

Ralph Nader Suggests:

Twenty Billionaires or Megabillionaires Who Could Run for President of the United States in 2016 to Break the Two-Party Duopoly from the Primary to Election Day

The tightening two-party duopoly has been moving relentlessly in the direction of common funding of candidates by the same privileged interests. The exclusion of independent or third party competitors through costly ballot access hurdles (see: opendebates.org for more information), litigious harassment, and barring them from debates has been well-documented. Gerrymandering into one-party districts has eliminated political competition in many states. Furthermore, there is no one of the above options on the ballot to allow for a no-confidence vote. Voters are told either to cast a *yes* vote or stay home.

All this has resulted in a seriously diminished democracy and ever declining public expectations that a reversal of this downward spiral and gridlock government is possible.

Both the mass media and the pollsters react accordingly by accepting the status quo and embracing the winner-take-all theory that only one of the two major party candidates can win. Consequently, there is little to no coverage of any other independent candidates. This process eliminates any chance that independents may have to highlight major neglected perils and directions or even to sprout in order to grow over several election cycles.

Presently, only very rich modestly enlightened people could have a chance to break this introverting cycle of political oligarchy, which unenlightened rich people generally approve of, that sets its own rules, makes its own laws, appoints its own judges and even brazenly forces taxpayers to finance its quadrennial political conventions. Predictably, the shared monopolization of politics, as has been the case with corporate market monopolization, redounds to the disadvantage of communities, the environment and the citizens whether as voters, workers, consumers, or small taxpayers.

Our political monoculture is worse than the multi-party political systems in any other Western country. It denies choices for voters, both candidates and agendas, resulting in the entrenchment of a *least worst* voting attitude that strips voters of their bargaining power from the onset. It assures that every four years, both parties degrade further toward widespread betrayal of the American dream, which starts with true freedom of choice, justice, civic engagement and opportunity. The numerous indicators documenting the long-term slide of our political economy and the globalized strip-mining of America by many of its own global corporations tell a shameful story.

Modestly enlightened rich people (MERPs) can persuade the mass media and other definers of the public's attention that they have the resources to overcome, at least initially, many of these obstacles. Ross Perot did so and after temporarily dropping out in the summer of 1992,

still managed to receive an amazing 19 million votes. Former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg probably could have had similar results had he chosen to run for the presidency.

MERPs receive immediate media coverage, and are likely to be regularly included in polling. They can get on all 50 state ballots, plus D.C. and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. They can demand access to the presidential debates or even attract sponsors of additional presidential debates and circumvent the largely corporate-funded arm of the Republican and Democratic Parties, called the Commission on Presidential Debates (see opendebates.org for more information).

MERPs can open up this closed system and make it breathe. And this openness helps people publically place many issues, redirections and improvements, from the local to the global, on the electoral table that have been previously wholly neglected by the Republican and Democratic political parties.

MERPs should indicate their interest in being candidates in 2014, if only to put constructive forces in motion that send the message to incumbents and their conventional challengers inside the Democratic and Republican parties that competition could be on the horizon.

The *first option* is to mount an independent or third party campaign.

A *second option* is for MERPs to challenge the two major parties within their own nominating procedures as Republican Party or Democratic Party primary candidates.

The *third option* is simply to challenge one Party's primary candidates (or candidate if a coronation drive is underway) until their Party's convention in order to reshape agendas, as to what is placed on the table; such competition would make the conventional primary candidates more competitive and less prone to conscious parallelism or self-censorship. A broader, healthier, less tediously repetitious debate routine can ensue.

A *fourth option* is simply to pose a possible challenge unless some major priority is specifically and convincingly adopted and campaigned regularly by a major party, its candidates and its apparatus ó such as reducing specific governmental waste and bureaucratic rigidities, fighting crony capitalism, reforming tax policy, supporting a coherent investment in public works, ways to confront climate change, waging peace, promoting living wages, creating jobs, reducing poverty, implementing universal Medicare, transforming education, prosecuting corporate crimes, freeing shackled health and safety regulators, increasing access to justice, protecting civil liberties (including privacy), abolishing the Electoral College, reforming campaign finance, and other long-overdue changes with majoritarian support that often invite left-right coalitions.

