As former Pennsylvania Governors, we are writing today in full support of current legislation in both the House and Senate that would repeal closed primaries and bring 1.2 million independent voters back into the primary election process. Representing both major political parties, we come together in our firm belief that it is long past time for Pennsylvania to join the 43 other states that in some way allow independent voters to vote in every election.

When we were elected Governor, we pledged to govern on behalf of all Pennsylvanians – Democrats, Republicans, independents, those who voted for us, and those who voted against us. But our political system has changed over the last decade or two. Primary elections are often decided by a few more extreme voters. Candidates elected by those more extreme voters don’t have as much incentive to engage in the compromise and give and take that is so essential to effective governing. Adding independent voters to the primary mix will help.

Nothing is more fundamental to our democratic republic than the right to vote. Over the years, people have marched, protested, petitioned their elected officials, and even laid down their lives to make sure that voting is free, fair, and secure for all citizens. Plus, it is what the voters want. Repealing closed primaries enjoys remarkable support, with 74% of all Pennsylvania voters in favor. That includes strong majorities from across the political spectrum.

We also believe that opening primary elections will help build both political parties. By inviting independent voters into party primary elections, it’s giving them a chance to “try before you buy.” Both political parties have seen dramatic declines over the past 20 years, while independent voters are the fastest growing segment of the voting population. Why wouldn’t we want to invite them in?

Pennsylvania’s independent voters aren’t looking for favors, just fairness. As taxpayers, these independent voters help pay the roughly $50 million it costs to run a primary election – and yet they are denied the right to cast a vote. This is surely taxation without representation.

There is one more critical reason we believe that this is the right issue – at the right time – for Pennsylvania. It should come as no surprise that half of all veterans identify as independents. When members of our armed services take the oath to defend our country, it’s not to serve the red team or blue team. They serve the red, white, and blue team. How can we ask them to put their lives on the line for our country but deny them their right to vote when they come home?

We are proud to join together in our support for repealing closed primaries. It’s the right thing and the smart thing to do.

Gov. Tom Wolf (2015-2023)