Washington Secretary of State
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Advisory Issue: 08 Ballot Processing
January 7, 2008

The 2008 Presidential Primary is guided by a unique set of rules that are markedly different than those for our regular Pick-A-Party Primary. This advisory will outline the basic rules for the Presidential Primary, note some differences between the two primaries, and provide ballot processing tips for the Presidential Primary.

Basic Presidential Primary Rules

- The signed party oath on the return envelope is the determining factor; only a vote within the party the voter has selected will count.
- If the voter has selected both party oaths, no Presidential Primary votes will count.
- If the voter has voted in both parties, no Presidential Primary votes will count.
- If a voter has neglected to select a party oath, no Presidential Primary votes will count, on either separate or consolidated ballots. Any special election votes will still be valid.
- If there is no concurrent special election, and the voter has not selected the party oath but has signed the absentee oath and the signature has been accepted, the voter may be credited with voting.
- Voters needing to cure a signature problem must be afforded the option of selecting a party if they did not originally do so on the ballot envelope.

How is the Presidential Primary Different from the Pick-A-Party Primary?

- In the Pick-A-Party Primary, if the voter has chosen a party in the party box on the ballot, even if he or she votes for both parties, the votes for the party whose box they have chosen would count. ***In the Presidential Primary, if a voter votes for both parties, no partisan votes count.***
- In the Pick-A-Party Primary, the party box on the ballot determines what partisan votes are counted. ***In the Presidential Primary, the signed party oath on the envelope determines what partisan votes are counted***. If there is a party box on the ballot, it has no influence whatsoever on what partisan votes will be counted.
- In the Pick-A-Party Primary, if the party box on the ballot is left blank, and the voter votes for only one party, the partisan votes count. ***In the Presidential Primary, if a voter does not select a party oath, no partisan votes count.***

Presidential Primary Ballot Processing Tips

Sorting

- Sort ballots according to the signed oath: Republican, Democratic, and other. WAC 434-219-230(3)

Signature Verification

- Verify the signatures of all batches, even if there is no party oath selected.

- You may credit voters with participating in the primary if the signature is accepted, even if no oath was selected and their ballots will not be counted. If there is no concurrent special election, you need not process these ballots further.

- Be sure to track the number of voters whose ballots are not counted, but have already been credited with voting.

Signature Issues

- If the signature does not match or the envelope is unsigned, send the voter a letter according to the procedure detailed in RCW 29A.60.165 and WAC 434-261-050.

- Include in the letter an option to cure the oath, if applicable. The voter may, along with curing the signature issue, select a party.

- If there is a party selection made on the letter, accompanied by an accepted signature, that selection will supersede any party selection on the ballot envelope. If there is no selection made on the letter, the selection made on the ballot envelope stands.

Opening

- Opening should be done in a two step process as usual, making sure to break the connection between the ballot and the envelope.

- Each batch should be a single oath option (all Republican, all Democratic, or other.)

Manual Inspection, Duplication & Resolution

- After the connection between the envelope and ballot is broken, manually inspect every ballot from each batch for damage or voter intent issues.

- For consolidated ballots, check that the correct party and ONLY the correct party is voted. If both parties are voted, no partisan votes are counted regardless of the party oath that was selected on the envelope. *(NOTE: For some counties, these will need to be duplicated or resolved as <u>undervotes</u> in order to ensure that when they are tabulated, no partisan votes are recorded. It was previously stated in Presidential Primary Advisory #05 that these should be treated as overvotes, but due to more thorough information we have received on our voting systems, we now understand that they must be treated as undervotes in order to be consistent throughout the state.)*

- For separate ballots, check that the voter has returned the correct ballot. If the voter has returned and voted on more than one partisan ballot, no partisan votes count. Nonpartisan votes would still count.

- When inspecting the ballots from a single party batch, if a consolidated ballot contains votes for the other party, or if using separate ballots, the wrong party ballot was returned, check the envelopes to be sure there was not a mistake made when the envelopes were sorted into batches by party.

Ensuring Ballots are Processed According to the Oath Selected

- You may wish to mark on all ballots the corresponding oath by swiping the edge of the ballots with color coded marker (red for Republican, blue for Democrat), or stamping the ballot with the party selection.

- You may choose to keep the ballots segregated by using color coded tubs or boxes to store them.

- For ballots that need duplication or resolution, have procedures to ensure they are processed according to the oath. This may be done by indicating the party on the ballots themselves or by another method.

Please contact our office with your questions about ballot processing:

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