

OPEN THE ★ GATES

CALL FOR ACTION: OPEN THE GATES!

To: Democratic National Committee
Republican National Committee

From: Reflective Democracy Campaign on behalf of the American People

Date: July 13, 2016

Public opinion research (<http://bit.ly/29IKia3>) shows that a majority of Americans – across party lines – want to see leaders who represent the “best and the brightest,” but instead see an entrenched status quo that looks like an “old boy’s club.” They want to see officeholders who reflect the full range of talent and experience among the American people, and they support policies that help to elect more women and people of color. On the eve of the Republican and Democratic national conventions, we call upon both parties to open the gates of power and take concrete action to create a democracy that truly reflects the American people.

1. Political parties hold the keys to the gates of power. It’s time for you to lead the efforts to fix the demographic imbalance of our political system.

Political parties are the primary recruiters and supporters of political candidates in this country. And you are failing. More than 50 years since the passage of the Voting Rights Act and more than 30 years since Geraldine Ferraro broke the glass ceiling, our elected officials continue to be predominantly white and male. Clearly this problem is not fixing itself. It’s long past time for you to take deliberate action to offer us, the voters, candidates who reflect us.

2. This issue is about more than fairness or equity: for our democracy to survive, our elected leaders must represent the diverse voices of the American people. It is not tenable for a people who are half women and nearly 40% people of color to be offered candidates who are 71% men and 90% white. This has resulted in a political system in which white men hold four times the power of all other groups. And this is a bi-partisan problem: 96% of Republican candidates and 84% of Democratic candidates are white, and 76% of Republican candidates and 67% of Democratic candidates are men.

3. Changing this is a win-win. Voters are tired of the status quo, and they elect women and people of color at the same rates as other candidates. The myth of white male electability is just that; a myth. Our data (<http://bit.ly/29Ty0cS>) shows that women and people of color win

and lose at the same rate as white male candidates. But they can't compete in elections if they're not even on the ballot, and right now two of every three candidates for office is a white man.

4. You know how to do this. In fact, your own upcoming national conventions provide a model.

For decades, the Democratic National Convention (DNC) and Republican National Convention (RNC) have adopted party rules to promote gender parity (<http://bit.ly/29Eob61>) in the composition of their delegates. The DNC has incorporated rigorous diversity requirements in its delegate selection process since 1968, and since the 1970s the RNC has reserved one position for a man and one for a woman from every state and territory and requires women to hold several key executive positions. Imagine if you applied the same lens to your candidate recruitment efforts?

5. It's time for action.

There's no need to study the problem or wonder what can be done. In fact, the Reflective Democracy Campaign has done the research (<http://bit.ly/29Ty0cS>) already. Here are some immediate steps you can take to produce candidates who truly reflect America:

- Commit, then make a plan.** Create a task force explicitly charged with creating a plan of action. Include concrete and measurable goals.
- Make sure your own leaders and decision-makers reflect their communities.** They will be more likely to recruit and promote candidates who share their life experiences.
- Reward good behavior.** Create meaningful incentives for state and local level party organizations to recruit and support reflective candidates.
- Tap your communities.** Partner with community organizations whose diverse constituencies and leaders are a treasure trove of potential candidates.
- Go beyond the usual suspects.** Don't rely on the same old sources of candidates. Dare to say no to people who don't reflect their communities.
- Look upstream.** Advocate for policies that will advance greater diversity in appointed boards and commissions, where many candidates get their start in public service.
- Take a hard look at economic barriers.** Advocate for changes that would enable average citizens to pursue elected public service.

History shows us that our political system is not viable when the people do not see themselves reflected in it. Today we are confronted almost daily with another example of our system breaking down. It is time for change. It is time for you to open the gates of power.