

Earlier this month Missouri voters went to the polls to select candidates to represent their party in the upcoming November general election. Unlike the November election, August primary election voters are required to pick a ballot of the party of their choice. Because only one ballot can be selected, a voter can't "split" their ballot and vote for some Democrat candidates and some candidates on the Republican side but must commit to voting for the slate of candidates from only one of the major political parties. This system has been a source of aggravation for some who would like to be able to vote freely for the best woman or man for the job instead of being locked into voting for candidates from only one party. In this column, I discuss some alternative primary election systems used by our sister states.

Open Voting: Missouri's current primary election system, where voters must choose the ballot of one party before voting, is called a "partially open system." Some states use a different system called a "completely open system." In these states, a voter may be given both a Republican and a Democrat ballot. In the secrecy of the voting booth, the voter then picks one of the ballots to cast, but only one can be submitted so the voter cannot pick candidates from both ballots. This system avoids forcing the voter to tell the election judge which ballot he or she wants.

Closed Voting: Unlike Missouri, some states require that a voter declare party affiliation and pre-register with a party before casting a ballot. Some states allow the voter to change his or her party the day of the election while others require that the change be made days prior to voting. Like Missouri, under the closed voting system a voter can only vote for candidates from one political party. However, this system discourages Democrats from influencing the Republican primary and Republicans from influencing the Democrat primary.

Blanket Voting: In a "blanket voting" system, a citizen may vote for any candidate in any race regardless of their political party. For example, in the primary earlier this month, a voter could have voted for a Democrat in the governor's race while at the same time selecting a Republican candidate in the lieutenant governor's race. Blanket voting offers maximum flexibility to voters. However, a recent decision by the U.S. Supreme Court has put a roadblock in front of states wanting to use this type of primary election. In a California case, the political parties sued claiming that their right to determine which candidate would represent them at the November election was unconstitutionally violated by blanket voting since a citizen could select a party candidate while claiming no affiliation with that party. Although not specifically written in the Constitution itself, the federal courts have stated that the First Amendment carries with it an implied right of free association. In the California case, the Supreme Court declared that because of this right, political parties may determine who can and who cannot vote in their elections and struck down the state's blanket voting system.

Louisiana "Cajun" Voting: As an alternative to blanket voting, some have looked to "Louisiana" or "Cajun" voting. In this system the two candidates with the most votes from the primary election face off in the November election. One concern is that this does

not guarantee that these two candidates will be members of different political parties. A state might find itself with two Republican candidates running for governor without a Democrat challenger.

With all the hassle surrounding primary elections, some have wondered aloud whether we should have heeded George Washington's advice and stayed away from political parties entirely. Of course, that advice was rejected by the American people long ago. Policy-makers are left to deal with current political realities as we find them and must select the best alternative for primary voting. I would be interested in your thoughts on this issue. If you have an opinion on this subject please drop me an e-mail or contact my office at the address listed below.

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