

The Voter



Newsletter of
LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS
OF BOWLING GREEN OHIO
January 2017

PO Box 873 Bowling Green OH 43402 www.wcnet.org/~lwvbg

SOUPER SUPPER and CONSENSUS MEETING ON PRIMARY ELECTIONS

**Tuesday January 24, 2017
6:00 p.m. potluck, 7:00 p.m. meeting
870 Scott Blvd, Bowling Green
(home of Ellen Dalton)**

We hope to see many members at this important meeting. A Consensus meeting is a quintessential League activity at which our local group helps to shape a position for state or national League. In this case, the position will be for League of Women Voters of Ohio. Plus, the Souper Supper is an enjoyable time to share good food and conversation with fellow League members.

How to prepare: Read the materials which have been prepared by the Primary Elections Study Committee. They can be found at www.lwvohio.org/MemberArea/LeagueStudies. Selected materials are included in this newsletter. Give some thought to the consensus questions and how you would answer them yourself. Discussion will be led by several League members and the consensus of the group about each question will be recorded and sent to LWVO. On the basis of the responses they receive, a state position on primary elections will be formulated.

For the Souper Supper potluck, 2 kinds of soup and beverages will be provided by the Board. Please bring a salad, dessert, bread item, or side dish to share. All utensils will be provided.

Snow date will be Wednesday February 1, same time and same location. We're hoping for good weather on January 24 so the meeting can happen that day!

SOUPER SUPPER and CONSENSUS ON PRIMARY ELECTIONS
870 Scott Blvd, Bowling Green. JANUARY 24, 2017 6:00 p.m. potluck 7:00 meeting

Mark Your Calendar

January 24, 2017: Consensus meeting on Primary Election Process. This is the last step in a state League study. Meeting will start with a Souper Supper potluck at the home of Ellen Dalton, 870 Scott Blvd at 6:00 p.m. Consensus meeting will begin at 7:00. Snow date February 1.

February 2017: Open

March 22, 2017: Public program presented by Mental Health & Senior Concerns Committees. Date and place TBA.

April 2017: Public program presented by Education Committee. Date and place TBA.

May or June 2017: Annual meeting including election of officers and board members and approval of budget. Date and place TBA.

CONSENSUS QUESTIONS FOR PRIMARY ELECTION STUDY

The Study Guide at www.lwvohio.org has useful background material on each question.

Question #1: What do you believe is the MORE important purpose of primary elections? (Choose one.)

- a. A way for political party members alone to choose their nominees (partisan)
- b. A way for all voters, regardless of political party membership, to narrow the field of candidates (nonpartisan)

Would your answer to the above vary, depending on the level of government for which the election is being held? Yes No

Question #2: If you answered yes in the second part of #1, indicate your preference before each of the following levels of government, by placing P (partisan) or NP (nonpartisan) in the space provided.

- a. U.S. House and Senate races
- b. Statewide office races (e.g. Governor, Auditor, Treasurer, etc.)
- c. OH House and Senate races
- d. Countywide office races (Commissioner, Recorder, Prosecutor, etc.)
- e. City, Village or Township races

Question #3. What principles should a good primary election system encourage? (Check as many as you believe important and/or achievable)

- a. Increase voter participation
- b. Enfranchise independent or third party voters who otherwise have no voice
- c. Preserve strong political parties
- d. Strengthen the viability of third parties
- e. Simplify administration of elections
- f. Lessen partisan polarization
- g. Reduce costs of elections
- h. Result in more competitive general elections.
- i. Other: _____

PRIMARY ELECTION STUDY (continued)

Question #4: Ohio's current system for local, county and statewide offices is a semi-closed, partisan primary election, in which the voter may request any party ballot at the time of the election, and the voter may be challenged if he/ she changed party affiliation.

Do you want to keep Ohio's current system?

