

## final - Gaggle - third party.mp3

[00:00:05] **Mary Jo Pitzl** Arizona is one of the nation's newest swing states and may be its most competitive. President Joe Biden's 2020 win in Arizona was the smallest margin of any state in the country. We're working on our fourth straight cycle with a competitive U.S. Senate race, which could be a three way contest next year. And the No Labels and Forward parties are making the rounds in Arizona. Tech entrepreneur and former presidential candidate Andrew Yang was in Phenix last weekend to promote his forward party. Just days after the No Labels party qualified as the newest political party in Arizona.

[00:00:44] **Ron Hansen** Third parties are nothing new to Arizona or to U.S. politics. They are often viewed as spoilers by both Democrats and Republicans.

[00:00:54] **Mary Jo Pitzl** Welcome to the gaggle, a politics podcast by the Arizona Republic and AC Central dot com. I'm Mary Jo Pitzl. I cover state politics for the Republic.

[00:01:04] **Ron Hansen** And I'm Ron Hansen. I cover national politics. Each week we explore the pressing political issues facing Arizonans. Today, we're turning our sights to third parties. We're talking to an Illinois professor, an Arizona native, who has studied the effects of third parties and different voting processes. But before we do, Mary Jo, you went to the forward party event. Help set the scene for us. What did you see and hear at that matter?

[00:01:35] **Mary Jo Pitzl** Oh, it was quite the crowd on a late Saturday afternoon at the church, all in downtown. Phenix was a real mix of people, all different ages, ethnicities, political leanings. A lot of people that were there who are curious. I think a lot of people were also there because there was free beer and food. I met one woman who said she was there because they lived across the street and she heard about the event and came over to check it out.

[00:02:05] **Ron Hansen** So you talked about people who are curious. There clearly is a desire for some kind of change in the political status quo, not just in Arizona, but across the country. We'll explore that more in a bit. But talk about the appeal of the forward party in particular. What is this, the sales pitch that they're offering to people who may be open to it?

[00:02:28] **Mary Jo Pitzl** Sure. They issue the extremism of, you know, some of the politics that we're seeing now that come from the two major parties. Their appeal is, look, we we stand in the middle. We are for multi partizan bipartisan solutions. We think there's a lot of agreement on things. If people can just talk to each other, but we've got to get away from having the far right of the Republican Party and the far left of the Democratic Party running things, which is how the current primary system tends to produce candidates.

[00:03:04] **Ron Hansen** Okay. So if that's the pitch for this, what's the criticism?

[00:03:10] **Mary Jo Pitzl** The criticism is that, okay, so you're for bipartisanship. That's great. But what do you want to achieve? What's your platform? I ran into one gentleman who had come up from Tucson just because he wanted to learn more about the party. And he said, look, I just don't get it. It's like they're all for bipartisanship. That seems to be what they're all about, but they don't have a platform. And it seems that that to him, it was backwards. You know, put out your platform, talk about what you stand for and where you

would stand on certain issues and then see who you can attract. But Yang says, look, our platform is the people. It's who who comes here. They will set the tone. So it's a very sort of mushy, imprecise, kind of hands off thing that they feel will grow organically as they grow this party.

[00:04:01] **Ron Hansen** It wasn't just the creation of a political party that they were talking about. There's also something more fundamental in the way that people vote that they were talking about as well, wasn't there?

