

Syracuse's Howie Hawkins is presumptive Green Party nominee for president

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Green Party gubernatorial candidate, Howie Hawkins, takes part in a debate sponsored by the League of Women Voters at The College of Saint Rose Nov. 1, 2018 in Albany.

Hans Pennink, Associated Press

Howie Hawkins, who has been a candidate for federal, state and local offices in the Syracuse area and New York, has secured enough delegates to win the Green Party presidential nomination.

With wins in the Green Party's Michigan primary and the Lavender Caucus, Hawkins has 182 delegates — more than the 176 needed to win the nomination at the convention.

The Green Party's convention, which is scheduled for July 9-12, will be held online due to COVID-19 pandemic.

"It feels good," Hawkins said in a phone interview Sunday. "Now we've got bigger

hurdles."

One of those hurdles is getting on the ballot in every state. Hawkins and his running mate, Angela Walker, are halfway to their goal. They are on the ballot in at least 25 states and the District of Columbia. Hawkins said they received good news on Sunday when a judge ruled that Illinois must keep the Green Party presidential ticket on the ballot.

There are efforts in other states to qualify for the ballot. Hawkins noted that the COVID-19 pandemic has made it difficult to secure spots on states' ballots because of physical petitioning requirements. The party is seeking relief from the requirements, but that hasn't been easy. New Jersey is allowing the party to collect electronic signatures. Alaska didn't change its rules, so the party is paying petitioners to collect signatures.

Hawkins is also hoping to change the media's narrative about the presidential race. The focus is on the two major party presidential candidates, Republican President Donald Trump and presumptive Democratic nominee Joe Biden.

So far, Hawkins said he's been asked some variation of this question: "Why are you spoiling the election for Biden?" Green candidates have been criticized in the past for siphoning votes from the Democrats. But Hawkins thinks it's really the Democrats who are to blame. He says they are spoiling the elections by not replacing the Electoral College with a ranked-choice national popular vote for president.

One way to receive more national attention, according to Hawkins, is to get more of the Green Party's issues into debates. The party's platform includes a "full-strength" Green New Deal, an economic bill of rights and Medicare for All.

Hawkins believes that the burgeoning nuclear arms race should be a top campaign issue, too.

"None of the major presidential candidates, including the two that are left, are talking about it," he said.

Becoming the presumptive Green Party nominee for president is the culmination of years of work by Hawkins. He is a co-founder of the Green Party and has been a candidate for numerous offices. He ran for New York governor in 2010, 2014 and 2018. He was a candidate for U.S. Senate in New York in 2006 and ran for a Syracuse-area congressional seat in 2008. He's also campaigned for Syracuse mayor and city council seats over the years.

Hawkins was asked to run for president in 2012, but he was still working for UPS at the time. Now that he's retired, he decided to launch a presidential bid.

"It's just a massive job," he said of being a presidential candidate. "You get a lot more direct feedback when you're running for city council or even for governor. And we did have the coronavirus, but you meet with people, you get a sense of where people are at, you know the people. Going across the country, it's so many new people that you've never worked with before, so it's a very different kind of experience."