

Let's OPEN PRIMARIES in PENNSYLVANIA to MORE Voters

Pennsylvania has a **CLOSED** primary system, where only registered Republicans and Democrats may vote for candidates of their party in a primary. The Pennsylvania League of Women Voters supports opening Pennsylvania primaries to voters who are not registered with either party. These "unaffiliated" or "independent" voters are a significant and growing segment of the electorate (1.3 million out of 8.5 million PA voters).

Reasons Why Voting in a Primary is So Important

- 1) Voting in the primary determines what candidates will appear on general election ballot. In a CLOSED Primary system candidates are competing for the votes of the "party faithful"--*not of the wider electorate*--and do not need to engage with voters on all important issues.
- 2) The winner of a closed primary goes to Harrisburg or Washington with no compulsion to work on issues or solutions to problems important to the wider electorate.
- 3) Due to gerrymandering or demographics, there may be no other-party challenger in the general election.



UNCONTESTED PA House and Senate Seats in 2020:

SENATE: 25 up for election;
Virtually uncontested- 10 (40%);
Uncontested- 6 (24%)

HOUSE: 203 up for election;
Virtually uncontested- 51 (25%);
Uncontested- 68 (34%)



WHO PAYS? Taxpayers pay for primary elections. In 2020, the primary cost \$20 million taxpayer dollars. While the major parties control primaries, *taxpaying unaffiliated voters are excluded!*



Benefits of Opening Primaries to Unaffiliated Voters

- 1) Permitting unaffiliated voters to vote in the primary will increase turnout. One in seven voters is registered as "independent". Currently only 15-16% of registered Democrats and Republicans vote in the closed primary.
- 2) Candidate messaging and outreach begins in the primary. An open primary would result in candidates' messaging aimed at the wider electorate, rather than only the "base". The November election would present a real choice between two good candidates.
- 3) Broadly appealing candidates would reset politics to work for bipartisan solutions, not merely a partisan agenda.

Legislation in General Assembly

- 1) In the 2019-20 session, SB 300 was passed with wide bipartisan support. However, it was never taken up in the House.
- 2) In the 2021-22 session, Chris Quinn has introduced HB 1369 where "unenrolled electors" could cast primary ballots. Dan Laughlin has introduced SB 690 which is similar to SB 300 and would allow "unaffiliated" voters to request a Republican or Democratic primary ballot at the polls. *The League of Women Voters of PA has not endorsed any specific legislation to date.*



FULLY CLOSED Primaries:
9 States
30 States Combine Voter Registration with Political Party Registration
20 States have Nonpartisan Voter Registration



Other Concerns:

- 1) Why would R's or D's support unaffiliated voters to vote in primaries? *The major political parties recognize that they are losing widespread appeal, especially among younger voters.*
- 2) Won't D's and R's sabotage primaries with "strategic voting"? *There is no evidence that this kind of partisan vote rigging--voting against a particular candidate--occurs in other open primary states.*
- 3) Party bosses won't like this. *The League's role is as a nonpartisan organization committed to voting rights for all.*

SOURCES: Ballotpedia ([Senate 2020](#)) and Ballotpedia ([House 2020](#)); [Study of Independent Voters 2020](#); FAQ's for LWV PA 4.15.21