[00:04:12] **Mary Jo Pitzl** Oh, definitely. Yang has expressed support for the ranked choice voting method where candidates would, you know, rank the candidates in order of preference. There's a couple of different models for ranked choice voting that have already been used in a few scattered places around the country. And there is a petition drive starting in Arizona soon to bring that to the Arizona ballot in 2024. The Voter Choice Arizona initiative is aiming to put a measure on next year's ballot that would allow ranked choice voting, and if that were to pass, it would be in effect for the 2026 election cycle, but it would not affect the actual elections in 2024. One of the men that I spoke to who had attended said, Look, you know, I really like this ranked choice voting position. I don't know that I would join the forward party, but I sure liked that they support it. And certainly the organizers of the ranked Choice Voting Citizens Initiative, voter Choice, Arizona, they were there and they were saying, look, the only way a third party is going to succeed in a state like Arizona is if you have ranked choice voting, because it gives our candidates a more level playing field to compete with the two major parties. The concept can be a little difficult for people to understand, but they had a pretty clever mechanism to make that clear to people at their event last Saturday. They provided free flights of beer and then they urged people to rank their choices, rank them by. Which beer was the best? Which one came in second, third and fourth? Which reminds me, I probably need to find out which beverage one. So, Ron, we have Senator Cinema, you know, recently declared an independent. What is the appeal of her independent stance? How does that fit in potentially with a third party?

[00:06:06] **Ron Hansen** As always, Senator cinema has made this more interesting and something of a riddle than people might be comfortable with. I think the appeal of third parties and certainly now the presence of a new party in Arizona would suggest that there is a pathway for Senator Cinema to use that route if she were so inclined. But I go back to the comments that she made in announcing her switch in the Arizona Republic in December. She noted two things in particular that suggested she might not be eager to glom onto another party either. She said, quote, Arizonans, including many registered as Democrats or Republicans, are eager for leaders who focus on common sense solutions rather than party doctrine. She also said, quote, That's why I have joined the growing number of Arizonans who reject party politics by declaring my independence from the broken partizan system in Washington. Looking at those two statements, it suggests that she may not be looking to run through any party because she would be, in effect, swapping out Democratic ideology for the No Labels ideology or the Republican or forward Party. None of these things are things that she has necessarily embraced in the past. And in December, she seemed to explicitly reject that. But things change, and we will see as the cycle continues to unfurl, whether there is some kind of overarching ideology that would be compatible with where she needs to be or if necessity requires her to gather signatures or other kinds of funding mechanisms through some other party. To help us understand the viability of third parties, we turn now to AJ Simmons, originally from Arizona. He's the research director at the Center for State Policy and Leadership at the University of Illinois, Springfield. AJ, welcome to the gaggle.

[00:08:21] **AJ Simmons** Thank you for having me.

[00:08:23] **Ron Hansen** Earlier this month, the group No Labels qualified as a political party in Arizona, as they have in a few other states in recent months as well. It's a group heavily funded by a few wealthy donors, some of whom have ties to the financial industry. Last week, Andrew Yang's forward party kicked off their efforts to make the ballot here in Arizona as well. What does this say about third party efforts and are they going everywhere or is Arizona getting special attention?

[00:08:52] **AJ Simmons** Well, both the organizations that you noted there are focused nationally, it seems. As you mentioned, the No Labels party folks have been getting ballot access in different states. I don't know if third party has anywhere yet. They seem to be kind of more operating, kind of like PAC to fund moderate candidates, particularly in races that maybe the major parties are throwing resources in. And then, you know, the no party label does seem to be focused on that. Four party also seems to be focused on kind of electoral innovations and alternative electoral systems as well. So I don't think it's just an Arizona thing, but south, as I think they both were hoping to have something hit in Arizona recently. And it seems like Secretary of State funds as might be amenable to kind of helping third parties in Arizona as a part of kind of a small D Democratic push.

[00:09:48] **Ron Hansen** So help us understand what is happening across the country. You noted that this is not just an Arizona thing. Help put the third party movement into its broader national context at this moment.

[00:10:01] **AJ Simmons** That's a big question. So it seems like, you know every few years or so, there tends to be kind of an attempt at a movement like this. Like we had Americans Elect 2012. Now we've got these folks here in 2023 as well. And it seems like that there might be growing discontent with the major parties, though that seems to have been growing for a while and that folks are putting some efforts into doing it versus in the past kind of I think was much smaller and slower. Right. Like Libertarian Party has been around since seventies. Right. And they were kind of state by state chipping away at things versus trying to make a big national splash immediately like perhaps Ford Party is and the no label party is trying to do. But it seems to be happening and it seems perhaps at least these two major groups to be focused on political polarization, the idea that the parties are becoming too polarized and that there is this unrepresented middle in America that third parties could represent.

