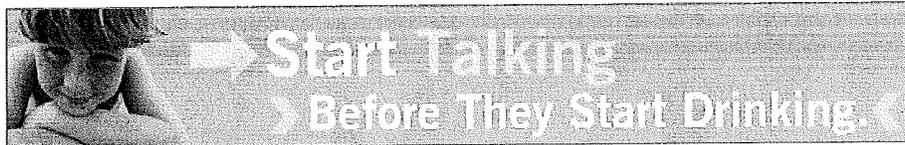


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Political Buzz

A place where people go to talk about politics.

Thursday, August 21st, 2008

News tidbits for political junkies, from David Ammons

Posted by Joe Turner @ 12:22:14 pm

Our former colleague, David Ammons, now of the Secretary of State's office, offers up some leftovers from the primary election.

For those of your who can't get enough.....

Washington's Top 2 Primary bits & pieces ...

ALL ONE PARTY PREFERENCE.

Under the provisions of the voter-approved Top 2 Primary, no party "owns" a slot on the November ballot and it is always possible that voters will send forward to the General Election two candidates who express the same party preference. There were no examples of this among the eight partisan statewide executive offices this week, but some legislative and local government contests will offer such matchups in November.

For the first time, eight legislative finals apparently will feature finalists who prefer the same party _ two Senate seats and six House races, based on partial and unofficial returns. This is eight out of 124 seats on the ballot this fall (26 Senate, 98 House). In some cases, that's because the only candidates who filed listed the same party preference. These include the Senate seats now held by Margarita Prentice in the 11th District and Karen Fraser in the 22nd. Both filed as "prefers Democratic Party" and will be challenged by fellow prefers-Democratic Party candidates, either Juan Martinez or Scott McKay against Prentice, and Erik Lee against Fraser.

[More:]

In Districts 7 and 8, only "prefers-Republican" or "prefers GOP" candidates filed and the Top 2 will face off in November. In the 12th, Rep. Mike Armstrong, who prefers Republican, faces a prefers-Republican write-in candidate, Courtney Cox. In the 27th, Rep. Dennis Flannigan and Jessica Smeall, both preferring Democratic Party, advance. In the 36th District race to succeed the dean of the Legislature, Rep. Helen Sommers, both finalists prefer the Democratic Party, John Burbank and Reuven Carlyle. And in the open race in the 46th District, the top vote-getters both prefer the Democratic Party, Scott White and Gerry Pollet.

FINALISTS OTHER THAN PREFER-D OR -R.

In the 3rd District state Senate race, Majority Leader Lisa Brown, who prefers Democratic, will be opposed by John Moyna, who states no party preference. In the 37th District, Rep. Eric Pettigrew, who prefers Democratic, is challenged by Ruth Bennett, who prefers Libertarian. In the 38th, Rep. John McCoy, prefers Democratic, is opposed by Cris Larson, who states no party preference. Speaker Pro Tem Jeff Morris, who prefers Democratic, is challenged in the 40th District by Howard Pellett, who prefers Green; and in the 49th, Rep. Jim Moeller, who prefers Democratic, faces Mike Boman, who prefers Independent.

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POLITICAL BUZZ

A team of experienced reporters keep you updated on what's happening in political arenas at the city, county, state and federal levels. From presidential campaign visits to who's running for city council, we've got it covered.

Contributors

Niki Sullivan covers Tacoma city government. Before coming to Tacoma, she covered state government in Oregon. She is a regular contributor to the GritCity blog. Email Niki

Peter Callaghan is a local columnist. He's covered the statehouse and state politics since 1981. Before joining The News Tribune in 1985, the Stadium High grad worked for newspapers in Everett and Lewiston, Idaho, and for The Associated Press in Olympia and Seattle. Email Peter

Joe Turner has covered state government and transportation issues since 1990. Since the Bellarmine grad's arrival in the newsroom in 1978, he's covered police, suburban cities, Tacoma City Hall, Federal Way City Hall and the Pierce and King county governments. Email Joe

David Wickert covers Pierce County government. Before coming to The News Tribune in 1998, he covered local government for newspapers in Illinois, Virginia and Tennessee. Email David

Jason Hagey covers politics. Before coming to The News Tribune in late 2000, he worked at newspapers in the Tri-Cities and Pendleton, Ore., covering city and county government, courts, crime and the occasional feature. Email Jason

Les Blumenthal has been covering Washington,

UNUSUAL PARTY MONIKERS.

Before filing week opened, Secretary of State Sam Reed urged candidates to "play it straight" and not list a preference for made-up or quirky names. Some of those who didn't take his advice didn't survive the primary. Example: Candidates of the Salmon Yoga Party and the True Democratic Party didn't move forward, and neither did hopefuls from startup parties called America's Third Party and the Party of Commons. Some did move forward through, including candidates who said they prefer the Cut Taxes GOP Party and the Progressive Dem Party. One well-known county Republican leader, Curt Fackler, ran for state insurance commission without a party preference label, and lost a runoff spot to someone who touted the Republican brand, albeit with the historical-sounding name of John Adams.

BY THE NUMBERS.

In this year's Primary, there were a total of 288 candidate races throughout the state: congressional - 9; statewide executive - 9; legislative - 124; State Supreme Court - 3; Court of Appeals - 7; multi-county Superior Court - 7; single-county Superior Court - 52; county commissioners, county PUD commissioners and other county races - 77.

WHAT WAS THE TURNOUT?

Good question. The number is hard to project because so many ballots still are in transit and counties continue to process ballots, including some from military and overseas voters. As of Thursday, over 930,000 ballots had been counted, or 27.3 percent of the 3.42 million registered voters who were sent mail ballots or, in King and Pierce counties, allowed to vote at polling places. Counties have estimated they have well over 300,000 ballots in hand or expected _ and this number does not include populous Pierce County, which did not submit an estimate. Counties have until Sept. 3 to certify their returns and the state will certify the election by Sept. 9. The turnout still could exceed 40 percent, a fairly average turnout. Before the election, Reed's office predicted a 46 percent turnout, based largely on the wide use of convenient mail-in ballots, the popularity of the wide-open Top 2 system, and the heavy advertising and voter interest in the close races for president and governor. Some counties later downgraded their initial predictions, based on lighter-than-expected return of ballots.

NEXT UP.

Deadline for mail-in or online voter registration or updates for the general election is Oct. 4.

Deadline for in-person new registrations is Oct. 20.

General election ballots for overseas and military voters must go in the mail by Oct. 5 and must be available in-person for other voters by Oct. 15. Ballots for most voters will be mailed by Oct. 17 and many voters will get them over that weekend or on Monday, Oct. 20. Election Day is Nov. 4.

For more information, visit www.vote.wa.gov

Categories: Governor, Legislature, Congress, Voting, Campaign news, President, Attorney General, Auditor, Treasurer, Schools Superintendent, Lands Commissioner, Secretary of State, Lt. Governor, Insurance Commissioner, State government, Supreme Court • 1 comment

COMMENTS:

D Comment by **Daniel K** @ 20:15 - Thursday, August 21st, 2008
<http://www.kirkdorffer.com/ontheroadto2008/>

The turnout still could exceed 40 percent, a fairly average turnout. Before the election, Reed's office predicted a 46 percent turnout, based largely on the wide use of convenient mail-in ballots, the popularity of the wide-open Top 2 system, and the heavy advertising and voter interest in the close races for president and governor.

Perhaps the Top 2 system isn't as popular as Reed thinks, most races were foregone conclusions as to who the top two would be, and earth to Sam Reed: there was no presidential race on the primary ballots!

D.C. for The News Tribune since 1990, focusing on issues and politicians involving the state. Before joining The News Tribune, he spent 13 years working for The Associated Press in Seattle, Illinois and Washington, D.C. **Email Les**

Hunter George is the local news editor who oversees coverage of state and county politics. Before coming to The News Tribune in 2001, he spent 11 years covering the statehouses in North Carolina, Pennsylvania and Washington state for The Associated Press. **Email Hunter**

John Henrikson is a local news editor who oversees City of Tacoma and education coverage. He's worked as a journalist in the Northwest for 19 years, supervising coverage and reporting on local and state government, the environment and growth. **Email John**

LOCAL POLITICS LINKS

- **Chris Mulick's Olympia Dispatch**
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■ Last comments

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Published August 21, 2008

Top-two limits choices for Mason County commissioner

When it comes to voting for county commissioners in Mason County this November, the choices will be monochromatically clear.

As in: Democrat, Democrat, Democrat, or ... Democrat.

The top-two vote getters in a four-person race for Tim Sheldon's commission seat were Sheldon and county Democratic chairwoman Roslynnne Reed. Sheldon, who serves as a state senator, won the seat in 2004 as an Independent.

In the other commission race, Democratic incumbent Lynda Ring-Erickson and Democrat Rick Ryan were the only ones to file. Both advance automatically.

The latest results from Mason County show Sheldon with 1,490 votes, or almost 46 percent of the total cast for the District 2 position. Reed had 835, or almost 26 percent, followed by Republican Deborah Reis, 728, or 22 percent, and Frank Benavente, with 220, or less than 7 percent.

Republican Secretary of State Sam Reed and the Washington State Grange said the "top-two" primary would give voters more choices, and Reed hailed the primary's maiden launch this week as a big success.

And in a news release this week, he said in part: "The parties no longer automatically 'own' the runoff positions for November, and the primary once again has been reclaimed by the voters."



