

From the Office of Secretary of the State Susan Bysiewicz

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For Immediate Release

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2004 ELECTIONS BRING HISTORIC CHANGE
Direct Primaries open party ballots to all candidates

Secretary of the State Susan Bysiewicz released the 2004 state election calendar, which for the first time provides direct access for candidates to the Democratic and Republican party primary ballots.

"This historic change to our election process gives all interested candidates the ability to bring their candidacy and ideas directly before the voters of their chosen political party," said Bysiewicz, a long-time advocate of "direct primaries" who first introduced such a proposal as a legislator in 1994. "By literally opening up a party primary ballot, we are encouraging greater debate of the issues and more direct participation among voters. Greater competition among candidates will create a more vibrant democracy."

After considering various direct primary bills over the past decade, the 2003 General Assembly eliminated delegate thresholds at political conventions as the sole route to a party's primary ballot. Under the new law, candidates may bypass the traditional convention process and wage a direct primary of party nominees by gathering petition signatures of enrolled party voters.

Prior to passage of the new election law, only candidates for single-town district offices (such as mayor and some state legislative districts) could petition onto primary ballots. According to election statistics, primaries were much more prevalent in single-town districts. For example, from 1988-2000, primaries were held in almost 50% of single-town state senate districts, with primaries being waged in less than 10% of multi-town senate districts.

To accommodate the anticipated increase in the number of primaries, party conventions will convene in May as opposed to July with primary elections moving up to August instead of September. In 2004, primaries will be held on Tuesday, August 10.

Direct primary petitions will be released in late April for congressional candidates. Petitions for legislative and statewide office, including governor and U.S. senator, become available in May. Other significant changes include the elimination of delegate primaries to state and district conventions.

“Direct primaries give citizens a greater incentive to register with a party and become involved,” said Bysiewicz. “Under a direct primary system, individual voters have a greater voice in choosing their party nominees.”

Bysiewicz credited the Legislature’s Elections Committee Co-Chairs Sen. Don DeFronzo (D-New Britain) and Rep. Jim O’Rourke (D-Cromwell) as well as Ranking Members Sen. Andrew Roraback (R-Goshen) and Rep. Livvy Floren (R-Greenwich) along with Democratic & Republican State Party Chairs George Jepsen and Herb Shepardson for working together to develop a plan that garnered bipartisan support. “Without the cooperative efforts of the chairmen of Connecticut’s major political parties and the leaders of the legislature’s elections committee, we would not have direct primaries in Connecticut,” said Bysiewicz.

Nominating petitions for candidates interested in appearing on the November general election ballot representing a minor party, or as an independent, will be available from the Secretary of the State beginning January 2. The complete 2004 Election Calendar is available online at www.sots.state.us