[00:11:01] **Mary Jo Pitzl** So here in Arizona, President Biden won the state by his narrowest margin anywhere in the country. And in the upcoming 2024 election, we have the possibility of a three way U.S. Senate race with an independent incumbent on the ballot. So how much does Arizona's competitiveness make it a magnet for third parties? How does that work into the equation for those parties?

[00:11:25] **AJ Simmons** That's an interesting question, and I think perhaps it kind of goes back to trying to understand where parties are coming from. You noted that Arizona's elections are quite competitive and there's also, I think, been a bit of a drift from the middle on at least one of the parties in Arizona, which kind of creates potentially some room for a third party, too, to come in again, following the national argument that these parties are making. And so that that may come into play. Plus, Arizona, I think, has a bit of a reputation for mavericks independence. It's the state that produced, you know, somehow John McCain and moved on Barry Goldwater. All three very different folks. But all three

kind of known for at least their independent spirit that seems to kind of run through the state. And so I think there's there's some of that. Arizona also has a decent chunk of independents, right? I think roughly about 35, 36% of Republicans, another 35 or so somewhere in there are independents. And then Democrats are actually of the smallest of the group out there, which again, could create an opportunity for for third parties out there. But, you know, I think it's an interesting question about the races being competitive, because one of the things we hear about third parties in the context of competitive elections is spoiler word. Right? And I'm going to have some nuance around that word, which I think you folks can appreciate that, because I think that might be something that we're talking about is an electoral context. And electoral systems are going to matter for whether third parties are spoilers. Right. And I'll note a couple of examples of both. And news actually in Arizona, example, we can talk, I think, about the next Senate race there within this context to somebody's electoral context that kind of I mean, who the candidates are and how they're funded, kind of what the race looks like, Right? The 1992 presidential election is a good example of this, President Clinton versus President Bush versus Ross Perot. Right. And there's a bit of a I think, a narrative, particularly from supporters of President Bush, that Perot was the spoiler. I disagree with that. And I'm not only I, but the great Dean Lacy political scientist disagrees with that. There's two ways you can look at this, but look at the polling for that race. Prior to Mr. Perot dropping out in the early summer. He was actually in the lead and third party candidate in that sense was Bill Clinton. Ross Perot drops out in the summer. Whose support goes up. Bill Clinton's. I am on Ross Perot comes back in in the fall whose support goes down. Clintons. These were economic Democrats would be the word that I would use. And, you know, Ross Perot was speaking to them in a different, different way, different style. And Democrats were but they were economic Democrats. And so he said, you look at the polling, you can look at research from D and Laci that Ross Perot wasn't a spoiler in that election for President Bush, because if you pull him out of the equation, President Clinton actually wins by more. If you look at who the second choice was for Mr. Perot's supporters. And then actually, you know, in the context of Arizona, if we think about this a bit and say like the 2002 governor's race, Governor Napolitano versus Congressman Matt Salmon, if I'm remembering my races where I was a little younger then and then. Richard Mahoney Right. That race is incredibly close. Governor Napolitano won by about a percentage point, and I think Richard Mahoney got about 7% of the vote and he was the former Democratic secretary of state. I don't know is a reasonable argument to be made that he hurt Congressman Salmon sitting in that race. Right. And so that's what I mean when I talk about electoral context, that sort of stuff matters of who are they hurting overall, because there's going to it's going to shake out that some of the support of a third party candidate will support one party, some will support the other, and some will continue to support whatever in the Senate because they don't like the major parties and then some won't vote. And then we have electoral context that's going to matter as well as our electoral system. And I can use Maine as an example. It's Maine. In 2018, it was the first election they use ranked choice voting. Jared Golden, a Democrat on the counting of the first choices for everybody, was in second place by percentage point to something like that. But during the campaign, Golden Nugget was utilized during choice voting system and it went to those independents and said, Hey, I may not be your first choice, but I'm a lot closer to what you want than than the Republican here. And once they started the tabulation using choice voting that moved and now Congressman Golden into the first place. So there was no spoiler there for the third parties because they were able to fill out their ballot more fully. And we even see this morning some work from some journalists in Alaska that it appears that third parties and the ranked choice voting system helped some Republicans in the state legislature in Alaska and helped maintain the Republican control up there as well. And so, you know, the spoiler effect kind of depends. I know that the easy and I know you hear the parties are

the big parties, like the third party is always a spoiler, maybe depends on the state of the race, where the support would go and even the electoral system, I would argue.

