

Presidential Primary FAQ

Q: Why does Washington have a Presidential Primary?

In 1988, over 200,000 Washington voters signed an Initiative to the Legislature proposing a Presidential Primary. The Legislature adopted the initiative in 1989. The first section of the law states as follows.

The...presidential nominating caucus system in Washington State is unnecessarily restrictive of voter participation in that it discriminates against the elderly, the infirm, women, the disabled, evening workers, and others who are unable to attend caucuses and therefore unable to fully participate in this most important quadrennial event that occurs in our democratic system of government.

The Legislature further emphasized that the presidential selection process must be more open and representative of the will of the people.

Q: Is there a significant difference in voter participation between caucuses and a primary?

Only 2% of voters generally participate in political party caucuses. An estimated 60,000 people participated in the Democratic and Republican caucuses.

By contrast, with a 42% turnout, 1,309,367 voters participated in the 2000 Presidential Primary.

Q: What is the anticipated date for the 2008 Presidential Primary?

The Secretary of State plans to propose an alternative date that would move the 2008 Presidential Primary to February. This option was exercised in 1996 and 2000. Almost half of the states are planning to hold presidential primaries on or before February 5, 2008. To be meaningful, Washington's Presidential Primary must be early.

Q: Are the political parties required to use the results of the Presidential Primary?

The state central committees for each major political party decide whether to use the results of the Presidential Primary to allocate any of Washington's delegates to the national nominating conventions.

If a political party does not use the primary to allocate its delegates, or uses the results to allocate only a portion of its delegates, it conducts a nominating process using caucuses and/or conventions. The specific details of the caucus and convention process are established in state party rules.

The Republican Party used the results of the primary to allocate all of the Washington delegates in 1992, half of the Washington delegates in 1996, and one third of the Washington delegates in 2000. The Democratic Party has never used the results of the primary to allocate delegates to the Democratic National Convention.

Q: Why was a Presidential Primary not conducted in Washington in 2004?

In 2004, it was clear that the Republican nominee was George W. Bush. The State Democratic Party refused to use the primary to allocate any delegates to the Democratic National Convention. Consequently, the State Legislature cancelled the 2004 Presidential Primary because the results would not be considered.

Unlike 2004, in 2008 both parties are offering a number of qualified candidates and no clear frontrunners dominate the race in either party. It has been 40 years, since 1968, that a Presidential election did not include an incumbent President or Vice-President.

Q: How does the date get changed?

The statutory default date for Washington's 2008 Presidential Primary is May 27, 2008. An alternative date will be proposed as provided for in state law.

Either the Secretary of State or any major political party planning to use the results for selecting its delegates may propose an alternative date. This authority has been exercised for the 1996 and 2000 Presidential Primaries. The three previous primaries have been held on May 19, 1992; March 26, 1996; and February 29, 2000.

A committee will be convened to determine a new date. A new date must be affirmed by two-thirds of the committee members. The committee consists of the following officials.

- Sam Reed - Secretary of State
- Lisa Brown - Senate Majority Leader
- Mike Hewitt - Senate Minority Leader
- Frank Chopp - House of Representatives Speaker
- Richard DeBolt - House of Representatives Minority Leader
- Luke Esser - Washington State Republican Party Chair
- Olga Miller - Washington State Republican Party Vice-Chair
- Dwight Pelz - Washington State Democratic Central Committee Chair
- Eileen Macoll - Washington State Democratic Central Committee Vice-Chair

Each committee member may appoint a designee to serve on his or her behalf.

Q: Are delegates committed to vote for a certain candidate multiple rounds of voting occur at the national party conventions?

Delegate commitments are defined by the parties, and the parties have not yet completed rules for the 2008 presidential cycle.

According to the national party rules, state Democrats must submit delegate rules to the Democratic National Committee by May 2007, and state Republicans must submit rules to the Republican National Committee by September 2007.

In terms of past commitments, research has produced conflicting information. Both major parties may have committed their delegates for two rounds of voting. Other information indicates delegates are not bound to any candidate. The two major parties in Washington State should be contacted for additional information.

The last time multiple ballots occurred at a convention was in 1952, when Adlai Stevenson was selected after three rounds of voting at the Democratic National Convention.

Q: What is the process for a presidential candidate to appear on the Presidential Primary ballot?

Only major political party candidates may appear on the Presidential Primary ballot. Candidates are placed on the ballot one of two ways.

- 1) By direction of the Secretary of State if the candidate is generally advocated or recognized in national news media.
- 2) By petition for nomination by political party members filed at least 60 days before the presidential primary.

Q: How much will the 2008 Presidential Primary cost?

The Office of the Secretary of State estimates the cost to hold the 2008 Presidential Primary will be about \$9.7 million.

Q: Where in state law is the Presidential Primary authorized?

The presidential primary is authorized in Chapter 29A.56 of the Revised Code of Washington, also known as RCW 29A.56. The Legislature provides a copy of these statutes on its website at: <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=29A.56> .

Q: What is the contact information for the two major parties in Washington State?

The major political parties recognized in Washington State are the Democrats and the Republicans. The contact information for the two parties is:

Washington State Democratic Central Committee
P.O. Box 4027
Seattle, WA 98194
Phone: (206) 583-0664
Fax: (206) 583-0301
Internet: www.wa-democrats.org
E-mail: info@wa-democrats.org

Washington State Republican Party
16400 Southcenter Parkway, Suite 200
Seattle, WA 98188
Phone: (206) 575-2900
Fax: (206) 575-1730
Internet: www.wsrp.org
E-mail: comments@wsrp.org