate CEO's and elected officials elected due to corporate donations - otherwise it is sports stars and entertainment. The truth is there is more activism and organizing going on than even those of us working for change realize. If you attended the U.S. Social Forum in Detroit this month you could see it - at least 12,000 people attended, almost all were parts of organizations representing many more people, each working on a range of issues from housing and banking, to peace and criminal justice - people working to transform the American economy and political system. Did the media report on this conference? Does the media report on the movements these people are part of?

This leads me to the second area of independence we need - independent political movements. Throughout history it has been independent movements that made paradigm shifting change happen. Woodrow Wilson worked to prevent women from getting the right to vote. Leading suffragists were jailed and tortured during his presidency for protesting outside the White House. But in the end, woman got the right to vote while he was president. LBJ was a member of a political party dominated by southern segregationists. They opposed African American voting, ending Jim Crow, blacks and whites living together, going to school together, eating in the same restaurants - but LBJ signed the Civil Rights Act because an organized, independent civil rights movement demanded it. Richard Nixon, a

war hawk did not want to end the Vietnam War admitting defeat of the U.S. military. He was forced to by a persistent and independent anti-war movement that criticized both political parties for their support of the war. The peace movement - and the people in Vietnam resisting U.S. aggression - forced Nixon to end the war.

The Obama era has shown many Americans that advocacy groups that work hand in glove with the Democratic Party sell out their base and claim false victories. A prime example is the health care bill. This "reform" protected the status quo - health care dominated by private insurance was the problem before reform and remains the problem. The bill will result in hundreds of billions of dollars going to the insurance industry every year in tax payer subsidies and Americans being forced to buy their flawed corporate products. The cost of health insurance was not controlled, tens of millions will be left without insurance ten years from now and every regulation of the insurance industry in the law contains a poison pill that protects the insurance industry. The coalition, Health Care for America Now, spent tens of millions of dollars, donated by donors allied with the Democratic Party, to support the Democratic leadership bill. It was a sell out of their constituents who needed real reform. Americans will not receive better health care, health care will devour more and more of the GDP, and deficit spending by government will continue because of a fraudulent "reform" that preserved market dominated health care. This is happening on issue after issue - corporations win, the people lose, and organizations supposedly working for the peoples necessities claim victory while selling Americans out.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Americans need to declare their independence from two parties dominated by concentrated corporate power. Both parties take tens of millions from big business interests every year, elected officials, their staff members and sometimes their spouses profit going to work for corporations they "regulate" in the revolving door between government and concentrated corporate interests, receiving big checks for serving on their boards and feeding off the trough of crony capitalism.

This is not a new problem for America. Big business interests have always dominated government and the two parties have consistently represented status quo business interests, but throughout our history we have seen the people transform the government by creating independent political movements that challenged the two parties.

When the most valuable industry in the United States was slavery, the two parties - the Democrats and the Whigs - conspired to ensure that abolition of slavery would not be considered in Congress. The Democrats, dominated by slave holding plantation owners, and the Whigs, dominated by Northern industrialists who profited from cheap cotton, did not want to see slavery end. More than a hundred years of abolition advocacy was unsuccessful in breaking the grip of two parties whose political power came from slavery. Some of those who opposed slavery decided to challenge the two status quo parties. They formed abolition parties and ran to end slavery. They were called spoilers - just as Ralph Nader is called a spoiler for challenging the corporate parties today - but they ran and ran. They never won. But gradually the Whig Party weakened. Finally, the abolitionists evolved into the Republican Party and the most successful third party president in history, Abraham Lincoln, was elected president and slavery finally ended.

Looking back at this history would you have voted for either one of the slave parties? Or, would you have voted to end slavery even though your candidate had no chance of winning?

Look at many of the major paradigm shifts in history – farmers fighting banks that were foreclosing on them, workers not allowed to unionize and forced to work long, unsafe hours, the creation of Social Security, health care for the poor, ending child labor – the list goes on and on. All of these major changes in American history were first brought into the electoral arena by independent electoral efforts.

The government is dysfunctional today. It is unable to deal with pressing problems facing the country. People are losing their homes, declaring bankruptcy, dying from lack of health care, suffering from endless wars – but elected officials are stuck in inaction or fake action that protects the status quo. Independent politics means recognizing we have two corporate dominated parties and that we need to have at least one party not dominated by concentrated corporate interests in order to make progress on the urgent necessities of the American people. Independent politics does not necessarily mean winning elections, at least not right away. It may mean that the greater evil gets elected – an evil that will fund war and dole out taxpayer dollars to corporate interests – much like the lesser evil will do. But the path to paradigm shifting change has always included people willing to fight in the electoral arena even if they lost the election. These parties lost the election, but won the argument and in the end won real reform.

It is becoming more and more evident to Americans that the issue of the day is concentrated corporate power. We are in the midst of a major paradigm shift that will end corporatism – the combination of government and concentrated corporations working for their interest and not ours. Will you continue to vote for one of the corporatist parties? Or, will you do as our ancestors did and create the paradigm shift we need by challenging the powers that be.

So, on Independence Day remember the roots of the United States declaring independence from the most powerful imperial power of the day, remember Americans throughout history challenging two parties that protected the status quo and look at the lessons of the last year when the lack of independence has only led to change that corporations can believe in.

This weekend – Declare Your Independence – and work for the real change we need.

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