FEATURE POLICY PRIORITY

Oklahoma should move to a Top Two Open Primary System for all primaries except presidential primaries.

- A Top Two open primary election is a primary in which all candidates are listed on one ballot, and only the top two vote-getters in the primary election – regardless of party preference - move on to the general election. It is most often noted that the Top Two system does not change the party composition of your elected bodies but allows all voters to vote and in turn produces elected officials that work harder for their constituents.

- From a practical standpoint, any proposal that reduces inefficiencies, cost, runoffs, and voter fatigue deserves attention. The current electoral system is cumbersome and inefficient, in that there are so many elections between party primaries, runoffs, generals, special elections, and local elections. Adopting the Top Two system will shift more of a burden off voters and will increase confidence in the election system.

- Even if a voter is affiliated with one of the three recognized parties in our state, their options are limited in the current Oklahoma – "closed-primary" – system. If Republicans, Democrats or Libertarians want to vote for a candidate they like from a different party, they cannot. That means, Oklahomans are unable to vote for whom they consider the best candidate. Elections are paid for by the taxpayers and not the parties. The closed-primary system is undemocratic.

- There are extensive benefits to the Top Two system when used for all primaries except presidential primaries. Reducing the number of times a voter must go to the polls should lead toward enhanced voter turnout, engagement, and voter buy-in, which can be accomplished through consolidating elections and implementing a Top Two primary system in Oklahoma. The need for primaries that let all voters vote, regardless of political affiliation, will only increase. Without an open primary system, we risk silencing the voices of countless voters in Oklahoma eager to do their civic duty. All voters should be able to vote.

TOP TWO
Myths and Facts

Myth #1:

The primary election is not important. Women, minorities, young people tend not to vote in them – it is typically older voters who do. Opening the primaries will not do anything positive and might open the door to mischief.

Fact:

Closed primaries are the biggest form of voter suppression in the country. In 75% of elections, the outcome is determined in the first round of voting—the primary. In the majority of races, once a candidate wins the primary, which under a closed primary system is limited to members of their own party, they do not face a real challenge in the November election. 75% of elected officials in this country are winning office without having to communicate with voters outside their own party.

Voters are disinterested in partisan primaries. When you go to a nonpartisan "Top Two" primary system, you get rid of partisan primaries. You end the "inside baseball" aspect of elections that turn so many voters off. You have a public primary open to all and a November election between the two finalists.

Myth #2:

Third parties are locked out of a nonpartisan "Top Two" primary system.

Fact:

Unlike the traditional partisan system, a nonpartisan "Top Two" primary system allows third parties to participate in the first round and creates a level playing field for all voters and all candidates. Candidates, regardless of party affiliation, are on the same ballot in the first round. You could have a primary ballot with multiple Democrats, Republicans, Independents, Libertarians, etc. in any given race. Independent and third party candidates and voters are no longer barred from the crucial first round.   Moreover, because candidates must now compete for all voters (instead of just their party base) in order to win, this gives groups of like-minded voters a lot of leverage to win powerful policy concessions. It's this leverage that will catapult the third parties into political relevancy and growth.

Myth #3:

"Top Two" primaries minimize competition by allowing for same-party races and more centralized party control of candidate recruitment.

Fact:

The majority of election districts are dominated by one party or the other. Under a traditional partisan system, independents and minority party voters in these districts have no say in who represents them because they are barred from participating in the only election that matters, the primary of the dominant party. In a nonpartisan system, every voter is empowered, and November elections are competitive rather than pre-determined affairs.

Myth #4:

If we went to a "Top Two" primary system, elected officials are going to have to work harder to keep their seats "safe" and work extra hard to gain new seats in competitive districts.

Fact:

Absolutely correct. All politicians have to work much harder to stay in office under a nonpartisan system.

(OpenPrimaries.org)