[00:16:45] **Ron Hansen** So given the facts, as you have just outlined them on, that the you would take issue with the spoiler effect that is often attributed to these third party runs. Why don't we have a more robust third party system here in this country? It's certainly not foreign to other Western style democracies. Why is America still in this two party mode?

[00:17:10] **AJ Simmons** So one of these sometimes third parties are spoilers. I tend to make sure that that and I stomach topics. But to the question about why we have the two major parties, we don't have more parties. There's lots of reasons that folks point to to kind of explain that. Right, folks, once our first past the post electoral system where you can win an election, depending on how many candidates are there, as long as you got one more vote, the nearest opponent. And so you can win an election with 22.2% of the vote size. Your closest bonds got 20.1% of the vote, and that this like pushes people to try and maximize their vote and the likelihood of it. And so they may agree with their candidate here 90% of the time, but they think they've only got a 10% chance of winning. So they move to the major party, the lesser of two evils argument, right? They're like, how about 50, 60% of what I want is there, but they've got a much higher chance to win. Some also point to like a proportional representation. So particularly around legislatures or in other countries, if you reach a threshold of votes, you at least get like one seat. And the legislative branch folks also point to electoral laws. Democrats and Republicans tend to pass laws that make it harder for third parties to get on the ballot and that tend to support electoral systems that will keep them out. Previously ranked choice voting was utilized in the U.S., and they've some evidence to suggest that the major parties coordinated to remove it because while third parties were having too much success utilizing that system, there's also what we call this stealing the Emperor's clothes argument. Around third parties, a third party might find a lane of topic that really does hit with voters. We saw this with Ross Perot in 1992, the deficit and NAFTA in particular. Right. He ran on that in 1992, had good success and potentially would have had. Better if he didn't drop in and out of the race like it was just a fun hobby to do. But we saw that that issue then was taken up by the Republican Party after. Right. And so, you know, we see other issues of that to FDR. A lot of his policies came from leftist third parties. There's other examples of this. And another argument that's put out there is from roughly post-World War two, because prior to World War Two, a little bit after, we actually did have a healthy amount of third parties, I'll say that not too terribly strong, but a healthy amount of third parties. But after World War Two, there's kind of a consensus around things and some bipartisanship. And like this sense of like American identity and outside threat of the Soviet Union pushed to where there was decreasing polarization. And I bring that up because we're seeing an increase in polarization. And here we are seeing potential attempts on third parties, again, as polarization grows. And then I also point within that same context of roughly 19 5290s, there's kind of a de facto four party system hidden within our two party system. Right? Liberal Republicans, conservative Democrats, liberal Democrats, conservative Republicans. And they often sorted it out in House and you kind of had local brand New England Republicans. Ray would be one of them that you knew they were more moderate, they were more focused on the fiscal side of being a Republican on the social side. And so that kind of contained some of it. But as the parties coalesced, perhaps less around the hidden for parties and to kind of very distinct parties, that again, opens up space potentially. And then finally, one of the big ones anymore is resources needed to run a political campaign. Even a statewide race is mighty expensive to run, let alone a presidential race. And so I think all of those sorry, again, nuance, I'm an academic, and so I do kind of help drive it because some people can point back at some of these arguments

and say, I don't know if that's it, because like our first past elections, well, Canada uses those. The U.K. uses those. They have third parties. A combination of factors potentially.

