

...Labor turns thumb down to Top 2 primary measure

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tion Day whether to help pick the Democratic or the Republican nominees.

Measure 90 is more accurately a "top two" measure, repurposing the primary as the first round of a two-round election. Because the primary election would winnow the field of candidates down to two, Measure 90 changes the general election too. General election voters would find just two candidates on the ballot for each office. And in many districts, the two candidates might be members of the same party. Minor party candidates would no longer appear on the general election ballot, unless they were among the top two vote-getters in the primary.

Measure 90 supporters say the current system disenfranchises too much of the electorate, because nearly a third of voters, and nearly half of young voters, aren't registered as Democrats or Republicans, and thus have no say in who those parties' nominees are.

Opponents counter that Measure 90 would disenfranchise Democrats and Republicans, eliminating the system that determines who their candidate will be in the general election.

Proponents also say Measure 90 would give independent and minor party voters more reason to take part in

the primary, and therefore should increase voter turnout. But the Washington and California experiments haven't born that out: Turnout stayed the same or fell. Though the top-two system might not be to blame for that, it doesn't support predictions of increased voter turnout.

The Oregon Working Families Party has its own particular reasons for supporting Measure 90, which have to do with its strategy as a minor party that formed to counter corporate power in the Democratic Party. Unlike Oregon's Pacific Green, Libertarian, or Constitution parties, the Oregon Working Families Party seldom runs its own candidates. Instead, it seeks to use Oregon's "fusion-lite" system, in which minor parties may "cross-endorse" major party candidates. Oregon Working Families Party uses its endorsement to signal which candidate is the most pro-worker.

Party co-chair Barbara Dudley said Oregon's version of the top-two primary is vastly better than California's or Washington's, because Oregon ballots can list up to three party endorsements next to a candidate's name. Washingtonians don't check a box for a political party when they register to vote, and their ballot lists only what

party a candidate says he or she "prefers." California ballots list a candidate's party registration, but not whether that party has endorsed them.

Oregon Working Families Party endorsed Measure 90 after several rounds of discussion, but the party's co-chair, Local 555 Secretary-Treasurer Jeff Anderson, was strongly opposed to it.

And money is the number one reason, Anderson says. Measure 90 would make campaigning even more costly than it currently is, because candidates would have to appeal to the entire electorate, twice, in order to win.

Under the current system, major party candidates need only appeal to members of their party in the primary, and in many lop-sided "safe" districts, winners of the majority party primary are virtually assured of a win in November.

Anderson points to the 2014 primary campaign in heavily-Democratic Oregon House District 42 as an example. Unions mobilized hard and were able to propel Oregon Nurses Association staff rep Rob Nosse to victory in a crowded field of Democratic candidates. In a top-two system, they'd have to do it all over again, because Nosse would likely have had to face off against the number two vote-getter in a general election cam-

paigned lasting an additional six months.

"That's goofy madness, to pay twice," Anderson said.

Those time and money demands would make it much harder for ordinary working people to run for office, says Oregon AFSCME Political Director Joe Baessler: "They'd have to run all year, even in a safe district. That's fine for old rich retired dudes, but my members can't do that."

Baessler says a top-two system gives more power to primary voters. The problem with that, Baessler says, is that primary voters tend to be older, wealthier, more partisan, less diverse — and most importantly, fewer in number — than general election voters. By opening up choices in the primary, the top-two system reduces choices in the general election, when more voters are paying attention.

And at times, a top-two system can lead to topsy-turvy outcomes. For instance, it disadvantages whichever party has more candidates, though the parties have no control over who runs.

In June 2012, four Democrats and two Republicans ran for Congress in California's 31st Congressional district. The result: The Democratic vote was split four ways, and voters found they had two Republicans to choose from in November — in a majority-Democratic district. If the 2008 presidential race had been run under a top-two system, the closely-divided Republican field would have resulted in a November run-off between Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton, with no Republican candidate.

California AFL-CIO Communica-

tions Director Steve Smith says that state's top-two primary has opened the floodgates even more to corporate money.

"We're seeing the strategy by corporations in California has really been to double down their investment in so-called corporate Democrats, and the top two primary system allows them to do that in a very effective way," Smith said. "What before was a safe seat for a worker friendly candidate now has become a seat that could go either way. We don't see this as advantageous to democracy."

Are you ready to run for political office?

Are you considering filing for a political office in 2016 or 2020? If the answer is yes, now is the time to get the right training for a successful race. The Oregon Labor Candidate School is accepting applications for its 2014-15 fall programs in the Portland and Medford areas.

In Portland, classes start Friday, Oct. 10, with orientation. The first full day of class is the following day, Oct. 11. There are six classes.

In Medford, classes start Saturday, Sept. 20. The program offers four classes over two weekends, one in September and one in October.

For more information about class dates and requirements, and to apply online or to download an application, go on line at: www.oregonlaborcandidateschool.org.

Applications need to be turned in as soon as possible.

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