2008 washington primary media kit

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www.secstate.wa.gov/elections
or
www.vote.wa.gov



Washington
Secretary of State
SAM REED

top 2 primary

Quick facts:

- A Top 2 Primary allows voters to choose among all candidates running for each office. Voters do not have to declare a party affiliation or select one party's ballot to vote in the primary.
- Candidates for each partisan office may state a preference for a political party, which is listed on the ballot.
- Candidates do not have to be supported, nominated or endorsed by the party they prefer, and that preference does not imply that the party approves of or associates with that candidate.
- The two candidates who receive the most votes for each office in the Primary Election qualify for the November General Election. Candidates must also receive at least 1 percent of the votes cast in that race to advance to the November General Election.

History:

The Top 2 Primary was passed by the people in 2004 as an initiative. Nearly 60 percent of voters approved I-872.

In May 2005, the state Democratic, Republican and Libertarian parties sued in federal court to prevent its implementation. The political parties argued that the Top 2 Primary system violated their right of free association. The federal District Court agreed with them and in July 2005 prohibited the State from implementing the Top 2 Primary. In August 2006, the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals agreed with the District Court.

The State appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court. In March 2008, the Supreme Court overturned the lower courts and upheld the constitutionality of I-872.

The opinion of the U.S. Supreme Court said:

“The First Amendment does not require this extraordinary and precipitous nullification of the will of the people.”

The Court also says the new primary:

“[...]does not, by its terms, choose parties' nominees. The essence of nomination – the choice of a party representative – does not occur under I-872. The law never refers to the candidates as nominees of any party, nor does it treat them as such. To the contrary, the election regulations specifically provide that the primary ‘does not serve to determine the nominees of a political party but serves to winnow the number of candidates to a final list of two for the general election.’”

primary systems comparison

Old Pick-a-Party Primary

New Top 2 Primary

The voter's options when voting the ballot:

The voter had to pick a political party, and only vote for candidates of that party, commonly called "vote down party line." For example, if a voter wanted to vote for a Democratic candidate for Congress, the voter could only vote for Democratic candidates for all of the other partisan offices.

For each race, the voter has the freedom to vote for any candidate running. The voter is voting for the person, not the party, because voters are not selecting a party's nominees.

The meaning of each candidate's party information:

Each candidate who listed a political party was affiliated with that party. The candidate from each party who received the most votes in the primary became that party's nominee, representing the party in the General Election.

Each candidate may state a political party he or she prefers. A candidate's preference does not imply that the candidate is nominated or endorsed by the party, or that the party approves of or associates with that candidate.

The purpose of the Primary:

In each race, the purpose of the primary was to nominate **one** candidate from each major political party to advance to the General Election. For example, if three Democrats and two Republicans filed for a legislative office, Democratic voters nominated one Democratic nominee, and Republican voters nominated one Republican nominee, who advanced to the General Election.

The purpose of the Top 2 Primary is to winnow the number of candidates for each race down to two. The two candidates who receive the most votes in the Primary advance to the General. Candidates must also receive at least 1 percent of the votes in the Primary in order to move on to the November General Election. The candidate's party preference is irrelevant to qualifying for the General Election.

Does the Primary decide each political party's nominees?

Yes.

No.

primary systems comparison ctd.

Old Pick-a-Party Primary

Minor party and independent candidates:

Minor party and independent candidates conducted nominating conventions to gather signatures of support. If the candidates gathered enough signatures, they qualified to appear on the General Election ballot. These candidates did not appear in the Primary because the Primary was only for major parties.

The two major parties in the Primary and the General:

The Pick-a-Party Primary was the **parties' primary**. Because the purpose of the primary was to select the nominees for the two major parties, each major party had a guaranteed spot on the General Election ballot, regardless of whether a nominee had much support at all.

New Top 2 Primary

Candidates who prefer minor parties, or who state no preference, file for office and appear on the Primary ballot like all other candidates. They no longer are required to conduct nominating conventions. Party preference information is irrelevant to qualifying for the General Election.

In the Top 2 Primary, voters are voting for a candidate, not a party. Candidates are allowed to name a party that they prefer, or may choose to not state a preference. Either way, party preference is irrelevant to advancing to the General Election. A candidate must be one of the top two vote-getters in order to qualify for the General Election. Major party nominees are not guaranteed a place on the General Election ballot because qualifying for the General Election is based on the number of votes received at the Primary, not on party affiliation.

voter registration

- Voters have until July 19, 2008, to register to vote or update their registration for the August 19 Primary.
- Citizens not currently registered in Washington State have until August 4, 2008, to register in-person at their local election office.
- Washington has a statewide voter registration database that screens the voter rolls for duplicate registrations, felons, and deceased persons.
- The database is made up of three categories:
 - Active Registrations**
 - New registrations are added to the database when people decide to register for the first time, turn 18 and register, or move into the state and register.
 - Registrations may be pending because more information is needed.
 - Inactive Registrations**
 - A registration is put in an inactive status when election material is mailed to a voter and returned by the post office as undeliverable.
 - A voter who is on inactive status may switch back to active status simply by updating his or her registration information.
 - An inactive registration is eventually canceled if it remains inactive through two federal general elections.
 - Canceled Registrations**
 - An inactive registration is canceled if it remains inactive through two federal general elections.
 - An active or inactive registration is canceled if it duplicates another registration that is more up-to-date. Duplicate registrations may occur when people move from one county to another, change their name, or forget they were still registered in another county.
 - A registration is canceled if the registration is identified in a screening for people who are deceased or convicted of a felony.
 - A registration is canceled if a voter requests to be canceled.
- Citizens who have a Washington driver's license or ID card can register to vote online at www.vote.wa.gov
- From January 7 to the end of May 2008, approximately 49,160 people chose to register to vote online.
- Washington State does not have party registration.

vote by mail

- Thirty-seven of Washington's thirty-nine counties vote by mail. King and Pierce counties still maintain poll sites, but King County plans to switch to vote-by-mail elections in 2009.
- In the 2007 November General Election 92.2 percent of Washington voters cast ballots by mail.
- Once a ballot is returned to the elections department, the voter's registration file is checked to confirm that the voter has not already returned a ballot.
- The signature on the envelope is verified against the signature on the voter registration file. If the signature on the envelope does not match the signature on file, or if the voter failed to sign the envelope, the County Auditor must attempt to contact the voter to correct the situation.
- Ballots are returned approximately:
 - 20 percent through the end of the first whole week ballots are out;
 - 23 percent from then through the end of the second week;
 - 10 percent the Monday before Election Day;
 - 21 percent on Election Day;
 - 26 percent come after Election Day.
- Ballots to overseas and military voters will be mailed by July 20, 2008.
- All other mail ballots will be sent by August 1, 2008.
- Many vote-by-mail counties have established voting centers to accommodate voters who prefer to vote in person or wish to vote on an accessible voting device. At a community voting center, voters may drop off ballots, request provisional ballots, vote on accessible voting equipment, and receive "I Voted" stickers.
- Each County Auditor is required to provide at least one location in addition to the County Auditor's Office for voters to drop off their ballots.

voting at the polls

- King and Pierce counties still maintain poll sites, although most voters cast ballots by mail.
- Polls are open on Election Day from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.
- Voters choosing to vote at polling places are required to show identification. Most voters choose to show photo identification, such as a driver's license, state ID card or student ID card. Federal law allows voters to present other forms of identification such as a voter registration card, utility bill, bank statement, paycheck, government check, or other government document.
- A voter who does not present ID may vote a provisional ballot.

voting equipment

- In Washington State, there are three types of paper ballots:
 - Fill in the oval
 - Fill in the rectangle
 - Connect the arrow
- Approximately 1 percent or less of the total ballots cast in an election are cast using electronic voting devices.
- In Pierce and King counties, approximately 2.2 percent of the ballots are cast on electronic voting devices.
- In the remaining counties, approximately 0.08 percent of the ballots are cast on electronic voting devices.
- Washington State requires a voter verified paper trail. Voters who cast ballots using electronic voting equipment can verify that their selections have been recorded properly.

certification of election

- Counties have until September 3, 2008, to certify the August 19 Primary.
- The Office of the Secretary of State has until September 9, 2008, to certify the August 19 Primary.
- To trigger a mandatory machine recount, the difference between the top two vote-getters must be less than 2,000 votes and less than one-half of 1 percent of the total number of votes cast for both candidates.
- To trigger a manual recount in a statewide election, the difference between the top two vote-getters must be less than 1,000 votes and less than one-fourth of 1 percent of the total number of votes cast for both candidates.

statistics

- Washington has approximately 3.4 million registered voters.
- Voter participation in the 2004 Primary Election was 45 percent.
- Voter participation in the 2004 General Election was 82 percent.
- Voter participation is much higher for vote by mail than for poll voting.
 - In the 2008 Presidential Primary, King County mail voters turned out 29.8 percent, while poll voters turned out only 3.5 percent.
 - In the 2008 Presidential Primary, Pierce County mail voters turned out 34.61 percent, while poll voters turned out only 2.37 percent.
- The state is a very mobile population.
 - Each year approximately 96,000 people turn 18.
 - Each year approximately 46,000 to 49,000 people die.
 - Each year approximately 15 percent of the population moves.
 - Each year approximately 42,000 people change their name.

dates to remember

- July 19, 2008** - Last day for mail in and online voter registrations and transfers for the August 19 Primary (RCW 29A.08.140)
- July 20, 2008** - Overseas and military ballots mailed for the August 19 Primary (RCW 29A.40.070)
- July 30, 2008** - Absentee ballots available for the August 19 Primary (RCW 29A.40.070)
- August 1, 2008** - Absentee ballots mailed for the August 19 Primary (RCW 29A.40.070)
- August 4, 2008** - Last day of in-person registration for voters not currently registered in Washington State for the August 19 Primary (RCW 29A.08.145)
- August 19, 2008** - Primary Election Day (RCW 29A.04.311)
- September 3, 2008** - County Canvassing Boards certify the August 19 Primary (RCW 29A.60.190)
- September 9, 2008** - Final day for the Secretary of State to certify the August 19 Primary (RCW 29A.60.240)

top 2 primary voter education

July 14, 2008 - TV, internet and ethnic print ads start

July 28, 2008 - Radio ads start

Today is Friday,
Aug. 22, 2008

Commission Election Numbers Hold Up

There were no surprises in the race for an open county commission seat on Thursday

Posted August 22, 10:40 am. E-mail this article to a friend.



