



COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES

REGISTRAR-RECORDER/COUNTY CLERK

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CONNY B. McCORMACK
REGISTRAR-RECORDER/COUNTY CLERK

March 1, 2004

TIME SENSITIVE

TO: EACH SUPERVISOR

FROM: Conny B. McCormack, Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk

FINAL STATUS REPORT: MARCH 2, 2004 PRIMARY ELECTION

Primary Rules

Attached is an op-ed piece from today's Daily News that I wrote in another attempt to explain the complex voting rules for tomorrow's election.

Election Day Visitors

We are pleased that Ray Martinez, Presidential appointee to the new Federal Election Assistance Commission is joining us to observe voting activities around the County. Supervisor Knabe will be introducing Mr. Martinez during the presentation period at Wednesday's Board meeting.

Each of you is invited to join us in Norwalk to observe ballot counting tomorrow evening. We begin releasing tally numbers with preliminary absentee totals at 8:00 p.m. and precinct ballots typically begin arriving at our Norwalk headquarters at about 10 p.m. Election results are available online at www.lavote.net.

Election Day Telephone Calls

Please call the Executive Office at (562) 462-2617 on Election Day to report any critical voting issues that come in to your staff during the day.

Pollworker Recruitment

Many resources were tapped to fill final vacancies and cancellations, including area colleges, City Clerks, Board office referrals and lists of furloughed employees. Trained troubleshooting staff will be deployed tomorrow morning in the field, with a ratio of about 10 poll locations per troubleshooter. Following the successful model we used in October 2003, we have "pre-deployed" our troubleshooters to specific areas and they will rove all day to assist pollworkers and voters.

Absentee Ballot Mailings

We have issued 436,065 absentee ballots. As of yesterday, 238,514 had been voted and returned, for a return rate so far of 55%. Many voters typically return their voted absentee ballots to a polling place and those ballots are counted during the vote canvass period in the days and weeks after election day.

Touchscreen Early Voting

Early Voting closed at 15 sites on Friday, February 27, serving 15,233 voters. Touchscreen voting will continue to be available (at our office in Norwalk only) through election day.

Please call me if you have any questions regarding this report or any other election preparation activity.

Attachments

State primary rules strike out on simplification

By Conny McCormack

VOTING rules for California's primary election on Tuesday may leave many voters shaking their heads. To see just how well you understand your political party choices, I challenge you to take the following election day quiz:

1. All registered voters, regardless of political party affiliation, are allowed to vote for candidates of other political parties in the primary election.

True or False?

2. Voters registered as nonpartisan (independent) may choose to vote on the primary ballot for either the Democratic, Republican or American Independent parties but not for the Green, Libertarian, Natural Law or Peace and Freedom parties.

3. If a nonpartisan voter chooses to vote on a Democratic ballot, he/she is entitled to vote on the Democratic contests for president and all other Democratic contests with the exception of County Central Committee. However, if the same nonpartisan voter chooses to vote on a Republican

ballot, he/she is prohibited from voting on the presidential contest as well as the County Central Committee but may vote on other Republican contests (such as Congress, State Senate, Assembly, etc.). *True or False?*

Answers:

1. **False.** It used to be true, and was the case in the last presidential primary election in March 2000. But not anymore.

2. **True.**

3. **True.**

These confounding primary election rules more closely resemble a "Who's on First?" comedy routine than the rational decisions made by the state Legislature. Following is a quick review of how and why this convoluted primary election format evolved:

Prior to and including 1996, California's primaries were closed elections. Only voters registered with a political party were eligible to choose that party's nominees; nonpartisan voters were limited to voting on ballot propositions and nonpartisan offices.

In 1998 and 2000 California's pri-

mary was changed by initiative to a wide open or blanket format in which all registered voters could pick and choose from among any of the political parties' candidates just as they do in November general elections.

While voters liked the wide open primary, political parties did not. The parties sued. The lawsuit went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, which in July 2000 sided with the political parties, declaring California's blanket primary format unconstitutional.

However, the number of political party registrants has been steadily declining for decades while nonaffiliated or nonpartisan registrants have swelled to more than 15 percent of the state's voters. The political parties, wanting to tap into this huge reservoir of voters, persuaded the California Legislature to enact a modified closed primary election format shortly after the Supreme Court decision. County registrars of voters jokingly refer to it as the "slightly ajar" primary format because it is neither open nor closed.

