

FROM THE DESK OF
ROBERT F. KENNEDY, JR.

U.S. DEMOCRATIC PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE

★ ★ ★

September 13, 2023

Jaime Harrison
Chairperson
Democratic National Committee
Washington, D.C.

Dear Chairman Harrison and Members of the DNC,

I know some of you well. A few of you are among my oldest friends. Others of you I have never met. But all of you are my family, as public servants and fellow Americans.

Families tell one another the truth, as best we are able with grace and love and, above all, with candor. When we take wrong turns, or fail to live up to our best selves, it is our family's responsibility to hold up a mirror and recall us back to our true purpose and highest self-expression. And so I feel compelled to write to you now, because in my view, limited though it may be, the Democratic Party has gone off track.

We live in times of division, disease, and turmoil, but they are not the first such times in our nation's history. Rulers always face the temptation to maintain social control by denying the people their sovereignty and their voice. But from our nation's founding, through many struggles, we have upheld freedom instead. Our founders shed their blood for it. The civil rights movement fought for it, and the Democratic Party supported that movement under the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, culminating in the Voting Rights Act. Throughout the modern era, the Democratic Party fought back against censorship, upheld civil liberties, resisted corporate influence, and sought to enfranchise as many voters as possible. The Democratic party truly lived up to its name — the party of democracy, the party of the people.

Unfortunately, in recent years our party leaders have succumbed to the siren of control. They have compromised the defining democratic principle of one person, one vote through repeated interference in the primary elections. They have hijacked the party machinery and, in recent years, directed the power of censorship onto their political opponents, raising political victory onto the altar in place of honest democracy.

In school rooms across this country, we teach our children that they have an inalienable right to self-determination, that no matter the town or creed or condition into which they were born, they each have an equal right to vote for the life and society of their choosing. And that someday, they too will have the chance to put forth their own ideas and be elected or passed over, based on the equal votes of diverse peers.

Never, in all the civics lessons in all the schools in America, did the teacher add "except for in states that the President lost in the previous election." Never, in all the glorious retellings of our fight for universal voting rights, has any teacher added, "and the decision of the people should be overturned if it doesn't comply with the preference of the ruling elites." Yet this is exactly the new page in history that the DNC's pending rules propose, casting out New Hampshire's votes, limiting ballot access in Iowa, and deploying party operatives to water down the popular vote and ensure a controlled victory.

Equally disheartening is the DNC's refusal to hold debates. The matter of precedent is spurious, as there has been no serious primary challenge to an incumbent in more than 40 years. (Although Al Gore, a sitting vice-president, did debate challengers in 2000.) Voters deserve — and democracy requires — a competitive process by which to determine nominees. It should be a party's voters who choose a candidate, not party insiders who anoint one.

The DNC and the Joe Biden campaign have essentially merged into one unit, financially and strategically, despite the promise of neutrality in its charter and bylaws. The DNC is not supposed to favor one candidate over another. It is supposed to oversee a fair, democratic selection process, and then support the candidate that its voters choose.

Much has been said in recent years about our country's endangered democracy. As someone who has spent decades battling corrupt corporate polluters, I can attest that endangered species are not saved by idle talk. We didn't bring the Bald Eagle back to the Hudson River Valley by holding a press conference. We did it by cleaning up the pollution that threatened its survival and introducing new chicks to the wild.

Our endangered democracy is no different. Its salvation lies in cleansing our society of the toxic divisions and corporate greed that pollute our political waters. Its salvation lies not in sound bites, but in the careful seeding and nurturing and protection of healthy examples of democracy in action.

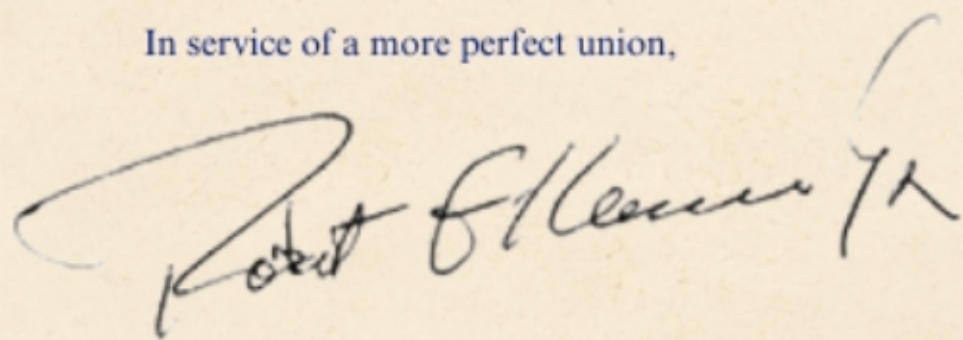
To my dear family of fellow public servants and caretakers of democracy, I would like to offer a heartfelt invitation. Please, lead by example and hold the most transparent, equal, accessible, and accountable election that has ever been seen in this country. You have the power to do this. You have the power to restore the faith of the people — faith in the Democratic Party, and faith in democracy itself.

Family to family, I urge you to reflect, privately and in consultation with your higher power, on what legacy you wish to leave. Will it be a fearful, desperate grasping for power at all costs? Or will it be the confident and graceful letting go that marks those who truly believe in democracy? And if, in those reflections, you find yourself seeking sage counsel, I offer the parting words of George Washington — a leader whose voluntary handover of power set a precedent that echoes to this day.

"Parties," Washington warned, "become potent engines, by which cunning, ambitious, and unprincipled men will be enabled to subvert the power of the people and to usurp for themselves the reins of government, destroying afterwards the very engines which have lifted them to unjust dominion."

I write to you now in the hope that you hold the engine of democracy as sacred as I do. I pray that, at a time of public discontent, you cede more power to the public, not less, and thereby do right by yourselves, by the American people, and by the ideal of self-determination that inaugurated our great nation.

In service of a more perfect union,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.", written in a cursive, flowing style.

Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.