[00:21:03] **Mary Jo Pitzl** As you mentioned earlier, there's a lot of people in Arizona who are registered with any party. We call them independents. But are they really are they really up for grabs or do they tend to hew more to one or the other of the parties and not shift that stance from election till election?

[00:21:22] **AJ Simmons** That is a wonderful question, is something I point out. So I do appreciate that is a yeah, roughly anywhere 30 to 40% of the electorate claims to be nonpartisan. Quite frankly, they're liars and I mean they mean it with good intentions and they may be and I'll get to some nuances, but the research on it actually suggests only somewhere around maybe a quarter started to 40% are actually independents. But there's a bit of a difference that does perhaps make them up for grabs because I little point the zombie like it's nonsense independents sort of thing but some AC with partizan identity and and that's something that we're increasingly seeing is that there's this polarization but there's also this like what we call affective polarization and like negative partizanship where it becomes like part of your identity that you say that you tend to vote Republican, you are a Republican, you introduce somebody. And that's like one of those five words you say right when you introduce someone. Well, there's a difference between that perhaps for Partizans and then independents that me right. That they okay they may fall in the camp of like didn't agree with Republicans on things. I tend to vote Republicans but there's a big difference between that and it is an ingrained part of their identity. And so for that they may be up for grabs in the fact that the PARTIZANSHIP hasn't taken over as an important key identity. So some later will point that out and then independents are nonsense. Again, I think there's more nuance that's important to highlight here around identity.

[00:22:51] **Ron Hansen** So one of the most notable races of the 2024 cycle already is at least potentially the Arizona Senate race. Senator Kyrsten Sinema, who is an independent and was formerly a Democrat, could run against Representative Ruben Gallego, a Democrat who's already declared in that race. Republicans are expected to field a candidate and there are a number of names circulating on that front. Talk about what the dynamics are in a possible three way race and how that may be different in terms of how we get to a winner. If it were, say, a Democrat and a Republican, as usual.

[00:23:30] **AJ Simmons** So that's a big question. And I think one of the things that is going to be important for the potential of a three way race out there to the Republicans not. Right. Are we looking at more moderate Republican or somebody similar perhaps to the slate of candidates that they nominated? You know, in the most recent election. Because if there is, again, this middle space out there. Right. That there's a Republican more to the right and Congressman Gallego, who is more to the left, that there might be a bit of space in there for senator sentiment to make a convincing argument and perhaps make the argument of late and better than the other two to the other side. Right. Like men like me. But do you want and serve this person here that's on the other side of the political spectrum representing you. And so I think that's something that's going to matter for that race. I think whether Senator Sinema runs as a true independent versus the like a label party. Right. Is going to make ballot access a lot easier. I think the amount of money perhaps that Senator Sinema is able to raise, I like for her campaign or for PACs that support her, she's going to need to, I think, have about \$50 million to mount a serious independent campaign out there. And so that that's all going to matter. And she's going to need to convince voters when she already I think in a bit of the she can win an election in Arizona. She can point to 20 years of watching elections in Arizona increasingly right from

moving from Arizona legislature all the way through Congress to the current Senate seat. So I think that's some of the psychological hurdle, too, for supporting third party candidates, like tell me when. Well, Senator, sentiment can point to a pretty solid track record of winning. I think that's what's also made some that may matter out there is endorsements and what the national Party does versus the state party. No, I think what Senator Kelly chooses to do in a three way race may matter. I think Senator Flake could matter out in Arizona. Senator Romney might be able to matter in Arizona a bit, too. So I think that that may matter. I think what the the subjects are for the race, what's the hot topics and stuff like that. Those things may matter, but I'll make an argument that I see a lane for senator sentiment as an independent, winning a three way race out there. And I don't think I'm alone. I think there's probably much closer I as I can to Arizona politics I think feel the same way about it. It's a couple different factors go into it. But I don't think that Senator Sinema is going to run if she doesn't think she can win.

