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## AS MANCHIN EYES PRESIDENTIAL RUN, HIS ALLIES AT NO LABELS FACE MOUNTING LEGAL CHALLENGES

The centrist political organization has been challenged in Maine and Arizona over its efforts to create a third-party ballot line ahead of the 2024 election.



Daniel Boguslaw

**NO LABELS, THE** centrist political organization that has raised [tens of millions](#) of dollars to support a third-party ticket for president, is facing multiple legal challenges over its efforts to qualify for the 2024 general election ballot in states across the country.

In Maine, the secretary of state's office [sent](#) the group a cease-and-desist letter last week in response to allegations that No Labels organizers gave misleading instructions to voters, who then unknowingly registered to vote on the No Labels party line. Meanwhile in Arizona, the state Democratic Party has filed a lawsuit [challenging No Labels'](#) recognition as a political party ahead of 2024.

Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., is considered the likeliest candidate for a third-party run, and he has dropped increasing hints that he is considering it. On "[Meet the Press](#)" early this month, Manchin refused to rule out running on a third-party ticket backed by No Labels, which

claims it wants a ticket split between one Republican and one Democrat. In February, Manchin and Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, [headlined](#) a No Labels event.

Manchin has also stoked rumors about his presidential ambitions by [holding a call with No Labels supporters](#) and [meeting](#) with influential community leaders from Iowa, a state that holds outsized sway in guiding the trajectory of the presidential primaries. “How do we save this nation?” Manchin said after the Iowa event. “You have got to fight for the reasonable, responsible middle and no one is doing that,” he added. “There’s no option.”

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No Labels has [described its mission](#) to run a candidate in 2024 as an “insurance policy,” guaranteeing voters the right to vote for a centrist candidate who represents centrist policies better than Joe Biden and Donald Trump. The group, which has so far raised \$70 million for the effort, has cautioned on its website that it “will run ONLY under the proper environmental conditions, which must be met for us to proceed” and that “[w]e will measure these conditions rigorously, through regular polling and research.”

Still, No Labels has begun the process to gain access to ballot lines in more than a dozen states, succeeding so far in Arizona, Colorado, Alaska, and Oregon. “We already are on the ballot in about four states. We’ll do another six by mid-spring, about 30 by the end of the year,” No Labels spokesperson Ryan Clancy [said](#) last month. The group did not respond to The Intercept’s request for comment.

In Maine, Secretary of State Shenna Bellows confronted No Labels on May 11 with allegations that it misled voters into registering for a third party without their knowledge.

“Over the past few months, municipal clerks have received reports from numerous Maine voters who did not realize they had been enrolled in the No Labels Party,” Bellows wrote in a [letter](#) to the group. “These voters have provided similar accounts of how they came to be enrolled in the party: that they were approached by No Labels Party organizers in public places and asked to sign a ‘petition’ to support the new party. These voters have further stated that No Labels organizers did not disclose – and the voters did not understand – that No Labels was asking them to change their party enrollment.”

In [response](#) to Bellows’s claims, No Labels said in a statement, “We have operated under the guidelines provided by the Maine secretary of state, according to both the letter and spirit of the rules, and we have total confidence in our transparent engagement with Maine voters.”

In addition to sending the cease-and-desist letter, Bellows also contacted voters newly registered with the organization and informed them that if they do not want to vote on the No Labels party line, they will have to switch their registration.

The controversy in Maine follows a different allegation of impropriety, [raised in March by the Arizona Democratic Party](#): that No Labels’ effort to form a political party violates both state and federal election laws.

In a lawsuit filed in a Phoenix state court, Arizona Democrats claim that No Labels improperly gained ballot access when it submitted affidavits from proposed No Labels electors that had been signed before all of its ballot petitions had been collected. Arizona law requires the ballot petition process to be completed prior to collecting affidavits, and Secretary of State Adrian Fontes, a Democrat, should have rejected the No Labels petition due to the procedural error, the lawsuit claims.

Arizona Democrats also allege that because No Labels is currently run as a 501(c)(4) organization – which legally cannot primarily be engaged in political activity – and has failed to disclose its campaign donors, it cannot be in compliance with federal election regulations governing political parties. “No Labels is not following the rules for political party recognition, while attempting to be placed on the ballot alongside actual, functioning political parties who do,” a spokesperson for the Arizona Democratic Party [said](#) in March.

A representative of No Labels contested this assertion, [firing back](#) that “[t]his undemocratic and unscrupulous lawsuit is a disgrace” and that “[n]ext time you hear this crowd talking about protecting democracy, remember what they are really doing is protecting their turf.” The lawsuit is [currently](#) ongoing.

No Labels, a dark-money group, bills itself as a bipartisan effort. Yet a 2018 [investigation](#) revealed that No Labels had solicited funds from major right-wing donors, including the Koch brothers and Peter Thiel. Since then, the nonprofit organization has failed to disclose its financial backers, raising questions about the end game of its electoral project and the full composition of political megadonors financially backing its efforts.

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In March, the centrist political advocacy organization Third Way – which has previously taken many of the same policy positions as No Labels – circulated a memo outlining why a third-party run could prove disastrous for Democrats’ chances during the 2024 presidential election.

“Given the overwhelming odds against a third-party candidate and the mountain of evidence about who their ticket would hurt, the conclusion is inescapable: No Labels is committed to fielding a candidate that will, intentionally or not, provide a crucial boost to Republicans – and a major obstacle to Biden.” Third Way [wrote](#). “As a result, they’ll make it far more likely – if not certain – that Donald Trump returns to the White House.

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