

For Immediate Release  
November 30, 2022

Contact:  
Drey Samuelson  
Spokesman  
South Dakota Open Primaries  
media@sdopenprimaries.org

## **Open Primaries Proponents File 2024 Ballot Initiative**

**Under the proposed constitutional amendment, primary elections for federal, statewide, legislative, and county races would be open to all South Dakota voters regardless of party affiliation**

Pierre, SD – Today, proponents of open primary elections filed a proposed constitutional amendment with the South Dakota Legislative Research Council. This is the first step towards placing an open primaries initiative on the November 2024 ballot.

“We believe that primary elections in South Dakota should be open to all voters regardless of political affiliation,” said Joe Kirby, a fourth-generation South Dakotan, lifelong Republican, and chairman of South Dakota Open Primaries, the organization backing the effort. “Under our current system, too many South Dakotans are excluded from the primary process. It’s time to let all voters vote.”

Current law prevents large numbers of South Dakota voters who do not join a political party from participating in the primary process. The proposed ballot initiative would establish a top-two open primary system for the following elections: U.S. Senate, U.S. House, Governor, State Legislature, and county elective offices. In each race, all the candidates would compete in a single primary open to all South Dakota voters. The two candidates that receive the most votes would advance to the general election. The ballot would continue to indicate the party affiliation, or lack thereof, for each candidate.

“I’m a South Dakota Republican who believes in putting the interests of my state ahead of the interests of my party,” said De Knudson, a former member of the Sioux Falls City Council and treasurer of South Dakota Open Primaries. “In recent years, our partisan primary system has been a driving force behind the troubling level of political division in South Dakota and across the country. Our initiative would help address this problem because candidates would no longer face overwhelming pressure to swing to extremes of the political spectrum in order to win a primary.”

South Dakota Open Primaries is a nonpartisan election reform organization that advocates for voting mechanisms that increase opportunities for South Dakota voters to participate in the electoral process.

“Over the course of my time in public service, I learned that the people who actually get things done in government are the pragmatists who favor common sense and cooperation over ideology and posturing,” said Thomas Dempster, a member of the board of directors of South Dakota Open Primaries and a former Republican elected official who served for nine years as a Minnehaha County Commissioner and eight years as a State Senator. “The interests of the people of South Dakota are best served by a primary system that yields high-caliber candidates in the general election.”

The board of directors of South Dakota Open Primaries is composed of Kirby, Knudson, Dempster, and Drey Samuelson, former chief of staff for U.S. Senator Tim Johnson.

The South Dakota Legislative Research Council now has 15 workdays to review the text of the proposed constitutional amendment and provide comments to the sponsors. After that, the sponsors must file their final initiative text with the South Dakota Attorney General and the South Dakota Legislative Research Council in order to receive a ballot title, a ballot explanation, and, if necessary, a fiscal note. Finally, proponents must submit materials, including the petition format and circulator handouts, to the South Dakota Secretary of State.

After that, the South of Dakota Secretary of State can approve the circulation of petitions. To qualify for the November 2024 ballot, the initiative sponsors must collect valid signatures from 35,017 registered South Dakota voters and submit the petitions to the state by November 5, 2023.

This press release can be viewed here: [sdopenprimaries.org/release113022](https://sdopenprimaries.org/release113022)

The full text of the initiative can be viewed here: [sdopenprimaries.org/initiativetext](https://sdopenprimaries.org/initiativetext)

[END]