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No Labels' August Off-Ramp Is a Fantasy

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The No Labels Party appears to be moving ahead with their doomed third-party presidential bid, despite overwhelming evidence that they would be a spoiler that re-elects Trump. No Labels ducks the spoiler question by claiming they can always “pull the plug” on their bid after nominating a ticket. But the truth is that No Labels’ nominating convention, which they moved up to mid-March and will now be held online, is the *final* off-ramp for them to stand down.

[NEWSNATION]

No Labels Co-Founder: “If there’s not a pathway to victory [in August], it erodes or whatever, then we’ll pull [the ticket].”

Source: NewsNation, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h9ghuN6Bgdc&t=245s>.

No Labels says they could remove their ticket from the ballot as late as August—well after their candidates are nominated. Their CEO repeated this claim in an NBC News interview: “If the crowds aren’t coming out...we’re getting out of this. We can get out of this by the end of August, pull the plug, [that’s the] latest we can get off the ballot.” And a No Labels surrogate added, “if there’s not a pathway to victory [in August], it erodes or whatever, then we’ll pull it.”

But this dramatically distorts how the process would work. The candidates are a separate entity from the party. As their CEO noted, after the nomination, “we step back...then the ticket will run their campaign.” Later in the same interview, however, she repeated the claim that No Labels will have until August to pull the plug on their presidential bid—four months after nominating their candidates. These are two different scenarios, and her claims make clear they don’t understand—or are not being honest—about who controls their ballot line and when.

Scenario 1: The No Labels nominee loses control

To make their CEO's claim about their ability to pull the ticket true, the No Labels Party would name a ticket in the spring but withhold their nomination paperwork for months, or until just before the submission deadlines. If they do, their nominee would be attempting to build and run a presidential campaign without knowing if it will continue through Election Day.

Let's play that out: No Labels nominates their presidential ticket in March. Over the next four months, the candidates pour their heart, soul, and millions of dollars into gaining ballot access and persuading voters, all the while not knowing whether their party will submit their names into nomination. The candidates would be running with one foot in the door and one foot out. And the No Labels Party leaders would retain an unprecedented amount of power to pull the rug out from under their campaign. This seems like an unappealing condition for their prospective candidates.

Scenario 2: No Labels loses control

At a certain point, No Labels would be compelled to submit paperwork if they intend to go forward. Their CEO has suggested that even after that submission, they would still have the ability to pull the plug as late as August. But they would not, at least not where it matters most.

The crucial battleground states of Wisconsin and Michigan do not accept withdrawals after a minor party presidential candidate is nominated and paperwork is submitted. Nevada and New Hampshire do not accept withdrawals from the ballot after the filing deadline. And in other battleground states where this will matter most, withdrawal must happen almost immediately.

Let's play this one out: No Labels names a candidate in March but determines "the American people aren't coming out in droves" for their ticket in August or that their (mythical) "pathway to victory" has eroded. So, they decide to withdraw in states in which they've *already* submitted their candidates' names. But it would be too late, because as soon as No Labels submits nomination paperwork, they quickly lose the ability to withdraw. Regardless of the wishes of the No Labels Party or their nominee, those names would appear on the ballot in November. The off-ramps would be closed. Any claim that No Labels makes about having control of the ticket in this scenario is wildly fantastical.

Conclusion

For more than a year, we've tried to take No Labels' claims about their third-party bid at face value. But at every point where we have dug just a little beneath the surface, their premises fall apart. That's true here, too.

Let's be clear: No Labels has an off-ramp to end their presidential bid right now, but the clock is ticking. The deadline is their convention. But why wait? The entire enterprise is hopeless and destined to sow chaos—possibly through a disastrous contingent election that would re-elect Trump. No Labels says that's not what they want. They should show they mean it and pull the plug on their third-party bid immediately.