By Dan Schreiber
The Chronicle

There were no surprises in the race for an open county commission seat on Thursday after the Lewis County Auditor's Office counted about 4,600 additional ballots sent in for Tuesday's primary election.

Lyle Hojem maintains a strong lead with 46 percent of the vote. The second-place finisher was Dryad resident Bill Schulte, who took 35 percent. John Penberth, the former Pe Ell mayor, lagged behind in third place with 18 percent.

The three Republicans were subject to the state's first top two primary, which allows the two most successful candidates to advance to the Nov. 4 general election regardless of their party preference.

Hojem and Schulte appear poised to compete for the District 2 spot, and the winner will represent Chehalis and West Lewis County on the three-person board of commissioners. Only voters in District 2 had a say in the primary, although the winner in the general election will be decided by the entire county.

The county plans to count an additional 3,500 ballots on Tuesday. The election is to be certified on Sept. 3.

...

Dan Schreiber covers county government and environmental issues for The Chronicle. He may be reached at 807-8239 or dschreiber@chronline.com.

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KNDU Right Now

Sec. of State Sam Reed Answers Same-Party Ballot Concerns.

Posted: Aug 22, 2008 12:57 PM PDT

Updated: Aug 22, 2008 01:24 PM PDT

KENNEWICK, Wash. - Secretary of State Sam Reed says voters win, despite arguments about the Top Two Primary.

The Secretary predicts there will be several instances where two candidates from the same party will be running against each other in the general election.

This has some party members upset, especially if their party is the one that's not on the ballot for a particular race come November.

"I think it is a good service because it is a real choice with real viable candidates, rather than one who is obviously going to be elected and another one who is obviously not going to be elected," said Reed.

Reed says candidates running against each other in the general election will now have to really stand out against their opponent to win, especially when political parties are the same.



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Postman on Politics

Chief political reporter David Postman explores state, regional and national politics.

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July 8, 2008 9:30 AM

Political parties say top-two primary may not count

Posted by David Postman

Attorneys for the state Democratic and Republican parties say the upcoming top-two primary violates a federal court order, and could jeopardize the results of both this year's primary and general elections.

Attorneys for the parties wrote to the state yesterday. The letters were prompted by an order from the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals last week that asked attorneys for supplemental briefing materials in the long-standing court fight over the primary. They say that makes clear that the legal fight over the top two is still alive, despite a U.S. Supreme Court ruling earlier this year.

Under the top-two primary, voters can select any candidate on the ballot for each race and the two highest vote-getters advance to the general election regardless of their party affiliation. The old pick-a-party primary required voters to select a party ballot and vote for candidates only from that party.

Democratic Party attorney David McDonald and Republican Party attorney John White said in separate letters that the 9th Circuit order shows that appeals of Judge Thomas Zilly's 2005 decision are continuing.

Zilly issued an injunction against implementing I-872, the initiative that created the top-two primary. McDonald wrote that the state has made no effort to modify or vacate that injunction. He wrote to state attorneys:

Proceeding with the planned August primaries and November elections in violation of this injunction will expose all of the results to challenge, potentially wasting significant taxpayer resources on elections that have to be redone.

White wrote:

As we have previously advised you: This litigation is not over. No court has vacated the injunction entered by the district court in July, 2005. The injunction against implementing the Modified Blanket Primary is still in effect. Conducting a Modified Blanket Primary in August will be a willful violation of the injunction. In addition to violating the injunction, issuing certificates of nomination to candidates who receive the most votes will constitute an "error" in the administration of the election because the Open Primary is still the law of Washington.

The party attorneys say the state should conduct a pick-a-party, or so-called Montana-style, primary that has been in place since 2004. And that, McDonald wrote, should be the law "until such time, if ever, as the validity of I-872 is fully and finally upheld." White asked the Attorney General's office to "confirm immediately that the State will adhere to the terms of the injunction, and conduct its August primary in accordance with the Open Primary law."

The top-two system got the go-ahead in March when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that overturning the citizen initiative would have been an "extraordinary and precipitous nullification of the will of the people."

The Supreme Court ruling left open the possibility that the top-two could be challenged after it was implemented and the political parties could show actual harm.

MORE: State election director Nick Handy says the U.S. Supreme Court says the top two is constitutional.

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled 7-2 in March that Washington's Top 2 primary is constitutional and that Washington may conduct a Top 2 primary. Accordingly, the state is proceeding to implement a Top Two primary on August 19. The Voters' Pamphlet has been printed and ballots for military voters will be in the mail in the next few weeks.

In summary, the state is proceeding to implement the people's initiative as upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court.

The order from the 9th Circuit, signed by a three-judge panel, says:

Within 30 days of the filing of this order, the parties shall submit supplemental briefs not

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Top two primary best reflects people's choice

Published: June 21, 2008 12:00 AM

At its root, the word democracy means “rule by the people.” And as President Abraham Lincoln said, “... government of the people, by the people and for the people shall not perish from this earth.”

The top two primary system is one of the best ways to continue rule by the people, and not the parties.

While this is not the blanket primary we've all been used to, it's the next best thing.

And democracy is too precious for us to convolute.

In 2001, the political parties sued the state to throw out the blanket primary and create a new primary system.

After many legal and legislative battles, voters approved Initiative 872, which created the top two primary system in Washington.

The top two primary allows voters to support any candidate of any political party.

The constitutionality of the new system was immediately challenged in court.

The U.S. Supreme Court recently upheld the top two primary.

Starting with the primary this August, you will be able to choose candidates regardless of political party.

I'm proud to be a life-long member of the Washington State Grange, which was the force behind the top two primary system.

I'm glad that they, along with Secretary of State Sam Reed and Attorney General Rob McKenna, had the tenacity to fight for the top two primary.

Since 2004, while the lawsuits have ensued against I-872, we have been using a primary system called the “Modified Montana” — also known as the “pick-a-party” primary.

This system required that people choose only one party's ballot, guaranteeing that one candidate from each party would be on the general election ballot.

Since it's inception, people have been frustrated with the Modified Montana system.

We tell voters their voice counts, and then we require them to choose within the party's preference.

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Folks want to vote for the best candidate, rather than being constrained to vote within a party's choice.

They don't want to sign an oath to Republicans or Democrats, they want to be free to pick candidates they believe are the best for the job.

I understand the political parties want their affiliation used only by their preferred candidates.

But political parties can still make it clear which candidates they prefer through advertising.

Some are concerned the candidates on the general election ballot could consist of just one party, but I believe the people's choice is more important.

Judy Warnick, R-Moses Lake,

represents Washington's 13th District.

Find this article at:

<http://www.pnwlocalnews.com/kitsap/poi/opinion/20605759.html>

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Washington Secretary of State Sam Reed and Thurston County Auditor Kim Wyman discuss the implications of the top two primary system.

Charlie Bermant/Staff Photo

Port Orchard Independent

Top-two system muddies state's politics

CHARLIE BERMANT, Staff Writer
cbermant@portorchardindependent.com
Published: June 21, 2008 12:00 AM

The newly enacted top-two primary will change how people vote and elect people who more closely represent the will of the people but will create some uncertain situations, according to information presented at a meeting of the Washington State Association of Counties in Bremerton on Thursday.

The system, which faces its first test on Aug. 19, is a work in progress and will change in reaction to test cases that will emerge after the election.

“This brings us into uncharted territory,” said Thurston County Auditor Kim Wyman. “I fully expect that it won’t be too long before the parties will sue us. But a lot of districts have already favored one party or another, and they are OK will having two candidates belonging to the same party.”

Wyman said an election in a district that consistently polled 15 percent for a Republican candidate a race between two Democrats would result in a more meaningful discussion of the issues and a better candidate prevailing.

For instance, a contest in heavily Democratic downtown Seattle between two Democrats, one liberal and one more moderate, would be more compelling than one between a Democrat and a conservative Republican who was all but certain to lose.

On the other hand, as former Washington State Democratic Chairman Paul Berendt said, some voters will “have ballots that do not reflect a diversity of ideas.”

In addition to Wyman and Berendt, the panel featured Kitsap County Republican Chairman Jack Hamilton and Washington Secretary of State Sam Reed.

Reed outlined the recent history of the state primary, beginning with the open "blanket" system that allowed cross-party voting.

This was replaced by a system requiring a single party preference, which was in place in 2006.

