



STATE OF MICHIGAN
BUREAU OF ELECTIONS
LANSING

January 2016

Questions and Answers: Michigan's Presidential Primary

Do I have to be a registered Republican or Democrat to participate in Michigan's Presidential Primary?

No. Michigan's Presidential Primary has been designated a closed primary. There is no political party registration requirement in Michigan Election Law. Any Michigan registered voter can participate in the primary. By law, you must make your ballot selection in writing by completing the *Application to Vote/Ballot Selection Form* on Election Day; or on the *Absent Voter Ballot Application* form if voting absentee the.

Why do I have to select a party ballot?

Michigan Election Law (MCL 168.615c) guides the conduct of the Presidential Primary. The law requires that voters indicate **in writing** which political party ballot he or she wishes to vote. This requirement only applies to Presidential Primary elections, and voters will **not** be required to select a political party ballot type at other types of elections.

Didn't the legislature just eliminate straight-ticket voting?

Yes, the legislature did eliminate straight-ticket voting. But straight-ticket voting was only an option in November General elections. A closed Presidential Primary is a very different process. You are required by law to select a Republican or Democratic party ballot to participate in the Presidential Primary.

What is the difference between an Open Primary and a Closed Primary?

Voters in an open primary are given a ballot with a column listing each qualified party's candidates. Voters then decide which party primary they wish to participate in by voting only in the column of their party choice while in the privacy of the voting station. Voting for candidates in more than a single party's column will void the entire partisan ballot.

Voters in closed primaries must state the party primary they wish to participate in before being issued a ballot. The ballot given to voters only has candidates of the party that corresponds to the voter's choice.

Will Michigan's closed Presidential Primary procedures affect the August State Primary in any way?

No. The August primary is an open primary. Voters will **not** be asked to select a party before voting in the August primary. Voters will be issued ballots containing all political parties and their candidates, and will select one of the parties in the privacy of the voting station.

When I select a party ballot for the Presidential Primary, does that mean I have to vote in the same party primary in August?

No. The written selection made by a voter at the Presidential Primary has no bearing on how a person votes in the State Primary election.

Will my ballot selection be made public?

Yes. By law a public list must be made available that includes the Presidential Primary ballot type chosen by each voter in the Presidential Primary. This list must be made available within 71 days after the Presidential Primary election. County, city and township clerks must retain the forms indicating each voter's Presidential Primary ballot selection for 22 months. This ballot selection information is subject to disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act. The public list of voters' Presidential Primary ballot selections and the documents containing this information held by local clerks must be destroyed after the 22-month retention period expires.

To be clear, only the political party ballot selection will be made public; **the candidate you vote for will not be made public**. Closed primaries also have secret ballots so that the candidate you vote for is never disclosed.

Who is on the ballot?

Michigan election law includes detailed requirements related to which candidates are eligible and how names would be placed on Michigan's Presidential Primary ballot. By law, both Republican and Democratic Party candidates are listed, but on separate ballots.

The law required the Secretary of State to issue a list of individuals "generally advocated by the national news media to be potential presidential candidates". In addition, Michigan's Republican and Democratic parties had the ability to add candidates and others not on those lists had the opportunity to file petitions to be placed on the ballot.

Candidates had until December 11, 2015 to formally withdraw their names from Michigan's ballot. Although some of the candidates have since suspended their campaigns nationally, state law required that the candidate listing be finalized in December 2015.

See the Michigan Voter Information Center (www.Michigan.gov/vote) for a sample ballot, which lists all candidates on the ballot.

Voters will also have the option of voting "uncommitted" on either the Republican or Democratic ballot.

What does an “uncommitted” vote mean?

Each party ballot has a vote position for “uncommitted.” When a voter selects “uncommitted”, this indicates the voter is exercising a vote for that political party, but is not committed to any of the candidates listed on the ballot. If enough voters cast “uncommitted” votes, the party may send delegates to the national nominating convention who are not committed to a specific candidate.

Will there be other things on the Presidential Primary ballot?

A number of local jurisdictions are holding special elections in conjunction with the Presidential Primary. Voters who do not wish to cast a vote in the Presidential Primary but want to vote in the local special election have the option of selecting a ballot containing only the local contests. A list of communities holding elections in conjunction with the Presidential Primary is available on our website at www.Michigan.gov/elections.

Where can I find more information?

For more information on your voter registration status, polling place, issues that will appear on your ballot, the absentee voting process and more, please visit the Michigan Voter Information Center at www.Michigan.gov/vote. For a detailed history of Presidential Primaries in Michigan, please visit www.Michigan.gov/elections. (See Presidential Primary Information)