

Political independence is the right approach to public service

By Greg Orman, Independent candidate for Kansas Governor

The status of the country's main political parties was the focus of recent national polling that showed just [34 percent of those surveyed](#) believe the two major parties do an adequate job representing the American people, while 61 percent are looking for a viable third option at the ballot box.

Among the 61 percent of Americans who favor a third major party – the highest number ever recorded by the Gallup organization – are 77 percent of independents, 52 percent of Democrats and 49 percent of Republicans, results that punctuate an historic five year stretch when overall demand for a third major party has been 57 percent or higher, according to Gallup.

If you combine this trend with the fact that today [seven in 10 Americans](#) are dissatisfied with the way our nation's being governed, I believe the salient question facing voters is not whether political independents are the future but rather how much longer the two party duopoly can prevent independent candidates from breaking through.

To be sure, political independence to me isn't an ideology. It's about an approach to public service. It's about putting the needs of our country and our state ahead of the needs of a political party. It's about using facts and common sense to solve problems, not clinging to ideologically driven policies despite all evidence that they are failing our citizens.

Like any successful duopoly, however, the Republican and Democratic parties have done an excellent job of entrenching themselves by rigging the rules of the game. Overall, roughly 40 percent of Americans describe themselves as independent – a bigger bloc than either party – yet there are only two independents in the U.S. Senate and none in the House, for example. Those numbers are hard to justify when the two parties are systematically failing at the basic tasks of governance, but I believe we can reverse course.

First, credible independents here in Kansas and across the country need to step forward and run on platforms that transcend Republican or Democratic dogma. The process of identifying a different kind of candidate – someone willing to put country before team – must begin now and needs to happen at every level of government. Today's state representatives are tomorrow's governors and U.S. senators, and most state legislatures could use a dose of independent centrism, too.

Second, those of us with an historical allegiance to one political party must have the courage to leave the tribe and support those independent candidates. Political insanity is expecting the parties that created our current impasse to solve it.

Third, we must reform an electoral process that has been designed by the two parties exclusively for self-preservation. Across the country, good things are happening on this front already: independent redistricting commissions to preclude gerrymandering; open primaries to give more moderate candidates a chance to make the general election ballot; and ranked-choice voting to give small parties and independents a fairer shot at winning.

As the 2018 races get underway, voters have an opportunity to break through the two-party stranglehold by electing candidates based on their resume and experience rather than their party affiliation. Here in Kansas, voters should ask themselves who they want representing them at every level of government – party bosses who put special interests first, or independent problem-solvers who will pursue solutions to our most challenging problems regardless of where they come from.

Breaking through the tired old two-party thinking, I believe, will be key for Kansas to move on from years of partisan rancor and begin building a plan for the future that embraces the inevitable changes coming our way and capitalizes on a new culture of innovation and forward thinking at every level of government.