This year, the system elevates the top two primary vote-getters to the general election, which theoretically could result in two members of the same party opposing each other in the general election.

This situation could occur locally, in the race for South Kitsap commissioner. With two Democrats, one Republican and an independent in contention, it is possible that the fall contest could pit Democrats Charlotte Garrido and Monty Mahan against one another.

Even with the expected lawsuits, Reed predicts the system will hold fast for future elections. It was challenged in the U.S. Supreme Court, but supported by a 7 to 2 majority.

This margin, Reed said, will discourage any further challenges.

Wyman said the new system will change how elected officials are replaced once in office, a situation that is directly relevant to Kitsap County.

In the past year, two electeds have left their posts before the end of their term, with the replacement selected by their party.

Under the new system officeholders are not elected as their party's nominees, so the party will not be entitled to pick the replacement.

Wyman would not predict how this would shake out, but that resulting court cases would set the necessary precedent.

A Republican, Wyman said she would not mind voting for two Democrats in the gubernatorial election if they were the prevailing candidates.

She noted that if the new system was in place in 2004 the election would have been more decisive.

Christine Gregoire and Dino Rossi, who became the nominees that year, were the top two votegetters. And the omission of third party candidates in the general election would have provided a decisive result, one way or the other.

On the other hand, the 1996 election during which Kitsap Republican Ellen Craswell was her party's nominee would have turned out quite differently. Craswell earned that nomination with only 15 percent of the total vote due to a crowded Republican field.

~~The case may eventually return to the U.S. Supreme Court, but not until it is tested at least once.~~

"The losers are the independents," Hamilton said. "Many people want to vote for the candidate and not the party. As it stands, the best way to accomplish this is to join a party and get involved. You can't change things from the outside."

Berendt agrees the voters will face lots of unforeseen circumstances, but also predicts the new system will survive.

"Political parties always learn to play the cards they are dealt," he said.

See related Guest Opinion, page A4.

Port Orchard Independent Staff Writer Charlie Bermant can be reached at cbermant@portorchardindependent.com or (360) 876-4414.

Find this article at:

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Primary turnout far lower than expected

By *Tony Lystra*

The way Cowlitz County Auditor Kris Swanson figured it, Tuesday's primary vote should have set a record.

It comes in a presidential election year. Gov. Chris Gregoire and her Republican opponent Dino Rossi are facing off again after a bitter, hair-splitting race four years ago. And there's a hotly contested Cowlitz County commissioner race between four candidates in District 1.

On top of all that, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the so-called "top two" primary this year after voters had been grousing about a more restrictive primary system.

Swanson was so confident voters would be energized, she predicted earlier this month that the Cowlitz County turnout could climb as high as 61 percent. The highest turnout in more than three decades during a presidential election year was in 1972, when 49.4 percent of voters cast their ballots.

Yet, as of Monday, only 26 percent of the county's voters had returned their ballots, and Swanson was at a loss as to why people appeared to be sitting out the primary election.

"I don't get it," she said.

Voters, who received their ballots around Aug. 5, have until 8 p.m. Tuesday night to return them to several drop boxes throughout the county, including two at the Civic Center in Longview.

Swanson acknowledged that the primary vote, which includes races for governor, Brian Baird's District 3 Congressional seat, secretary of state, state treasurer and state auditor, is long and rife with candidates. Voters, she suggested, may be taking their time to sift through their choices.

She said she's "still optimistic" that ballots will pour in Tuesday.

In an interview with The Daily News earlier this month, Secretary of State Sam Reed acknowledged that there are no tight statewide races in Tuesday's primary. Still, he predicted a turnout of 46 percent, far higher than Cowlitz County's participation as of Monday.

Local party leaders also were vexed by the low turnout.

"I don't know why they're not voting," said Butch Eldridge, the Cowlitz County Democratic Party chairman. "I just don't understand."

Eldridge said he too thought the top-two primary would attract more voters, perhaps bringing as much as a 50 percent turnout. But on Monday evening, he wondered if the new system had proved too confusing.

"It's worrying when the people aren't involved," he said.

Keath Huff, the chairman of the Cowlitz County Republican Party, said he'd expected participation of at least 35 percent. Republican organizers, he said, are "a little shocked" by voters' apathy.

"We're just not seeing the ballots drop," Huff said. "It's frustrating. We've probably made close to 9,000 phone calls trying to get people to get their ballots in."

Huff suspected voters weren't participating because the state's February presidential primary has long past and "We've got a primary happening here in the dog days of summer."

The low turnout, Huff said, could allow a "dark horse" in any number of campaigns to pull off an upset. Tom Wilson, the only Republican in the District 1 commissioner race, benefits from a broad Republican base in the district, Huff said.

However, he said, any of the three other Democratic candidates — incumbent Kathleen Johnson, Todd McDaniel and Steve Madsen — could blow past him if the returns remain low and they've amassed even a hint of solid support.

"I'm sure there's more than one nervous campaign manager tonight," Huff said Monday.

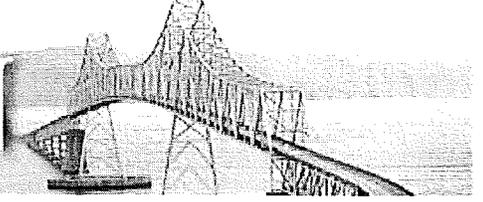
Several ways to return your ballot

Mailed primary ballots must be postmarked by Tuesday, Aug. 19. Voters also have until 8 p.m. Tuesday night to return their primary ballots to six ballot drop boxes, which require no postage. The drop boxes are located at:

- Longview Civic Center, across from Broadway Avenue, near the post office boxes
- Longview, on Broadway Avenue, driving west toward the Civic Center, just before the post office boxes
- Kelso, on Third Avenue, between Allen and Academy streets, near the post office boxes
- Woodland, in the city parking lot at Davidson Avenue and Second Street, near the utility payment drop box
- Castle Rock, at the corner of Cowlitz Street West and First Avenue Southwest, near Hattie's
- Kalama, at North First Street, near the post office boxes.



The DAILY ASTORIAN



Monday, August 18, 2008

Rule change adds spice to Pacific County primary vote

East Oregonian Publishing Group

Monday, August 18, 2008

ILWACO, Wash. - Multi-way local races for seats on the Pacific County Board of Commissioners and the Public Utility District board are expected to add to participation in all-mail primary election balloting that concludes Tuesday.

Voters received their ballots two weeks ago and must mail them back or drop them into the box at the Pacific County offices on Second Street North or 68th Place in Long Beach before 8 p.m. Tuesday.

Unofficial voting results will be available Tuesday night on The Daily Astorian Web site at www.dailyastorian.com

But because Washington continues to count votes as they straggle in through the mail, close races may not be decided until the county canvassing board reviews results on Aug. 22, 26 and 29.

On the county level, the county commission district that represents most of the Long Beach Peninsula has four candidates, including incumbent Democrat Bud Cuffel. His opponents include fellow Democrats Fred Hill and Melissa Goldberg, and Independent Ray Bowman.

Three men are vying for the nonpartisan open seat on the county public electricity board, which is being created by Lawrence Remington's decision to not seek re-election. Karl Heinicke, Bruce Barker and Michael Swanson will be pared down to two candidates for the general election.

This is the first time the state will use the top-two primary system approved by voters and recently signed off by the courts. Theoretically, this could mean two people from the same political party might advance to the November general election. As a practical matter, this arrangement allows voters to vote for whomever they wish, without having to identify themselves as belonging to any party.

The ballot features a Third Congressional District race where the incumbent, Democratic U.S. Rep. Brian Baird, faces three challengers: Cheryl Crist from his own party and Republicans Michael Delevar and Christine Webb.

In the governor's race, incumbent Democrat Chris Gregoire is up against nine opponents, including Republican Dino Rossi, whom she defeated four years ago by only 129 votes out of more than 2.7 million cast. Hard feelings on both sides have driven a bitter TV ad campaign. All the state's other top elected positions are up for election. The three District 19 state legislators, all Democrats, are unopposed.

There also are two contested state Supreme Court races. Another justice and local Superior Court Judge Mike Sullivan are running without opposition.

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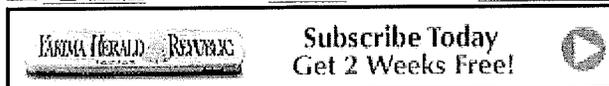
Published on Tuesday, August 19, 2008

Your vote counts only if you cast it

Yakima Herald-Republic

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A vote is a terrible thing to waste.

Yet way too many people in Yakima County are on the verge of blowing off today's primary election. As of Monday morning's mail, county election officials reported that only 26,466 of the 93,989 ballots sent out by the county auditor to registered voters had been returned. That's about 28 percent.

Or, put another way, on the eve of today's Primary Election, not even three out of 10 people who had their ballots mailed to them 20 days ago had bothered to mark and return them. C'mon, we can do better than that.

There's a nonpartisan Yakima County Superior Court race that will be decided in today's election. Yakima attorneys David Elofson and Rob Lawrence-Berrey are vying for the seat being vacated by Bob Hackett and state election law provides that whoever gets a majority (50 percent plus one) in today's final count wins the seat. There will be no General Election vote.

A state Supreme Court seat is also up for grabs today. Incumbent Mary Fairhurst is opposed by challenger Michael Bond, and if one gets a majority vote, he or she goes on to the General Election ballot alone, which is tantamount to election.

