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## Greens come to city to pick presidential nominee

Party is still seeking a spot on the Maryland ballot

July 12, 2012 | By John Fritze, The Baltimore Sun

Hundreds of Green Party members arrived Thursday in Baltimore to pick a candidate for president, even as the party has been forced to scramble for a spot on Maryland's ballot this fall.

The national convention, which is taking place at the University of Baltimore before moving to a downtown hotel, doesn't have the glitz Democrats and Republicans will bring when they nominate Barack Obama and Mitt Romney later this year. But getting away from the money pervasive in national politics, Green Party leaders said, is at least partly the point.



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Greens are expected to formally nominate Jill Stein, a physician from Massachusetts, as their presidential candidate Saturday. Actress Roseanne Barr also sought the nod, but while her celebrity raised the party's profile she failed to capture the delegates needed to pose a threat to Stein.

"Until we fix our political system and get our democracy back on track, it's going to be very hard to fix all these other things that are taking us down," Stein, who has been to Baltimore just once before, said in an interview. "I wouldn't be running if I didn't think this is really critical to our future."

As the party meets in Maryland to nominate its candidate, it is still working to put that candidate's name on the ballot here. The Greens have until Aug. 6 to present 3,000 valid signatures to the State Board of Elections to ensure that voters have the option of voting for Stein and the party's congressional candidates.

The State Board of Elections ruled in 2011 that the party no longer met state standards to be on the ballot because it failed to win 1 percent of the vote in the most recent election. The state's Libertarian Party also must collect additional signatures to get on the ballot.

Green Party officials say they expect their candidates to be on the ballot in more than 40 states in November, including key battlegrounds such as Florida and Ohio. Maryland party officials said Thursday they are confident they have the signatures needed to secure a spot on the state ballot. They are working to collect 2,000 more to build a cushion in case some of the signatures are disqualified.

About 275 delegates pre-registered to attend the convention, and organizers say as many as 400 could show up. A handful of candidates and volunteers wandered through the university's law school Thursday as the party hosted workshop sessions on campaign messaging and courting young voters.

George Gluck, a Rockville computer analyst who is running for the House of Representatives in Maryland's 8th District, worked potential voters outside the school, asking them to sign the Green Party's ballot-access petition. Gluck said he was a longtime Democrat who split with the party when President Bill Clinton signed the North American Free [Trade Agreement](#) in 1993.

"Their generation is going to fix this country," Gluck said, pointing to a couple of 20-something women he had approached earlier for signatures. "I'm hoping to give them a leg up."

Greens will not be a major factor in this year's presidential election and, if history is a guide, will not play a deciding role in congressional races either. In 2008, the Green Party's presidential candidate, Cynthia McKinney, received just under 5,000 votes in Maryland — less than 1 percent of the ballots cast.

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Stein is realistic about her chances, saying, "I'm not holding my breath." But she said that raising awareness about the party's platform — it has long supported stronger environmental protections and nonviolence, for instance — is itself a win.

And while it faces impossible odds of winning the White House, it doesn't mean the party is politically irrelevant. Many Democrats blamed Green Party candidate Ralph Nader for wooing voters away from Al Gore in the razor-thin 2000 presidential election won by Republican George W. Bush.

The charge by Democrats has been a sensitive topic for some in the Green Party, but not Stein.

"This fear campaign of the past 10 years after Nader that 'you don't dare stand up and vote your values or terrible things will happen,' look where that strategy has taken us," she said. "Silence has not been an effective political strategy."

Baltimore hosted the first presidential nominating convention in 1831, but it has not been home to one since Democrats nominated Woodrow Wilson in 1912. The Green Party considered several cities for its convention this year, but Baltimore wound up the winner by default after Sacramento, Calif., dropped its bid late last year.

The Maryland Court of Appeals ruled in May that state officials were correct to disqualify thousands of signatures the Greens and Libertarians had submitted on petitions for ballot access. Many of the signatures were tossed out because they did not match the state's voter registration rolls.

Libertarians, who have fielded more candidates for Congress in Maryland than the Greens, are also collecting signatures to get on the ballot. "We're on track," said state party spokesman Lorenzo Gaztanaga, though he would not say how many the Libertarians had secured.

Brian Bittner, chairman of the Baltimore Green Party, said getting a presidential candidate on as many state ballots as possible is key to the party's future and can play an important role in local races as well.

"There are lots of states where the Green Party isn't as strong as we want it to be," Bittner said. "Even if there's nobody running on the local level right now, everyone who goes to the polls will see the Green Party on the ballot — and that can't hurt."

[john.fritze@baltsun.com](mailto:john.fritze@baltsun.com)

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