Yes No COMMENT _____

In some states or local jurisdictions, major systemic reforms have been introduced or recommended, which are listed below. If you answered NO above, then which of the following would you prefer? (You may choose more than one.)

a. A closed, partisan primary election, in which only registered members of the political party conducting the primary are permitted to vote, with no independent or crossover voting permitted.

b. An open, partisan primary election, in which any registered voter may choose to vote any party's ballot without having to be a member of that particular party.

c. An open, nonpartisan, "top-two" primary, in which ALL candidates appear on the same primary ballot but only the top two vote-getters, regardless of party affiliation, advance to the general election

d. No primary - a nonpartisan general election is held, and possibly a runoff election if no candidate achieves a majority of the votes. (A voter chooses one candidate)

e. No primary - "ranked choice voting" or "instant runoff voting" in the general election, a voting system in which the voter ranks candidates in order of preference.

f. No primary - "approval voting," a voting system in which each voter may vote for (or "approve" of) as many of the candidates as the voter deems acceptable, and in which the winner is the candidate receiving the most votes.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF PRIMARY ELECTIONS IN THE U. S. (from the Study Guide)

The direct primary as we know it today was a reform instituted by the Progressive Movement in the early 20th Century, whose main objective was eliminating corruption in government. Until the establishment of the direct primary, political party candidates were chosen by political machines in closed-door meetings and at political conventions, outside of the purview of the voting public. To overcome the monopoly of party bosses, Progressives aimed to introduce competition and popular choice into the selection of party nominees.

In 1903, Robert LaFollette, the progressive Republican governor of Wisconsin, is credited with passing the first law that established statewide direct primaries. The Reverend Herbert Bigelow of Cincinnati was instrumental in gaining passage of the direct primary in Ohio, which became law in 1906. This law required a primary election for candidates running for congressional, state, county, and local office. By the end of the Progressive Era at the entry of the United States into World War I in 1917, 32 of the then 48 states had implemented direct primaries for party nominees for state offices. By the 1960's, all states had started to use the direct primary.

Early on, however, it became apparent that the direct primary might have negative consequences as well, as it began to reduce the influence of political parties in American politics. Opposition of politicians to this reform emerged in the 1920's, but efforts to repeal or restrict the direct primary were largely unsuccessful. Interestingly, it was the inclusion of women into the electorate in the 1920's that stymied attempts at repeal, because women voters saw such a move as reinforcing a political style of male-dominated, "smoke-filled rooms."

In its earliest years, the reform worked for the most part as anticipated, even in areas of one-party dominance, because primaries tested public officials as they ran for election. But, by the end of World War II,

PRIMARY ELECTION STUDY *(continued)*

the effectiveness of the primary to increase competition in elections had been greatly reduced. By reducing the influence of political parties and partisan loyalties, the power of incumbency grew, which eventually weakened competition in both the primary and general election. By the 1960's, with changes in campaign technology such as television and computer-analyzed opinion polls, elections became more candidate-centered, and the influence of parties as political intermediaries was further diminished. This trend has increased even more with social media and the 24-hour news cycle on cable TV.

New forms of state primaries even less conducive to party control have been introduced. In the 1970's, Louisiana introduced a single "primary," in which all candidates of all parties are listed. We have put "primary" in quotes because this can be considered as a more elaborate general election system rather than a primary in the strict sense of the term. If no candidate secures 50 percent of the total vote, there is a runoff election between the two leading candidates, who might even be candidates from the same party. Washington and Alaska experimented with the "blanket primary," a single ballot with candidates from all parties. Voters could vote for only one party's candidates in a race for any single office, but could choose to vote in a different party's primary contest for another office. The top vote receiver from each party became that party's nominee for that race in the general election. In 2000, the U. S. Supreme Court ruled this to be unconstitutional, because it violated a political party's right to freedom of association. Washington subsequently reformed its system with a "top-two primary" (similar to Louisiana's), in which the top two vote getters in the primary election face a run off in the general election, even if they are of the same party. California soon followed and established a "top-two primary" in 2010. Attempts to institute this are also being undertaken currently in Maine, Florida, and Arizona. U. S. Representative John Delaney (D-Md.) has introduced his Open Our Democracy Act, which would establish the top-two primary for all congressional and senatorial elections nationwide. These and other terms for alternative systems are defined below and discussed later in this study guide.

Several groups, such as Fair Vote, have emerged advocating for primary reform. These groups are critical of the "plurality system" of voting, and they generally advocate for "open" nonpartisan primary systems. They seek to better enfranchise the increasing number of voters who do not identify with either major party, and they also appear to be reacting to the increasing hyper-partisanship of the current political atmosphere. Alternatively, many experts, including some political scientists, are concerned that reforms that weaken political parties may have the unintended consequences of increasing the influence of special interests or highly polarizing outside groups, thus facilitating the trend toward candidate-centered political campaigns.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS (from the Study Guide)

There is a lack of uniformity in the use of many of these terms from one information source to another. This study will use all of these terms consistently as follows:

Approval voting: a nonpartisan general election system in which each voter may vote for (or "approve") as many of the candidates as the voter deems acceptable, and in which the winner is the candidate receiving the most votes.