Today's primary is the first "Top Two" partisan election held in the state, which means the top two vote-getters, regardless of party, advance to the Nov. 4 General Election.

That has set the stage for two spirited races today in Yakima County.

A 14th Legislative District race will determine a successor for retiring Mary Skinner, Yakima Republican, and voters will pick from a field of five Republicans and one Democrat to select the two November finalists.

The Republican candidates are Scott Hess, Norm Johnson, Bob McLaughlin, Aubrey Reeves and Al Schwappe. The Democrat is Vickie Ybarra.

The race for the District 2 seat on the county commission is also crowded, with one Democrat and three Republicans vying for two spots on the fall ballot. Republicans are Kevin Bouchey, Ron Gamache and Dan Olson. The Democrat is Jesse Farias.

Granted, the legislative race is limited to the 14th District and the commissioner race to District 2 voters, but both are important first steps. The Superior Court race is countywide and the Supreme Court contest is a statewide vote.

Yakima County officials have predicted that 48 percent of eligible county voters will cast ballots. Secretary of State Sam Reed was even more optimistic and predicted a turnout of about 57 percent or 58 percent statewide.

If you got a ballot in the mail, you're eligible to vote it and have until midnight to get it postmarked -- or, drop it off today at the auditor's office in Yakima or at designated areas at Sunnyside Community Center and Toppenish High School before 8 p.m.

Obviously, we have a way to go in Yakima County to even reach those modest numbers. And there's not much time to get there.

A turnout of 50 percent or so is nothing to brag about. Anything less is embarrassing.

** Members of the Yakima Herald-Republic editorial board are Michael Shepard, Sarah Jenkins, Bill Lee and Karen Troianello.*

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Aug, 17, 2008

ELECTIONS

Ballots due for top-two primary

SAM TAYLOR

Ballots are due Tuesday, Aug. 19, for the first top-two primary in state history.

Ballots must be postmarked by Tuesday; if not, your vote won't count.

Whatcom County Auditor Shirley Forslof predicts a 55 percent turnout because of the 40th Legislative District Senate seat race and a Whatcom County Superior Court showdown, which will be decided in the primary.

Mail ballots by Monday, Aug. 18, to ensure they are postmarked in time. Two drop-boxes are available at the county courthouse, 311 Grand Ave., in Bellingham.

Also, several drop boxes will be open from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. on Election Day. They are:

Blaine City Hall: 344 H St.

Everson Fire Station: 101 E. Main St.

Ferndale Library: 2222 Main St.

Kendall Fire Station: 7528 Kendall Road.

Lynden Library: 216 Fourth St.

For more information contact the Auditor's Office at 676-6742.

Reach SAM TAYLOR at sam.taylor@bellinghamherald.com or call 715-2263.



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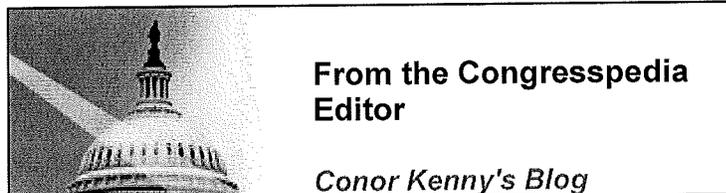
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Home » blogs » Conor Kenny's blog



Meet the Candidates: Congressional primaries in Washington and Wyoming Tuesday

Submitted by Conor Kenny on Mon, 08/18/2008 - 08:14.
Topics: U.S. Congress | Election 2008

By Congresspedia asst. editor Avelino Maestas

(For all candidate profiles, see the Wyoming and Washington portals.)

It is anything but business-as-usual for voters in both states holding their congressional primaries on Tuesday. In Wyoming, every seat in the congressional delegation is up for election this year and in Washington state, voters will try out a controversial new primary election system that has already garnered protests from the state's political parties and a Supreme Court ruling.

Washington's new "top-two" system, designed by Secretary of State Sam Reed, removes the party apparatus from primary elections. Under the new rules, the two candidates who receive the most votes in a given race will move on to the November election, regardless of party affiliation.

Leaders of the state Democratic, Libertarian and Republican parties all objected to the change, arguing it dilutes voters' choices. The U.S. Supreme Court, however, ruled there was no proof the system confuses voters, since there is no precedent for that type of election.

For more on the Washington and Wyoming races, and our Wiki the Vote project, click through.

The tightest race in Washington is in the state's 8th congressional district, challenger Darcy Burner (D) is challenging Republican incumbent Rep. Dave Reichert to a rematch of the 2006 election, which Reichert squeaked out with 51.5 percent of the vote.

After the death of Sen. Craig Thomas (R) in 2007, Wyoming



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Gov. Dave Freudenthal appointed state Sen. John Barrasso to the seat. However, with four-years remaining in Thomas' term, a special election will be held in November to determine who will hold the seat through 2012, with the Tuesday's primary winners on the ballot. Despite earlier conjecture, no Republicans are running against Barrasso in the primary. There are two Democrats: Nick Carter and Keith Goodenough are vying for the chance to challenge Barrasso.

Sen. Mike Enzi is in a similar situation, with no primary competition but a couple of Democrats in the race. However, Wyoming Republicans in the state do have one contested race: that for the at-large congressional district currently held by Incumbent Rep. Barbara Cubin (R), who has announced her retirement. Four Republicans are seeking a spot on the November ballot and the winner will face Democrat Gary Trauner in the general election.

As part of Congresspedia's Wiki the Vote project, our citizen-editors have been tracking and profiling each of the candidates in the primary. We'll have more on the winners Wednesday (including more in-depth descriptions of challengers), so stay tuned then. In the meantime, if you know something about any of the races listed above, or any race in the country, we want to hear from you. Log in to our Wiki the Vote project, find your state, and upload some information about a candidate or incumbent there. It's easy, and you can always contact one of our staff editors for help.

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Mark that ballot

Election Day

Last updated August 18, 2008 4:51 p.m. PT

SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER EDITORIAL BOARD

Secretary of State Sam Reed is optimistic: He's predicting a 46 percent turnout for Tuesday's primary election. We hope enough voters are getting their ballots postmarked pronto or heading to the polls before the 8 p.m. close to make him right, or even a ways under the mark.

But voters here are hardly used to the idea of voting in August, which started last year. There's also a shortage of high-profile races.

But there are important decisions for state Supreme Court, superintendent of public instruction and possible nonpartisan county elections. It also is the first time for the new top-two primary, which is what voters said they wanted in place of the limited voting sought by the major political parties. We've got it; let's use it. Maybe the political parties will even learn to like it.

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Aug, 18, 2008

ELECTIONS

Hot races create buzz as primary nears

Democrats look to solidify control of state Legislature

CHRIS MULICK

TRI-CITY HERALD

OLYMPIA — The Tuesday, Aug. 19, "top two" primary will greatly define the battlefield for this fall's legislative campaigns. Democrats, with a 63-35 majority in the House and 32-17 majority in the Senate, have far more turf to protect.

But their majorities also have afforded them a notable fundraising advantage to fight off Republican challengers and even reach into GOP strongholds.

With voters no longer confined to choosing from only one party's slate of candidates, the primary will serve as a poll highlighting the state's hottest campaigns.

There are about a dozen hot races in swing districts that could alter the balance of power in Olympia. A batch of perhaps two dozen more might yield a couple races that reveal themselves to be more competitive than previously thought.

House Speaker Frank Chopp, D-Seattle, said he's tracking about 20 races but that "some of that 20 will drop off."

"The primary is the place where you take stock and say, 'Are there any surprises there?'" said Senate Majority Leader Lisa Brown, D-Spokane.

Republican prospects are best in the Senate, where Democrats are taking a defensive posture and already are bracing for a tough 2010 election cycle. Top Republican targets are Sen. Marilyn Rasmussen, D-Eatonville, and Sen. Mary Margaret Haugen, DCamano Island.

Democrats are confident

they'll keep the seats and hold out hope they'll be able to unseat Sens. Mike Carrell, R-Lakewood, and Val Stevens, R-Arlington.

Four Republican seats and five Democratic seats have been targeted in the House. Republican targets include Democratic Reps. Don Barlow of Spokane, Liz Loomis of Snohomish and Roger Goodman of Kirkland, and they are angling to pick up open Democratic seats in the 41st and 26th districts in the Puget Sound region.

Democrats are going after seats held by Republican Reps. Jim Dunn of Vancouver, Spokane's John Ahern, Federal Way's Skip Priest and Whidbey Island's Norma Smith.

Their majority status has put Democrats in a better position to help their candidates. More members mean more big donors who can surplus leftover campaign cash to the caucus campaign committee.

In long-shot races, Democrats have spent money to support races against House Minority Leader Richard DeBolt, R-Chehalis, and right-hand-man Doug Ericksen, R-Ferndale.

"They've got so much money they can afford to gamble money on seats they're highly unlikely to win," said Chris Vance, former chairman of the state Republican Party.

Reports filed with the state Public Disclosure Commission last week indicated that the House Democratic Campaign Committee, which carried over a whopping \$580,000 from the last election cycle, had almost \$270,000 on hand to House Republicans' \$43,000.

"It certainly doesn't hurt," said Rep. Sam Hunt, an Olympia Democrat and House Democratic Campaign Committee chairman. "Our incumbents have been very good about raising money."

