

## [Washington's Top 2 Primary](#)

### Local News

Posted by: David Haviland

Posted on : August 2, 2012 at 4:14 am

OLYMPIA, Wash. - Secretary of State Sam Reed is urging a strong turnout for Washington's voter-created Top 2 Primary, which offers voters a chance to choose finalists for Governor, U.S. Congress, Legislature, and myriad state and local offices. Tuesday is the deadline for mail ballots to be postmarked or placed in county election dropbox. This is one of those watershed election years, and the action begins with the primary. There are lots of great races that should interest just about everyone - Secretary of State Sam Reed added "This is one of the most interesting election seasons in years. We encourage every registered voter, even the busiest people and those of us who are glued to the Olympics coverage, to take part. It's our duty and our privilege. In my book, casting an informed ballot really deserves a civics gold medal!" In some judicial races, and potentially the state's top education post as well, the primary will be decisive, with special rules allowing a candidate who gets 50 percent-plus-one to be elected outright or advance alone to the General Election ballot. The judicial elections are explained in this grid: <http://tinyurl.com/6nna7d4>. For partisan races and for local government offices, though, the Top 2 Primary is a winnowing process that allows voters to pick their favorite for each office, without regard to party preference, with the two highest vote-getters advancing to the Nov. 6 General Election.

Ever since the parties successfully challenged the state's time-honored "blanket" primary, which produced Democratic and Republican nominees for each office, since 2008 the state has used a Top 2 process in which no party is guaranteed a November election slot. Although voters usually pick finalists who prefer the two major parties, it's possible for the General Election to pit two people who list the same party preference. That has happened in legislative races in single-party districts in Seattle and Eastern Washington. Candidates also can run as independents or with a self-designated party preference. Here is a FAQ on the Top 2 Primary: <http://tinyurl.com/833mdd8>. In Washington, voters do not register by party and all registered voters are welcome to take part in the Top 2 Primary. The election has been underway for several weeks - longer for military and overseas voters - and counties sent out ballots to the general electorate by July 20. This is the first presidential-year primary that is being conducted by mail, with county voting centers available to persons with disabilities and other voters. Washington no longer has traditional poll-site voting. This is the earliest primary in modern times. At the request of Reed and the County Auditors, the primary was moved earlier in August to accommodate military and overseas voters, in keeping with new federal law that requires their ballots go out at least 45 days before the election. Tuesday is called Primary Day, but it really is the deadline to have mail ballots postmarked or deposited in a county dropbox. Ballots that have been received and processed will be tabulated after 8 p.m. Tuesday and most counties will post their results shortly thereafter. Most counties will have only one tally election night. Many ballots will still be in the mail or in the courthouse, but not yet processed. Counties have until Aug. 21, two weeks, to certify the results and the Secretary of State will have three days after that to certify. Overseas and military ballots for the General Election must go out by Sept. 22, less than a month after certification of the primary. General ballots will go out by Oct. 19, with a Nov. 6 postmark or drop-box return deadline. Results will be posted online at [www.vote.wa.gov](http://www.vote.wa.gov) and are accessible by smart-phone apps. The Secretary of

State's Office has an online Primary Voters' Guide <http://tinyurl.com/7qm5f3x> and teamed with TVW on a Video Voters' Guide. <http://tinyurl.com/6wuh3fn> Some counties also produced a local voters' guide. Secretary Reed, who is retiring after 12 years as the state's chief elections officer, is hoping that voter participation will be the best in more than 30 years, although the early return rate has been low in a number of locales. Reed is sticking with his primary forecast of 46 percent, somewhat higher than the average of 43 percent for presidential year primaries, and reflecting his view that voters are engaged in the campaign for president, governor and other offices and already paying attention to initiative battles that are shaping up. "There really is something for everyone on this ballot, and the decisions will shape the contests they we will settle in the General Election," Reed said. The primary will winnow the field to two candidates for each of the nine statewide executive offices, including four that have no incumbent running; the U.S. Senate; all 10 U.S. House districts, including a newly awarded 10th District; most legislative seats; and many local offices. Crucial court elections also are on the ballot, carrying their own rules (see above). Party precinct committee officers will be elected in the primary. Not on the primary ballot are two of the biggest draws: the White House and an assortment of ballot measures, including same-sex marriage, marijuana, charter schools, two constitutional amendments and Tim Eyman's supermajority-for-taxes redux and two first-ever tax advisory votes. Postscript: Despite losing a 2008 decision in the nation's highest court, the Democratic and Libertarian parties have continued their legal challenge of the way Washington is implementing Initiative 872, the voter-approved measure that created the new primary system in 2004. The parties have lost recently in federal district court and the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals, but are asking the U.S. Supreme Court to review. That decision could come in late September. \_\_\_\_

For more information, please visit [www.vote.wa.gov](http://www.vote.wa.gov).