[00:26:02] **Ron Hansen** Do you think that the party architecture will matter for her? Is that sort of a decisive factor in all this? In her announcement in December in the Arizona Republic that she was not going to remain a Democrat, that she was becoming an independent. She used a lot of language that seemed pretty harsh about political parties, generally, the Democrats and Republicans specifically. And she struck this tone of independents rather than being beholden to some sort of system superstructure that is, you know, sort of carrying her. Does she need to be within a party structure to be able to financially mount a viable campaign? Would that be defeating her brand if she did so?

[00:26:52] **AJ Simmons** I think the answer is no. But it goes back to the \$50 million price tag that I mentioned that she needs to raise that somehow to be able to mount a bid, because especially being outside the party structure, canvassing or crew, that sort of stuff is expensive. Even folks just getting the signatures. So again, if she were to go to the no label party folks, I think signatures would be a lot smaller. Some not having a party structure in place would mean that it would take more money to put a structure like that in place. And to the argument kind of being very anti-party in her announcement in December and leaning into the independent label, I think that that potentially could play well again in Arizona, given our record, our independent record. And I'm trying to remember that there was a candidate when I was younger out there that I think that this campaign slogan was like independent, like you write. And that was his attempt to try and market to Arizonans. I think a very similar approach could be useful, especially given how important I think independents are to Arizona politics and Arizona voters. And, you know, I think that Senator cinema could make a reasonable argument to a majority of that 30 or so Arizona voters that she can represent them and not represent parties because neither party's popular in actually the state level, like there is this on toxicity around the idea of being party. But also then we like our party, but the other party in our party is good and part of our identity that really gives us value and then think the other isn't. So that's there's this really weird dynamic at play. So I think the messaging is a reasonable one. So she's got to take ready and I think another argument that might be useful for her is that she might. One of the more conservative Democrats or liberal Republicans and trying to try to make the pitch. She's going to caucus with 2 hours and the majority representing Arizona's voice. It's the old Goldwater argument of I was there when it mattered for Arizona. Right. When he was criticized for his attendance and Senate race, you can make a kind of a similar argument of like a being a free agent, being an independent and caucusing with those in power. Well, that makes me kind of unique here. That I can do more for. Arizona might be an argument that she she could make there, but it's not going to be an easy ask by by any means. But I think it is a doable one, again, kind of predicated on who is she up against.

[00:29:23] **Ron Hansen** Well, A.J, thank you so much for sharing your views. We appreciate your time and your insights. If people want to follow your work online or on social media, where can they find you?

[00:29:36] **AJ Simmons** Best place for for my work would probably be the Capitol Connection blog hosted by the University of Illinois, Springfield. I intend to be a little bit more active on there going forward, and kind of bringing an academic work to the public scholarship is going to be useful. So that's kind of where I would suggest folks follow me. I mean, my social media stuff is more interesting if you care about like strong opinions on pro wrestling and like tacos. I don't think that's as useful for folks, but I think more research oriented. But Capital connection blog posts by the university would be where I direct folks to.

[00:30:10] **Ron Hansen** Thank you for your time.

[00:30:12] **Mary Jo Pitzl** Yeah. Thanks for sharing your thoughts.

[00:30:14] **AJ Simmons** I appreciate it. Thank you for having me.

[00:30:20] **Mary Jo Pitzl** That wraps up today's episode, Gaggle listeners. Do you have questions about Arizona's political landscape? Maybe you have some thoughts on third parties. Send them our way. You can leave us a voicemail at 6024440804 or email us at the gaggle at Arizona Republic.com. And since we are a podcast, we would love to hear your questions. Your message just might make it into one of our future episodes.

[00:30:50] **Ron Hansen** Be sure to rate and review our show and share it with a friend. You can find me on Twitter at. Ronald J. Hanson. That's an h-a-n-s-e-n.

[00:31:01] **Mary Jo Pitzl** And I'm at Mary Jo Pitzl That's p-i-t-z-l.

[00:31:07] **Ron Hansen** Today's episode was edited and produced by Amanda Luberto and Kaely Monahan. Thanks for listening to the gaggle. A podcast from the Arizona Republic and azcentral.com. We'll see you next week.