That disparity figures to grow larger in the days following Tuesday's primary, when incumbent legislators on the ballot will dump tens of thousands of leftover primary dollars into their caucus coffers.

House Democratic incumbents had a combined \$2.3 million in their campaign bank accounts last week while 31 House Republican incumbents had just over \$1 million.

"We have to be more thoughtful in terms of how we spend it and more effective," said Priest, who is co-chairman of the House Republican Organizational Committee. "That's just the reality."

The fundraising disparity is considerably smaller in the Senate. The Senate Democratic Campaign Committee had \$96,000 on hand to the Senate Republican Campaign Committee's \$48,000.

Collectively, the 13 Democratic senators on this year's ballot had almost \$829,000 on hand to the 11 Republican senators' \$805,000.

"You're at a very distinct disadvantage with the surplusing of funds," said Senate Minority Leader Mike Hewitt, R-Walla Walla. "The person who has the majority has a huge advantage."

Hewitt also finds big donors aren't as eager to contribute as much when it doesn't appear Republicans are close to claiming a majority any time soon.

"When you're very close they split the dollars a bit more," he said.



The Columbian

Lights out for parties? Tuesday's top two primary could signal a new political era for Washington state

Sunday, August 17, 2008

By Kathie Durbin, Columbian Staff Writer

Are Washington's political parties destined to go the way of the smoke-filled rooms where candidates once were anointed by all-powerful party bosses?

With the state's first top two primary just two days away, it's at least clear that the parties' wings have been clipped. Under a 7-2 Supreme Court ruling, the state will no longer run its primary election to advance the major parties' chosen candidates to the general election ballot.

Instead, the power to choose now rests with the voters, who are free to cast their vote for any candidate, with the top two vote-getters advancing regardless of their party affiliation. Come November, there is no guarantee there will be a Republican and a Democrat in every race. It could even happen in Southwest Washington's 3rd Congressional District.

Party leaders aren't happy about the prospect.

The top two system "will reduce the influence of the parties, and I think that's a bad thing," said state Democratic Party Chairman Dwight Pelz, "because the fact of the matter is that for hundreds of thousands of voters in Washington state and millions of voters across the country, party labels are important in deciding who to vote for."

"We feel very strongly that we should not have people who are hostile to the principles of the Republican Party choosing Republican candidates," Republican state chairman Luke Esser said.

Washington's experiment with the open primary could be just the opening wedge in a movement to diminish the influence of political parties.

In November, Oregon voters will decide whether to follow Washington's example and jettison their own party-run primary system. Oregon voters, unlike those in Washington, register by party, and only major-party candidates appear on the state's primary ballot, so the overhaul there would be even more dramatic.

Recent polls show the Oregon measure enjoys strong support. If it passes, and survives a likely legal challenge, the two states could find themselves on the leading edge of a national movement to cut political parties out of the candidate selection process in state and local partisan races.

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Did you know?

- The top two primary applies to elections for partisan offices including U.S. Senate and House of Representatives, state Legislature, statewide offices such as governor, and county offices such as commissioner or treasurer.
- It does not apply to presidential primary elections or to nonpartisan judicial, municipal, fire district or school board elections.



Most candidates in Tuesday's top two primary still identify themselves as Democrats or Republicans, but the new system leaves it to voters, not political parties, to decide who faces off in November. (Photo by N. Scott Trimble/The Columbian)

"Parties have no constitutional right to be part of the primary system," says former Oregon Secretary of State Phil Keisling, chief petitioner for the state's open primary measure. "They have plenty of free speech. They can advertise. What they don't have is control, and they hate that."

In Oregon, he said, an open primary would enfranchise large numbers of voters, including those under 35 who tend to identify themselves as independents. Under the current system, independents, Libertarians, Greens and members of other minor parties are excluded from the Oregon primary. In the state's 2006 primary, the median age of voters was 60 years.

"Fewer and fewer people are participating, and more and more decisions and being made by fewer and fewer people," Keisling said.

Washington's system hasn't limited voter participation as much as Oregon's "because we have not had political party registration," said Washington Secretary of State Sam Reed. "But I do still think it has had a chilling effect on people participating."

Reed, perhaps the state's leading champion of the top two primary, says that though political parties no longer have the clout they once did, they still have an important role to play.

"I don't think political parties will become irrelevant," he said. "I think the role of political parties in the 21st century is to go out and recruit quality candidates who would be good office holders, who fit their general philosophy, and to help them with training, raising money, helping them organize and succeed. That is going to be their role, instead of the 19th-century notion of the party bosses hand-picking who the candidates are going to be."

Party leaders say it's premature to write the political parties' obituaries.

"I do think it's too early to tell whether (the top two primary) has weakened the influence of the major parties," said Ryan Hart, chairman of the Clark County Republican Central Committee. "It certainly has that potential. It may be that we have some single-party races on the ballot in November."

With voting front-loaded to the primary, "Our number one job now is to get our members out voting for our candidates," said Dena Horton, chairwoman of Clark County Democrats. "A negative effect of doing it this way is that now it's up to the candidates to raise more money than ever before."

"If you have a race like Pam Brokaw's, to distinguish yourself among seven candidates, you have to do a lot to get your message out," she said.

Brokaw is the lone Democrat in a seven-way race to succeed County Commissioner Betty Sue Morris.

Regardless of how the new primary plays out, political parties aren't going away, Hart said. "The parties have their platforms and the voters identify with the platforms and the parties. They know in general what a party stands for. They want to vote with the party that shares their ideals."

'Cussed independents'

In one way, Washington's new top two primary sends the state's election system into uncharted territory.

In another way, Washington voters have been here before.

They've always been skittish about identifying themselves with a single party at the ballot box. That's why they liked the blanket primary, which for nearly 70 years allowed them to vote both sides of the ballot.

"The whole ticket-splitting is a Washington tradition," says Dave Ammons, longtime state political reporter for the Associated Press and now communications director for Secretary of State Reed. It's a reflection, he said, of "our cussed independent streak."

Voters weren't happy two years ago when they were required to check a party preference box for their votes to count in the much-reviled "pick-a-party" primary. Nearly 100,000 voters statewide failed

to do so, including about 6 percent who cast ballots in Clark County.

The 2007 Legislature wasted no time passing legislation to get rid of the offending box, which was supposed to prevent ticket-splitting.

The box surfaced again on the February presidential primary ballot, on which voters were required to declare themselves either Democrats or Republicans and to promise not to take part in the nominating process of any other party. Presidential primaries won't be affected by the top two primary rule.

'Will of the people'

In March came the U.S. Supreme Court's surprise 7-2 ruling upholding the top two primary, which Washington voters had approved by a 60 percent majority in 2004 with the passage of Initiative 872.

To overturn the primary, wrote Justice Clarence Thomas, would be "an extraordinary and precipitous nullification of the will of the people."

Legal challenges by the major political parties had stayed the implementation of the new primary system for four years. The parties argued, and still argue, that a primary election where they have no control over how candidates identify themselves violates their right to freedom of association and undermines the entire concept of party affiliation.

Reed hailed the high court's ruling. "We took the people's case to the nation's highest court and the people won," he said.

Washington voters "told us they wanted the freedom to vote for the candidate of their choice regardless of party, and the U.S. Supreme Court agreed with them," said Attorney General Rob McKenna, who argued the case before the Supreme Court.

The Washington State Grange joined the state in the court battle to implement the top two primary.

The ruling forced the parties into a defensive posture. If they could not nominate candidates through the primary system, they said, they would make endorsements outside the election system.

"We'll adapt," Esser said. "We'll have to do things to nominate our candidates earlier in the process, through conventions and caucuses."

In Clark County, 17th District Democrats were spared a public vote when Martin Hash bowed after it became clear the party favored David Carrier to run against Republican Sen. Don Benton.

Republican precinct committee officers in the 17th recently endorsed Joseph James over Rep. Jim Dunn by a 16-1 vote on a secret ballot. But both James and Dunn appear as Republicans on Tuesday's ballot.

Both parties faced tricky choices in the 3rd Congressional District race, where one Democrat and two Republicans filed to run against Democratic U.S. Rep. Brian Baird.

"It was possible that two Democrats could advance to the general election," said Hart, the county Republican chair. To lessen that possibility, he said, 3rd Congressional District Republicans endorsed Olympia party regular Christine Webb over Libertarian-leaning Michael Delavar "to make it clear who the Republican choice was."

Similarly, 3rd Congressional District Democrats had to choose between Baird and Olympia peace activist Cheryl Crist, who strongly opposed Baird's support for the 2007 U.S. troop surge in Iraq. Baird got the nod.

"We are a party of many voices," Horton said. "For folks who have strong opinions about the Iraq War, it was a difficult decision."

The Democratic, Republican and Libertarian parties continue to challenge the legality of the top two primary in the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, focusing on issues the Supreme Court did not address.

In July, their attorneys argued that the state should continue to use the pick-a-party system "until such time, if ever, as the validity of I-872 is fully and finally upheld."

Reed considers the case closed. "The fact that the highest court in the land not only decided this case, but decided it by a 7-2 margin, and the fact that the people adopted this system by a 60 percent margin, puts the state in a very strong position."

Early impacts

The legal arguments are likely to continue for a while.

In the meantime, how is the new system working?

There are still some bugs to be worked out, Ammons concedes.

For example, candidates are asked to state a party preference, whether or not the party they name actually exists. Case in point: the legislative candidate from Bellingham who said he preferred the "Salmon Yoga Party."

