



# Oregon Association of County Clerks

## OACC advocates thoughtful consideration before changing Primary Elections

The Oregon Association of County Clerks (OACC) supports improvements to election processes in Oregon. We understand the potential for improved voter participation and engagement when a Primary Election happens earlier in a Presidential Election year but other factors need consideration.

**Voter expectations.** OACC asserts that citizens expect elections to occur at regular intervals and on predictable schedules. If Oregon Primaries move to a date earlier in the year we believe:

- A) The date should be fixed permanently so elections officials and voters with challenging situations will know what to expect well in advance. "Snow Birds", for instance, need several months' notice so they can determine where they will be when ballots are mailed and then notify the elections office of their plans. Six months' notice may work for many travelling voters like Military, Overseas, UOCAVA, and Snow Bird voters.
- B) The date should not move in relation to other states' elections. Moving dates make planning a successful election very difficult and could cause voter confusion.
- C) Primary Elections should include Federal, State and local candidates. It causes considerable voter confusion when Federal Primaries are held in one month and local Primaries are held in another month.
- D) Biennial odd-year District Elections should remain in May.

## March election deadlines land around Holidays.

1. If Oregon Primary Elections move to March, the deadlines:
  - a. For major political parties to decide to "Open" their Primaries occurs the second week in December
  - b. To file a receipt of ballot title would land the week before Christmas
  - c. For candidates to file may land on New Year's Day and Voters' Pamphlet filing 2 days later
  - d. To file measure and explanatory statements would land the second week in January
2. If Oregon Special District Elections move to March, the deadlines:
  - a. Get positioned between Thanksgiving and Christmas and makes it very difficult for election officials to reach full participation by all concerned.
  - b. Affect Special District Boards who often only meet once every month or two and often avoid meeting during December because many people are busy.
  - c. Revert back to recreate the reasons why Special District Elections moved from March to May over 10 years ago.

These are just some of the deadlines and key process points that get pushed to some of the least convenient days for voters, potential candidates, and election officials.

**City and county elections.** If the move of Primary Elections is not tied to all other regular contests (like city council races and county commissioner races), then an unintended consequence may be the increased costs of conducting multiple elections each year. Currently if a city holds an election on a Primary or General election they don't have to reimburse the election costs. However, if the Primary



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moves to March and their charter requires a May election, they would have to start reimbursing counties for their election expenses or change their charter and/or code.

**Candidate recruitment.** For city, county, special district, and some state offices, candidate recruitment becomes quite challenging when the filing period lands primarily in December. Over time, this would become less problematic (as people become used to the new timelines) but OACC wants to caution those proposing a Primary Election date change to keep this in mind and include strategies for citizen engagement and education about the new timelines that come with the new election date.

**Potential for improved participation and engagement.** For all of the complications that a change to Primary Elections would bring, there is significant potential for improved voter participation and engagement – especially with regard to Presidential Elections. When voting in May for the Presidential candidates, Oregonians often end up with only a portion of the candidates to choose from than other states have. Voters tend to be more engaged when there are more options for them and they feel like their votes will make an impact.

**Position on moving Primaries:** The Oregon Association of County Clerks urges careful consideration of all challenges in addition to potential improvements when debating the merits of moving Oregon Primaries (and associated elections). Of significant concern is how a change impacts timelines, deadlines, and voters.