

# Operation Wildfire: Good Things Happen When YOU Vote

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May 9, 2023

## Why the Primary Election is Important

“General Election voters might award the winner, but it’s the Primary voters who set up the match.”  
- The Odyssey Online

Many voters don’t seem to realize that the Primary Election is one of the most important phases of an election. That’s why Operation Wildfire is devoting this issue to the May 16 Pennsylvania Primary.

The right to vote is an important one to exercise. It’s a way of having a voice in governmental actions that will affect your life in many ways. The act of voting is your opportunity to choose the person who most resembles your own belief system. Regardless of the outcome, your vote sends a message, letting candidates and political parties know what is important to you.

- Primaries are the main way voters get to know all of the candidates.
- The Primary Election provides a stage for the free and open exchange of all ideas and opinions.
- Primaries play a key role in shaping the final platforms of the major candidates in the November General Election.
- The Primary Election provides an important avenue in which voters can take an active part in choosing our own leaders.

While every state is different in how it holds its Primary Elections and determines voter eligibility, what they all have in common is that these races give the major political parties a good read on which candidate has the best shot at mobilizing voters and winning in November.

- **The Pennsylvania Courts.**
  - Your vote matters because the citizens of Pennsylvania deserve and need Judges who will interpret the law fairly and objectively based on facts and by following legal precedent and practice, never legislating from the bench. Your vote matters because our system works best when each branch of government sticks to its job. Be sure to select candidates who, when elected, will interpret the law, not legislate from the bench.
- **Change Begins in Our Community.**
  - The fight for social change often begins small in our communities, shaping policy from the ground up. This year, we’ll vote for leaders who will influence parks and recreation, public transportation, safety (police and fire departments), school rules, regulations and curriculum (education), taxes and public works. Make your voice heard and help to ensure that the changes you want really do happen by selecting candidates for County Offices, Borough Council, Township Supervisor and School Board that can compete and win in November.
- **Elected leaders are chosen by those who vote.**
  - Voter turnout is historically low in Municipal Elections. In fact, these elections are usually called “off-year” elections because they happen between presidential elections and presidential mid-term elections. If you don’t vote, your voice with elected leaders is diminished. When you do, your vote keeps our elected officials accountable. Let’s turn out the Primary vote, and double (or even triple) that in November! If you don’t vote in the Primary, fewer voters determine the General Election candidates.
- **Many people fought and died for your right to vote.**
  - From the American Revolution up to and including 1971 when 18 year olds were granted the right to vote, people have fought, and some have died, to ensure your right to vote. There are still people throughout the world who are unable to fully exercise this freedom, like the Muslim

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minority in India or the limited choices available to voters in Cuba, Venezuela, Russia and China.

- The right to vote is fundamental to our Constitutional Republic. In fact, five Amendments to the United States Constitution protect voting rights:
  1. The Fourteenth Amendment limits restrictions on voting rights that place a “severe burden” on voters. Often considered one of the most consequential amendments, it addresses citizenship rights and equal protection under the law.
  2. The Fifteenth Amendment prohibits any state or municipal authority from denying the right to vote on the basis of race, color or previous status as a slave.
  3. The Nineteenth Amendment granted citizens the right to vote regardless of gender.
  4. The Twenty-Fourth Amendment prohibits the use of poll taxes or any other tax to deny citizens the right to vote.
  5. The Twenty-Sixth Amendment set the legal voting age at eighteen.

**If you're unable to go to the polls on Tuesday, May 16 or think you may not be able to get there due to work requirements, vote by Absentee or Mail-in Ballot.**

## **Ensure Your Mail-in Ballot Counts<sup>1</sup>**

- When you receive your ballot, it's important that you read the instructions and complete the front and back of each page.
- After filling it out, place the ballot in the inner secrecy envelope that came with it. The secrecy envelope will be labeled, “official election ballot.” Be sure not to make any marks on this inner envelope.
- Put the secrecy envelope in the pre-addressed return envelope. Ballots with missing secrecy envelopes may be tossed out.
- Sign and date the return envelope.

In some past elections, counties accepted ballots that had missing or incorrect dates on their outer envelopes. That's no longer the case. If your ballot is missing its date or its date is outside the valid range, it can be discarded.<sup>2</sup>

## **Returning Your Mail-in Ballot**

- Your ballot must be received by the County Election Board by 8:00 p.m. on Tuesday, May 16 (Primary Election Day).
- You can return your ballot in person, at a drop box or through the mail.
- If you mail your ballot, be sure to leave enough time for it to arrive at the Election Office by 8:00 p.m. on May 16. If it arrives late due to mail delays or any other issue, it will not be counted.
- Voters must return their own ballots unless otherwise authorized. Only voters with a disability may designate someone to deliver their ballot for them. Contact your County Election Board.

## **Vote in Person on Election Day**

The best way to ensure that your vote will count is to go to your polling place on Election Day.

Historically, the lines are likely to be shorter. Even though many registered voters tend to dismiss the importance of Primary Elections, this is your opportunity to vote for the candidate that seems to think as you do. So we encourage you to take the minutes needed to cast your vote.

## **Unusual Activity at Your Polling Place**

If you see something that you think may be wrong, politely say something to the Election Judge. A candidate for office may not stay in a polling place longer than it takes that candidate to vote. They may not

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<sup>1</sup> Pennsylvania Department of State, Voting & Elections

<sup>2</sup> US News and World Report, “Pennsylvania Court: Ballots in Undated Envelopes Won’t Count,” 11/1/2022

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distribute any trinkets or literature about their campaign while in the Voting Room. The Election Judge and/or staff will discard any trinkets or literature that was left in a voting booth.

In some states during prior elections, voters were told that they already voted. Some voters questioned the validity of that statement. If it happens to you, you want to talk politely with the Election Judge. Ask him/her to contact the Election Office in Bellefonte. Remember that some of us are getting older and may have returned an Absentee or Mail-in Ballot and simply forgot. But if you know you didn't, you may request that the Election Office permits the Election Judge to issue a Provisional Ballot to you. In most cases you will be permitted to complete the Provisional Ballot, but it is returned to the Election Judge. He/she will return it to Bellefonte and provide information to you so you can check on how it was adjudicated. Your Provisional Ballot may have been accepted; but for several reasons, it may have been rejected. Let's hope that there is no need for a Provisional Ballot. But if one is given to you, follow the instructions given to you. **Provisional Ballots are not processed by the ballot machine.**

If your precinct runs out of ballots as they occasionally have in the past, politely discuss that with the Election Judge. If you don't get satisfaction from the Judge, call one or more of the Centre County Election Board at (814) 355-6700. Tell them what you observed and ask what they plan to do.

Many Americans feel, for the sake of our country, an obligation to pay taxes or to volunteer for military service. Is the obligation to vote similar? Operation Wildfire believes it is.

In the coming weeks, Operation Wildfire will review the Primary Election winners.

Over the months leading to the November General Election, we'll review the candidates and direct you to websites where you can learn even more about the individuals whose names will appear on the General Election ballot in November.

Remember, the fight for change begins in our communities where policies are shaped from the ground up. Make your voice heard and vote for candidates who will make the changes you want to happen.

Be a Responsible Voter and Be On Time!

Pennsylvania Primary Election  
Tuesday, May 16

7:00 a.m. Polls Open  
8:00 p.m. Polls Close

Mail-in ballots must be received on or before 8:00 p.m. on Election Day.