"Blanket primary": a primary system in which the ballot contained all offices and all candidates with party labels. For each race all voters could choose one candidate regardless of partisan identity. Both major parties brought suit arguing that it violated their right of association and it was ruled unconstitutional in 2000.

Closed: a general term describing any partisan primary election system where only those registered members of a political party are permitted to vote in that party's primary election.

Closed partisan primary election: a primary system in which only registered members of the party conducting the primary are permitted to vote, with no independent or crossover voting permitted.

PRIMARY ELECTION STUDY (*continued*)

Challenge: the act, by an election official at a polling place, of confronting a primary voter who has requested the partisan ballot of a party of which he or she is not a member. The voter may have to sign a statement of loyalty to the new party. There may be a penalty for falsification.

Charter municipality or county: a village, city, or county that has, by voter referendum, adopted a home rule charter, granting it limited powers of self-government. Such political subdivisions may, to a large extent, shape their own election systems.

Crossover voter: a member of one political party who requests the primary ballot of another political party. This study guide uses the same term to refer to an unaffiliated primary voter who requests the ballot of a political party.

Independent voter: (See “Unaffiliated voter.”) “A voter who identifies himself or herself as independent” is not an official term in Ohio but is often used to describe voters with little or no party loyalty. In Ohio, approximately one-third of voters are self-described “Independents,” but in 2015, over 70 percent were unaffiliated.

Instant runoff voting (IRV): (See “Ranked choice voting.”)

“Jungle primary”: another name for an open nonpartisan primary. Not used in this study guide.

Municipal corporation: a term that refers to all cities and villages in Ohio.

Nonpartisan primary election: a primary system in which all candidates appear on the same primary ballot, but only the top two vote-getters, regardless of party affiliation, advance to the general election.

Ohio Revised Code (ORC): the codified body of general law, or statutes, of the State of Ohio.

Open: a general term describing any primary system, partisan or nonpartisan, in which all registered voters are permitted to vote, regardless of party affiliation.

Open partisan primary election: a primary system in which any registered voter may choose to vote any party’s ballot without having to be a member of that particular party. In such a system, there would be no loyalty requirements or challenges to crossover voting.

Plurality: the number of votes cast for a candidate who receives more than any other but does not receive an absolute majority.

“Plurality system”: any voting system that could theoretically result in a general election winner with less than 50 percent of the vote. The term is not used in this study guide.

Ranked choice voting (RCV): a nonpartisan general election system in which each voter, regardless of party affiliation, ranks those candidates he or she likes in order of preference. Returns are computed and recalculated until a winner emerges with the most first-choice votes. In this way, a run-off is avoided.

Runoff election: a special election, held soon after a general election in the event of a tie or to avoid the possibility of a winner without a majority of the vote.

Semi-closed partisan primary election: a primary system in which the voter may request any party ballot at the time of the election, and the voter may be challenged if he or she changes party affiliation. Crossover voters thereby become members of their “new” party and may vote in its primary.

Statutory: a general term that, when used to describe an Ohio township, village, city or county, indicates it is governed by Ohio general law (the ORC), rather than by a citizen-adopted charter. Such a local or county government must employ Ohio’s default primary election system.

Strategic voting: an approach to voting in which one votes, not for one’s preferred candidate but rather for another candidate, for the purpose of influencing the primary choice of the opposition. This is sometimes correctly or incorrectly referred to as “sabotage.”

“Top-two” primary election: a nonpartisan primary system in which the top two vote-getters in a field of three or more candidates advance to compete against each other in the general election, even if they may be of

PRIMARY ELECTION STUDY (*continued*)

the same political party.

Unaffiliated voter: a registered voter who either chooses “issues only” ballots in primary elections or who does not vote in primaries at all. This official designation does not apply to those who self-identify as “independent” but are nevertheless listed as party members for the purpose of primary voting.

Unincorporated political subdivision: a term that refers to townships in Ohio.

“Winner-take-all system”: any voting system that results in single rather than proportional winners, regardless of the margin of victory. This could result in a unitary block of convention delegates, a unitary block of presidential electors, a single-district legislator, or a single office-holder. Its opposite would be a proportional system that allocates winners proportionally to their margin of victory. This study does not deal with proportional representation.