In retrospect, what seemed like a simple solution — allowing the politi-

cal parties to decide if they want nonpartisan registrants to participate in their primary elections — has turned into a complicated fiasco.

Some of the state's seven political parties said "OK" to nonpartisans participating, others said "no way," while the two major political parties chose a "maybe," splitting on whether or not to allow nonpartisans to vote on the presidential contest!

Unfortunately, the complex "slightly ajar" primary format may result in voter and poll worker confusion and a heightened potential for error when poll workers try to determine which of the political party ballots to hand to each voter on Tuesday.

Perhaps it is time for the Legislature to take another look at the primary election rules. The process needs to be simplified for the sake of the voters and the poll workers who volunteer their service.

Conny McCormack is the Los Angeles County registrar-recorder/county clerk, a position she has held for the past eight years.

OUR LINEUP INCLUDES:

MONDAY: RICH LOWRY

TUESDAY: THOMAS FRIEDMAN

WEDNESDAY: RICHARD COHEN

THURSDAY: THOMAS SOWELL

FRIDAY: MAI

MILESTONE STATUS REPORT OF KEY EVENTS

Presidential Primary Election March 2, 2004

| | WEEK ENDING | | | | | | | |
|---|-------------|-----------|------|-----|------|-----------|-----------|----------|
| | 1/16 | 1/23 | 1/30 | 2/6 | 2/13 | 2/20 | 2/27 | 3/5 |
| 1. FINALIZE BALLOT PAGE DESIGN. | ▲ 1/11 | | | | | | | |
| 2. RECRUIT AND APPOINT PRECINCT OFFICERS. | | | | | | | | △ 3/1 |
| 3. UPDATE REGISTRATION RECORDS. | | | | | | ▲ 2/17 | | |
| 4. TESTING OF ELECTION NIGHT DATA PROCESSING HARDWARE AND PROGRAMS. | | | | | | | | △ 3/2 |
| 5. RECEIVE SAMPLE BALLOTS AND BALLOT PAGES FROM PRINTERS. | | ▲ 1/21 | | | | | | |
| 6. MAIL SAMPLE BALLOTS. | | | | | | | ▲ 2/23 | |
| 7. PRECINCT SUPPLIES AND VOTE RECORDERS ASSEMBLED. | | | | | | ▲ 2/20 | | |
| 8. BOOTH AND SUPPLIES PICKED-UP BY PRECINCT INSPECTORS. | | | | | | | ▲ 2/22 | |

- △ SCHEDULE COMPLETION DATE
- △ RESCHEDULE COMPLETION DATE
- ▲ COMPLETION DATE

**MARCH 2, 2004 PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY ELECTION
STATUS OF EVENTS PERFORMED**

| | <u>EVENT</u> | <u>SCHEDULED COMPLETION</u> | <u>ACTUAL COMPLETION</u> |
|----|---|---------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 2. | <u>Recruit and Appoint Precinct Officers</u> | 3/01/04 | |
| | This election will involve 4,571 precincts requiring the recruitment of approximately 22,000 pollworkers. Recruitment of precinct officers is proceeding on schedule. | | |
| 3. | <u>Update Registration Records</u> | 2/17/04 | 2/17/04 |
| | The February 17, 2004 update of the registration records total 3,682,950 registered voters. This event is complete. | | |
| 4. | <u>Testing of Election Night Data Processing Hard/Ware and Programs</u> | 3/02/04 | |
| | Testing of election night tally programs is in process. This event is proceeding on schedule. | | |
| 6. | <u>Mail Sample Ballots</u> | 2/23/04 | 2/23/04 |
| | The initial and supplemental sample ballot mailing to over 3.6 million registered voters began on January 22, 2004. This event is complete. | | |
| 7. | <u>Precinct Supplies and Vote Recorders Assembled</u> | 2/20/04 | 2/20/04 |
| | Vote Recorder Packaging began on February 14. Supply box processing began on February 17. These events were completed on February 20. | | |
| 8. | <u>Booth and Supplies Picked-Up By Precinct Inspectors</u> | 2/22/04 | 2/22/04 |
| | Booths and supplies were distributed to Precinct Inspectors on February 21 and 22. This event is complete. | | |