The goal of this entire proposal is to open the electoral arena to start deliberating authoritative changes in our country by more candidates using the First Amendment to *freely speak, assemble and petition*. The electoral arena should be one of the most important marketplaces of ideas. It is time for competitive democracy at presidential decision time to advance this liberating process. The people and posterity deserve nothing less.

The following names are put forth in that First Amendment spirit and *without any implication that I either support or oppose their particular candidacies or political beliefs*. My public positions are known or, if not, easily retrievable (Nader.org), and probably run counter to many of the views and actions of those persons listed below. The overriding point, however, is that the MERPs were chosen because (a) they have the resources to overcome the many barriers to free speech, assembly and petition; (b) they have some public interest concerns, activity, or charitable experience that bespeaks of civic engagement beyond their occupations or professions; and (c) they have not been reluctant to enter controversial spaces. All have had measurable success in the private economy. Of course there are numerous other people who meet these criteria and could enter this electoral arena, as well.

I sent this proposal to the twenty super-rich ahead of the public release to give them a "heads-up," so that they can reflect on its aforementioned purpose. Some of them will probably describe any candidacy by them as absurd, impossible, ridiculous and completely outside their most fanciful imaginations. But it is also possible that a few will recognize the strategy behind their selection, and consider playing a part in opening up a closed, stagnant, deadening system that is grinding our country and its future into the ground and depriving our future generations of a robust, open and functioning democracy. As former President Jimmy Carter recently remarked: "America does not have a functioning democracy at this point in time."

It is long overdue, in Abraham Lincoln's words, "to think anew." It is time to redefine the entry points to the presidential elections, to break out of the existing dreary cul-de-sac and to expand the debate for positive deliberations that can lead to action and results benefitting present and future generations. Remember, our country has far more solutions than it applies and far more problems than it deserves.

Herewith a list in no specific order:

1. Thomas Steyer – former Hedge Fund entrepreneur, and a determined, environmental advocate especially on climate change.
2. Ray Dalio – heads the country's largest hedge fund and is an engaged philanthropist.
3. Oprah Winfrey – founder of the *Oprah Winfrey Show*, advocate, actress and philanthropist.
4. Jerome Kohlberg – co-founder of KKR – large leveraged buyout firm, contributes to education and has funded campaign finance reform.
5. Barry Diller – media, cable business, believes in the public airwaves as a public trust.
6. John Arnold – former energy trader, now promoting the Giving Library connecting philanthropists with nonprofits, among many other projects.
7. Ted Turner – cable television business, philanthropy includes \$1 billion to the United Nations and other major donations to environmental, peace and population control programs that he advocates.
8. Thomas Siebel – software company creator, heads several companies in software, real estate and agriculture, and creator of the annual educational Siebel Scholars program.
9. Chase Coleman – successful money manager and creates venture capital firms.
10. Marc Andreessen – supports Silicon Valley entrepreneurs and advances all-investing-partner philanthropic commitments.

11. David Rubenstein ó former, energetic White House assistant to President Carter and co-founder of a successful venture capital firm ó the Carlyle Group ó expanding philanthropist and convener.
 12. Steve Case ó former CEO and chairman of AOL and exuberant philanthropist for innovative projects.
 13. Sheryl Sandberg ó COO of Facebook, author of *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead* and a co-founder of the Lean In Foundation which supports women in reaching their career goals.
 14. Bill Gross ó leading bond mutual fund manager, supports, among other organizations, Doctors Without Borders.
 15. William Conway ó co-founder of Carlyle Group ó whose priority philanthropic mission is to generate job producing activities.
 16. Stanley Druckenmiller ó investment firm manager, now giving to medical research, education and the fight against poverty.
 17. Abigail Johnson ó President of Fidelity Investments, trustee of the Fidelity Foundation which has provided over \$200 million to nonprofits in the United States and Canada.
 18. Tom Golisano ó former independent candidate for Governor of New York, founder and Chairman of the Board of Paychex.
 19. Bill Gates, III ó co-founder of Microsoft, now more of a philanthropist with emphasis on prevention of infectious diseases and education.
 20. George Kaiser ó chairman of BOK Financial Corporation, and advocate for renewable energy and tax reform.
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