

Green Party presidential candidate Howie Hawkins on ballot access, Kanye West

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August 7, 2020



Howie Hawkins, the Green Party candidate for president, is based out of Syracuse.
Kevin Rivoli, The Citizen

Green Party presidential candidate Howie Hawkins said Thursday that he and his running mate, Angela Walker, are making progress in getting on the ballot in several states.

Hawkins, a Syracuse resident, will appear on the ballot in 31 states and the District of Columbia. In five states — Indiana, Kansas, Nebraska, New Hampshire and Ohio — voters can cast a write-in vote for Hawkins.

After winning the Green Party's presidential nomination in July, Hawkins said during a videoconference with reporters Thursday that ballot access has been the main focus. When Ralph Nader received nearly 3% of the vote in 2000, he appeared on the ballot or as a write-in candidate in 43 states and D.C.

"We're really busting our bottom right now," Hawkins said.

It hasn't been easy qualifying for the ballot in some states due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Even with the ongoing health crisis, some states haven't adjusted their ballot access requirements. The Greens have been successful in getting states, including Maryland and New Jersey, to allow electronic signatures to be submitted.

But there are 14 states where Hawkins is facing hurdles to getting on the ballot. There are ongoing legal challenges in three states — Arizona, Nevada and Oklahoma. Additionally, in Oklahoma, independent candidates for president must submit at least 35,592 signatures of registered voters or pay a \$35,000 filing fee.

Ballot access will remain the focus through Sept. 4, which is the filing deadline for Arizona, Kentucky and Rhode Island. Hawkins said they will also pursue independent progressive state party ballot lines.

Hawkins also commented on Kanye West's presidential bid. West, like Hawkins, is seeking to get on the ballot as an independent candidate in several states. West has already filed petitions to appear on the ballot in Colorado, Illinois, Missouri, New Jersey and Ohio.

The New York Times reported Wednesday that West's petition effort is being aided by Republican operatives. West told Forbes that he's aiming to take votes away from former Vice President Joe Biden, the presumptive Democratic nominee.

But Hawkins thinks the hip-hop mogul's candidacy may backfire on Republicans. Before West expressed interest in being a candidate, he supported GOP President Donald Trump.

"I don't think it's just potential Biden supporters that may give an F-you vote for Kanye West," Hawkins said.

According to reports, West — whose net worth is an estimated \$1 billion — is using a petitioning firm for his signature-gathering operation. Hawkins said after winning the nomination, the Green Party put out eight bids to professional petitioning firms to assist with their ballot access effort.

In the past, that has cost \$2 or \$3 per signature, according to Hawkins. But this year, he said the bids came in at between \$10 and \$20 per signature. He believes the firms are charging a "COVID premium" because of the health crisis.

"If you got a 5,000-signature petition and you want to at least get 50% more, you're looking at a \$75,000 bill, at least, with one of these firms," Hawkins said. "We are emphasizing hiring activists from the Green Party and others to get on the ballot. West apparently has a lot of money that somebody is spending."

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