"There's no way to register a party anymore," Ammons said. "It's definitely a new day."

Because I-872 did away with a lot of state election rules, a cleanup bill will be introduced in the Legislature in January, he said.

The top two primary is designed to winnow the field in partisan races to the top two vote-getters, who will advance to the general election, as long as they receive at least 1 percent of the vote cast.

But in Clark County legislative races, little winnowing will be required. Only two contests drew more than two candidates. Most races pit one Republican against one Democrat, just as in the past.

Incumbents still enjoy an advantage. Statewide, three dozen House members did not even draw a challenger this year, and others face only token opposition. Eight state senators, including Sen. Craig Pridemore, have a free ride, although a Republican is mounting a write-in campaign against the Vancouver Democrat.

In races with just two candidates, this year's primary is something of an empty exercise, especially for incumbents. Many are saving their campaign war chests for the general election.

"I think it would be more interesting if there was a third person involved," said Rep. Jim Moeller, 49th District Democrat, who is being challenged by independent Mike Bomar.

Bomar, in fact, stands to benefit from the top two primary rule. He's virtually guaranteed a runoff even as an independent.

First-time candidates say the experience of ringing doorbells and getting to know voters is invaluable even if they're assured a spot on the November ballot. And by revealing where voters stand two-and-a-half months before the general election, the primary results could lead some candidates to rethink their campaign strategies.

Even in two-candidate races the results will be watched closely by potential campaign donors. Lesser-known candidates say it's important that they make a respectable showing if they hope to raise money for the general election.

Jon Haugen, a Democrat who has raised less than \$10,000 in his campaign against Sen Joe Zarelli, R-Ridgefield, hopes to get at least 40 percent of the primary vote to show he's a viable candidate. "It's a dress rehearsal for the November election," he said. "If the voters say they want to stick with Joe, then I'm not getting any money."

"I've taken nothing for granted," Zarelli said of the primary campaign. "Given the fact that people can vote cross-ticket, we've made it a priority."

Washington primary timeline

1935-2003: Washington uses a "blanket primary" that lists candidates from all parties on one ballot and allows voters to choose candidates from any party. The highest vote-getter in each party becomes that party's nominee in the general election.

2000: The U.S. Supreme Court overturns a nearly identical primary in California, siding with four political parties who argue that the system unconstitutionally forces them to associate with voters who don't share their beliefs.

2003: The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals strikes down Washington's blanket primary as "materially indistinguishable from the California scheme."

2004: Washington voters pass Initiative 872, which establishes a top two primary system in which the top two voter-getters advance to the general election regardless of party affiliation.

2005: A federal district court judge rules I-872 unconstitutional in a case brought by the state Democratic, Republican and Libertarian parties. The state of Washington and the Washington State Grange appeal to the 9th Circuit, which upholds the district court ruling.

2006: Primary voters are required to pick a party and vote a straight party ticket.

2007: Attorney General Rob McKenna argues the state's case before the U.S. Supreme Court.

2008: March 18: The U.S. Supreme Court upholds the top two primary in a 7-2 opinion. Aug. 19: Voters use the top two primary for the first time.

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Wash. voters try out "top two" primary

By RACHEL LA CORTE
Associated Press Writer

Washington's contested "top two" primary makes its debut Tuesday, with state officials predicting near-record turnout and political parties waiting in the wings for another possible court challenge.

Ballots went to voters on Aug. 1. For the first time since 2003, voters can skip back and forth across party lines as they pick finalists for governor, Congress, the judiciary, the Legislature and other statewide offices.

Secretary of State Sam Reed, who's been talking up the top two system in a statewide tour, said he detects a "huge sigh of relief on the part of the voters."

"When we had pick-a-party, my office and county auditors received a huge amount of complaints and gripes," said Reed, who's also up for re-election this year. Now, "we are hearing nothing, which is an indication that people are satisfied. It's been a remarkable change."

But not everyone is happy: The state Republican, Democratic and Libertarian parties' legal challenges of the new system still linger in the background.

State Democratic Party Chairman Dwight Pelz said the primary "reduces the value of information of who is a Democrat and who is a Republican."

Pelz said the candidates' ability to decide how they are identified - Progressive Democrat, G.O.P and Salmon Yoga Party are just a few of the designators voters will see - will confuse voters.

"The voters are worse off for it," he said. "They should have more clarity, not less."

The political parties suffered a major setback in March, when the U.S. Supreme Court rejected their argument that they have a First Amendment right to select their own nominees without outside interference. Under Washington's system, all candidates for a particular office may list their political party preference after their names.

The top two finishers advance to the general election on Nov. 4, regardless of party. For partisan races like the treasurer's race, and a handful of legislative races, that means there's a possibility two Democrats or two Republicans could move forward to the general election.

State Republican Party spokesman Patrick Bell said this possibility deprives voters of a meaningful choice in November.

"We maintain that the current system is unconstitutional," he said.

In its ruling, the Supreme Court noted that since a top two primary had not yet been carried out, there was no basis to the parties' argument that voters would be confused.

The political parties believe that leaves the door open for them, and that the results of the primary will give them ammunition

to continue their legal fight. They're still pursuing challenges on various aspects of the law in federal courts.

For nearly 70 years, Washington state used a "blanket" primary system, with voters picking their favorites for each office - a Democrat for governor, a Republican for secretary of state, on so on. The top Democratic, Republican and third-party vote-getters for each office advanced to the general election.

That system was struck down by the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in 2003, three years after the Supreme Court invalidated a similar system in California, finding it infringed on the rights of parties to pick their nominees.

The top two primary, passed by initiative in 2004 with 60 percent of the vote, is a winnowing process rather than a nominating election - raising the possibility that two candidates of the same party could advance to the general election. The model was put on hold by the political parties' court challenge, and wasn't in play until the Supreme Court's ruling earlier this year.

Reed is predicting voter turnout at about 46 percent, driven in part by interest in the new primary. If he's right, that would be the highest since 1972, when turnout was more than 49 percent.

Also accounting for the high number is interest in the already heated governor's race between Gov. Chris Gregoire and her Republican opponent, Dino Rossi.

Voters will get their first chance to cast their vote in the rematch between the two, who faced off in the 2004 election.

Neither campaign is publicly putting much weight in the results. But in an e-mail to supporters, Rossi said that if Gregoire doesn't win the primary by a "commanding" margin, "it will be the beginning of the end of her campaign."

Voters also are weighing the race for state treasurer, the only open statewide elected seat.

Treasurer Mike Murphy is stepping down after three terms, and has crossed party lines to endorse Republican Alan Martin, his top deputy.

Two Democrats also are vying to get through the primary: state Rep. Jim McIntire, an economist and former House Finance Committee chairman, and ChangMook Sohn, who was the state's chief economist for more than two decades.

Other races include lieutenant governor, where incumbent Democrat Brad Owen faces four challengers, and secretary of state, where Republican Sam Reed has three challengers. State auditor Brian Sonntag and Insurance Commissioner Mike Kreidler, both Democrats, each have two challengers.

Terry Bergeson, running for her fourth term as superintendent of public instruction, faces five challengers but is expected to advance, along with Randy Dorn, a former legislator, teacher and principal who is executive director of the Public Schools Employees of Washington.

Republican Attorney General Rob McKenna faces Democratic challenger Democratic Pierce County Executive John Ladenburg, and Republican Public Lands Commissioner Doug Sutherland faces Democrat Peter Goldmark. All four are guaranteed to advance under the top two format, since there aren't any third challengers in either race.

On the Net:

Washington state Secretary of State: <http://www.secstate.wa.gov>

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Tacoma, WA - Monday, August 18, 2008

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A blanket primary substitute, if voters can keep it

THE NEWS TRIBUNE

Last updated: August 17th, 2008 01:24 AM (PDT)

Soon it can be told: Did voters get what they bargained for in 2004 when they avenged the political parties' assassination of the beloved but unconstitutional blanket primary?

Initiative 872, passed four years ago but on hold until earlier this year, is finally coming into its own with the debut of the "top two" primary on Tuesday. And voters are finally getting the chance to see what they have wrought.

The initiative was an attempt to reinstate the 68-year tradition of allowing voters to skip back and forth across party lines in the primary election.

But to pass legal muster, I-872 had to neuter the primary election. No longer could the primary be about electing standard bearers for every party on the ballot; it had to be about electing candidates, political affiliation be damned.

Thus the top two system in which not only can voters crisscross the ballot, but two members of the same party can also advance to the general election. It's the blanket primary one-upped.

We predict the electorate is in for a shock. Top two restores broad choice in this month's election, but at the expense of the main event in November.

Voters in Seattle and Eastern Washington are likely to see general-election runoffs between two Ds or two Rs, respectively. And Republicans could be watching the only open statewide race – the one for state treasurer – from the sidelines come November if the hype of this being a big Democratic year proves true.

The potential for screwy general-election pairings in Pierce County is mitigated somewhat by a debut of our own: instant runoff voting.

Most county races skip the primary election this year and head straight to the general, where a crowded slate of candidates will duke it out for voters' first, second and third preferences. State elections officials touring the state to explain the top two primary have got nothing on the voter education hurdle facing Pierce County elections workers.

But state officials are up against another kind of pressure: scrutiny from political parties that are none too happy that top two allows anyone to call themselves a Democrat or a Republican (or a Progressive or Libertarian or a Salmon Yogi).

