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Colorado Libertarian Barred From Senatorial Debate After Falling 0.023% Short of Arbitrary Requirement

Your daily reminder that the default setting among the powerful is to give third parties zero margin for error

[Matt Welch](#)|Aug. 31, 2016 10:29 am



Lily Tang Williams

Remember back at the beginning of this month, when Libertarians and other third-party supporters [briefly got their hopes up](#) after Commission on Presidential Debates co-chair (and co-founder) [Frank Fahrenkopf](#) told [CNBC](#) that "If someone came in and let's say he was [polling] at 14.5 percent and the margin of error in five polls was 3 points, we are going to have to sit down and look at it"? Well, that's because the optimists failed to fully digest Fahrenkopf's *next* sentence, which was: "But right now that person would not be included." Because when it comes to fighting for a seat at the table of power, there *are* no margins of error for the comparatively powerless, as Libertarian U.S. Senate candidate [Lily Tang Williams](#) has just learned the hard way.

Williams, like L.P. presidential nominee Gary Johnson, had based her campaign strategy around getting into September's televised debates. The gatekeeper in question here was not the CPD, but a nonprofit Western Colorado booster group called [Club 20](#). The rules for entry into the debate are that qualifying candidates have to come from political parties whose registration represent at least 1 percent of Colorado's registered voters. As Club 20 Director Christian Reece [wrote](#) in an email to Williams,

CLUB 20 bi-laws state that any 3rd party candidates must have at least 1% of their party represented as registered voters for the specific district that the candidate is running for. According to the Secretary of State's office, there are currently 3,678,915 registered voters in the

State through the end of August and 35,967 of those are registered as Libertarian voters. The Libertarian Party represents .977% of registered voters in Colorado which falls short of the 1% threshold needed to be included in our candidate debates. We understand that this may be frustrating, but we adhere strongly to these requirements to ensure our debates are truly representative of Western Colorado. I apologize for any inconvenience and would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Yes, Lily Tang Williams fell 0.023 percent short. Sorry for the inconvenience, kid!

Gary Johnson in Colorado is consistently polling in the [mid-teens](#). Dallas Brooks at the *Libertarian Republic* [points out](#) that Johnson and other Libertarians tend to poll disproportionately well among voters who don't belong to *any* party. But no matter: As I wrote in 2013 in the context of some forgotten Rand Paul micro-scandal, those who come at politics from an unusual angle face a [Weird Man's Burden](#), and will be subject to heightened, not lessened, levels of scrutiny, with zero margin for error. Paul himself [indicated](#) in private conversations at FreedomFest in mid-July that Gary Johnson would likely be shut out of the presidential debates even if he averaged 14.99 percent of the vote. The powerful are like hawks, and as Ernest Hemingway memorably observed, [hawks don't share](#).

I wrote yesterday about the growing media critique that [the presidential debates are rigged](#).

Photo Credit: Lily Tang Williams

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