



DEBRA BOWEN

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California's Top-Two Primary: What Voters Should Know

SACRAMENTO – As the June 5 primary election nears, California Secretary of State Debra Bowen today reiterated the balloting differences and similarities under the Top Two Candidates Open Primary Act. While the top-two primary law took effect in 2011, the June 2012 primary will be the first statewide election conducted under the new rules that changed how state constitutional, state legislative and U.S. congressional primaries are conducted in California. (The top-two primary law does not affect elections for U.S. President, county central committees or local offices.)

“This is the first statewide election since California voters created the top-two primary system,” said Secretary Bowen, the state’s chief elections officer. “But when you think about it, California voters in every general election see a ballot where several candidates are listed for one office.”

Under the new top-two primary system, what used to be known as party-nominated offices are now called voter-nominated offices. Again, other than presidential, county central committees and local offices, all candidates running in a primary election for voter-nominated offices – regardless of their party preference – will appear on a single primary election ballot, and people can vote for any candidate. The top two overall vote-getters (not the top vote-getter from each qualified political party) will move on to the November 6 General Election. Even if there are only two candidates in the primary, a general election is still required.

Party preference, previously known as party affiliation, is another new term under the top-two primary system. If a candidate indicated a preference for a qualified political party, the party will be printed by the candidate’s name on the ballot, as in past elections. A voter or candidate who does not indicate a preference for a political party, previously categorized as decline to state or a decline-to-state voter, is referred to as having no party preference (NPP).

“From a voter’s perspective, the new top-two primary law actually simplifies the process and offers more choices,” added Secretary Bowen. “While voters still must select just one candidate for each office under the top-two primary, they get to choose from the entire pool of candidates running for each office instead of just a portion based on their political party preference.”

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Voters may still opt to vote for a qualified write-in candidate who is not listed on the ballot in the primary election. However, to advance to the general election for a voter-nominated office, a qualified write-in candidate must be one of the two candidates who receive the most votes in the primary election.

Further information about primary elections in California is at www.sos.ca.gov/elections/2012-elections/june-primary/faqs-primary-2012.htm.

Because the primary elections for U.S. President, county central committees and local offices were not affected by the new law, they remain party-nominated offices and voters will continue to choose from their party's candidates. The top vote-getter from each party will run in the November 6 General Election.

- The Democratic and American Independent parties have chosen to conduct a modified-closed presidential primary, in which NPP voters will be permitted to request their 2012 presidential primary ballots.
- The Americans Elect Party has chosen not to participate in the June 5 primary.
- The other four qualified parties will hold closed closed presidential primaries in which only voters indicating a party preference for the Green, Libertarian, Peace and Freedom, and Republican parties will be permitted to request their 2012 presidential primary ballots.

Voters can check their registration status, including party preference, through the Secretary of State's web portal at www.sos.ca.gov/elections/registration-status. Californians can register to vote or update registration information by filling in the online voter registration form at www.sos.ca.gov/elections/register-to-vote/ then printing, signing and mailing the form. (The form is even pre-addressed to the registrant's county elections office.) Voter registration forms are also available at any U.S. post office, public library or county elections office.

The last day to register to vote in the June 5 primary election is May 21. The last day to request a vote-by-mail ballot is May 29.

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