Party officials will be watching for signs that voters are confused about which candidates have the parties' blessing. The U.S. Supreme Court, in giving the go-ahead for the top two primary, left open the possibility that such confusion would violate the protections against forced association.

Voters, if they want to keep their new primary, won't give the parties fodder for such a challenge.

Originally published: August 17th, 2008 01:24 AM (PDT)



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Monday, August 18, 2008 12:14 pm

NEW,NOW,NEXT

Wash. voters send in ballots while "top two" primary's fate still uncertain

Associated Press
Last updated: Monday, August 18th, 2008 02:19:06 AM

Washington's contested "top two" primary election makes its debut tomorrow, with state officials predicting near-record turnout and political parties waiting in the wings for another possible court challenge.

Ballots went to voters on Aug. 1. For the first time since 2003, voters can skip back and forth across party lines as they pick finalists for governor, Congress, the judiciary, the Legislature and other statewide offices.

Under the top two system, the two candidates for each office who receive the most votes, regardless of party, will advance to the general election ballot. That means two candidates from the same party could advance to the general election, while others are shut out.

But not everyone is happy: The state Republican, Democratic and Libertarian parties' legal challenges of the new system still linger in the background.

State Democratic Party Chairman Dwight Pelz says the candidates' ability to decide how they are identified will confuse voters. Some of the labels candidates have pinned on themselves are Progressive Democrat, G.O.P and Salmon Yoga Party.

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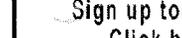
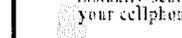
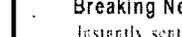
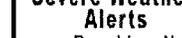
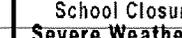
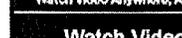
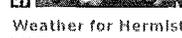


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Primary to winnow the field of candidates

By Andrew Garber

Seattle Times Olympia bureau

OLYMPIA — Don't count on Tuesday's primary election to predict whether Democratic Gov. Christine Gregoire or Republican candidate Dino Rossi will win in November.

Although more than a million people are expected to vote, the primary shouldn't be viewed as a trial run for the general election. Experience suggests a large proportion of the voters will be party loyalists. Many independents will sit out the primary.

"That's not a good indicator of the state," said Matt Barreto, co-director of the Washington Poll, a public-opinion survey sponsored by the University of Washington. "Especially in Washington, where the largest identification is independent."

Still, Rossi and Gregoire have poured about \$1 million each into broadcast advertising over the past four weeks, and independent political-action committees on both sides have spent another \$1 million combined.

Advertising has been particularly heavy during TV broadcasts of the Olympics, where Rossi is spending about \$260,000 for airtime. Gregoire's campaign would not comment about its Olympics advertising spending.

In the competitive 8th Congressional District, Rep. Dave Reichert, R-Auburn, remains focused on the general election, his campaign spokeswoman said. Reichert faces a tough challenge from Democrat Darcy Burner.

Burner launched her first television ad two weeks ago, while Reichert is doing only Internet video ads before the primary.

The purpose of the primary is to winnow the field of candidates in races across the state to two people who will appear on the November ballot.

In most cases, the outcome from Tuesday's vote is in little doubt.

Rossi and Gregoire are shoo-ins for the November ballot because of their name recognition and well-funded campaigns. So are Reichert and Burner in the 8th district.

But other primary races are more competitive.

In the state treasurer's race, Republican Allan Martin, the deputy state treasurer, and two Democrats, Rep. Jim McIntire and former chief state economist ChangMook Sohn, are vying to be on the general election ballot. The current treasurer, Mike Murphy, is not running for re-election.

Six candidates are running for state superintendent of public instruction, four for secretary of state, five for lieutenant governor, three for state auditor and three for insurance commissioner. However, the incumbents in all those races have the edge.

In addition, a few state legislative races in the Puget Sound area are considered competitive, primarily in districts where

retirements have created open seats.

The state has a new primary system this year that lets voters cast ballots for any candidate, and the top two vote-getters in each race, regardless of party, move to the November ballot.

As a result, for the first time voters in November likely will see legislative races in which both candidates are from the same party.

In Seattle's liberal 36th Legislative District, Democratic candidates John Burbank and Reuven Carlyle are expected to attract most of the votes, leaving Republican Leslie Bloss off the November ballot.

Burbank and Carlyle are competing to replace veteran Democratic Rep. Helen Sommers, who is retiring from Olympia.

In the nearby 46th District, Democrats Gerry Pollet and Scott White should move on the general election. They are vying to replace McIntire, who left the Legislature to run for treasurer.

Many independents will sit out the primary because "you don't need to vote on Aug. 19, and it will still be Gregoire versus Rossi," Barreto said. "Any vote Gregoire gets now in the primary will just be from her hard-core supporters. The same for Rossi."

Stuart Elway, who runs a Seattle polling firm, and Secretary of State Sam Reed also said voters should not read too much into the results for the governor's race.

"There's going to be significantly larger turnout in the general election, and there will be more independents," Reed said.

He predicts about a 46 percent turnout for this year's primary. In 2004, about 45 percent of registered voters turned out for the primary and 82 percent voted in the general election. In other words, an additional 1.4 million people voted in the November election.

Although the primary results can't predict who'll win in November, the Rossi campaign has been busy trying to downplay expectations.

His campaign sent out an e-mail to reporters last week stating, "Based on historical data and recent polling data, our campaign does not expect to win in the primary."

The campaign also sent out a memo arguing that since 1972, Republican gubernatorial candidates have generally done worse in primary elections than in the general election when it comes to their party's overall share of the vote. The Rossi campaign, however, failed to note that the opposite was true in the 1992, 1996 and 2000 elections.

Gregoire's campaign isn't saying much about what the primary results might mean, but said in an e-mail that it has "hundreds of volunteers knocking on doors and calling voters to make sure that people know they should vote August 19th."

In the 8th Congressional District, Burner's campaign spokesman, Sandeep Kaushik, also tried to lower expectations. Kaushik said Reichert has an advantage going into Tuesday's primary because he is the incumbent.

"We wouldn't be surprised if he outpolls us," he said.

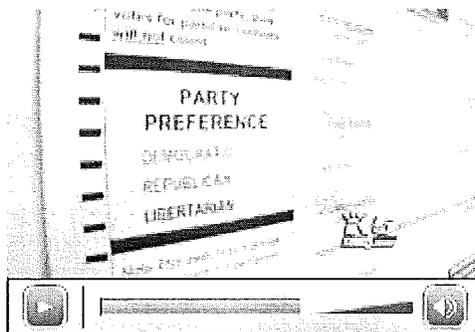
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Election Day in Washington Tuesday

10:12 AM PDT on Monday, August 18, 2008

By JANE MCCARTHY / KING 5 News



Video: Election Day in Wash. Tuesday

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OLYMPIA, Wash. - Tomorrow is Election Day in Washington, and voters can expect some changes in the process this year.

The state's contested "top two" primary makes its debut, with state officials predicting near-record turnout. And as King County transitions to vote-by-mail, there are several new ballot drop boxes throughout King County to drop absentee ballots.

In King County, you can still drop your ballot or vote at a polling place, but many of those spots have changed. Some voters still prefer to go to the polls.

"You know, I'd like to vote at a polling place," said Brent Loya, King County voter.

Many voters have yet to pinpoint their polling place.

"I think my polling place is like a church in Bellevue," said Greer Lundquist, King County voter. "I probably wait until Election Day and then find out where I could go."

This time around, your old polling place may no longer exist. In the past few years, 141 King County poll sites have changed and since the presidential primary in February, 20 were either moved or closed, affecting more than 17,000 poll voters.

King county elections officials have tried to notify voters, but they know some people may still be confused.

"We have several efforts because, of course, we don't want that to be the reason for anyone to miss an opportunity to vote," said Sherril Huff, director of King County Elections.

You can find your polling place and other information on the King County elections Web site or by calling the voter hotline at 206-296-VOTE.

Many of those polling places have been closed because they were not accessible for people with disabilities, the sites were underutilized or in some cases they've been demolished.

'Top two' primary

And this vote will be a bit different in other ways. Washington's top two primary makes its debut. For the first time since 2003, voters can hop back and forth across party lines as they pick finalists for governor, Congress, the judiciary, the Legislature and other statewide offices.

Secretary of State Sam Reed, who's been talking up the top two system in a statewide tour, said he detects a "huge sigh of relief on the part of the voters."

"When we had pick-a-party, my office and county auditors received a huge amount of complaints and gripes," said Reed, who's also up for re-election this year. Now, "we are hearing nothing, which is an indication that people are satisfied. It's been a remarkable change."

The top two finishers advance to the general election on Nov. 4, regardless of party. For partisan races like the treasurer's race, and a handful of legislative races, that means there's a possibility two Democrats or two Republicans could move forward to the general election.

For nearly 70 years, Washington state used a "blanket" primary system, with voters picking their favorites for each office -- a Democrat for governor, a Republican for secretary of state, on so on. The top Democratic, Republican and third-party vote-getters for each office advanced to the general election.

That system was struck down by the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in 2003, three years after the Supreme Court invalidated a similar system in California, finding it infringed on the rights of parties to pick their nominees.

The top two primary, passed by initiative in 2004 with 60 percent of the vote, is a winnowing process rather than a nominating election -- raising the possibility that two candidates of the same party could advance to the general election. The model was put on hold by the political parties' court challenge, and wasn't in play until the Supreme Court's ruling earlier this year.