

The History of Political Parties, and How Primaries Work

A chance to choose the fall election candidates

By Art Urie, for the Beacon

We take political parties for granted most of the time. It is only when someone asks why two parties dominate political life in our country, or when the ballot clerk at a primary election asks us which ballot we want, that we even think about our relationship with a political party. There is nothing particularly sacred about political parties; they are not mentioned in the United States Constitution, nor are they a necessity for the functioning of a democratic republic.

As I understand the history, political parties developed as people realized that consistently working with people who agreed with them about some basic concerns could help achieve results. From the beginning, members of political parties or movements did not agree about everything; they worked together because they agreed about some basic concerns and directions.

For example, people who were eager for the development of rail service might join one party, while those who were concerned that railroad companies were exercising too much power over other areas of life joined another party.

It is popular to say that I vote for “the person, not the party.” My suspi-

cion is that we are kidding ourselves when we say that. What we are really saying is that we vote for the person we like, as long as she agrees that the railroads need encouragement; or we vote for the person we like, as long as he agrees that the railroad companies need to be controlled.

If you think I am railroading this explanation, I am – but it is such a nice (non-contemporary) analogy.

Early in the process, parties would meet to name the candidate(s) they would support together. Over time, those meetings came to be called conventions and developed the reputation of having lots of wheeling and dealing in smoke-filled rooms.

Gradually, the view was adopted that it made sense for more people to be involved in the decision of which candidates to support, and the primary was born; “primary” because it was the first election, the election that was held before the main election.

As I understand it, in some states the parties ran their own special elections. In most states, the parties in effect asked the state to run the elections for them.

The way primaries are run varies by state and has changed over the years and will probably continue to change.

In some states, the people able to vote

See Primaries on page 7

Andover Votes in State Primary Election on Tuesday, September 9

You can register to vote at the polls

By Joanna Sumner, Town Clerk

The State Primary Election will be held at the Andover Elementary/Middle School gym on Tuesday, September 9. The polls will be open from 8 AM to 7 PM.

As has been the practice now for a couple of years, you will need to state your name and address to both the ballot clerks at the front of the gym and those at the back. You will have to show a photo ID to the Ballot Clerks at the front.

If you have not brought a photo ID with you, you will need to have one of the election officials – a Supervisor of the Checklist, the Town Moderator, or the Town Clerk – vouch for you. You will then be given a ballot and allowed to enter the voting area.

If there is no official available who knows you, you will have to fill out a challenged-voter affidavit, and then you will be allowed to vote.

Absentee ballots are available at the Town Office. They are available until Monday, September 8, the day before Election Day, during our regular office hours. We will also be open from 3 to 5 PM on September 8 to accept completed absentee ballots deliv-

ered in person.

If you have not registered to vote, you can come to the Town Clerk’s office to fill out the paperwork up until Tuesday, September 2. The Supervisors of the Checklist will be meeting that evening from 7 to 7:30 PM, and you can register to vote at their meeting as well. After that date, you will have to register to vote at the polls on Election Day.

At a primary, if you are a registered Republican, you will be given a Republican ballot. A registered Democrat will be given a Democratic ballot. You cannot change your party affiliation just before the election.

If you are Undeclared, then you can choose which ballot you would like. Choosing a party’s ballot immediately makes you a registered member of that party. After your vote has been cast, you can go straight to the Supervisors of the Checklist on your way out of the polling place and change your party affiliation back to Undeclared if you like.

The Town Clerk’s office will not be open on Election Day, as we will both be working at the election. If you are a registered voter in the town of Andover and would like to be involved in the Election Day procedures, please call the office at 735-5332 extension 4, and let me know.



Towns, like those in Merrimack 25th House District, are dependent on state funding for Education and Bridge Repair. We also need the state to keep promised funding levels and when implementing new laws, regulations and policies, to fund the implementation & enforcement. Our state government needs to work with us.

Andover • Danbury • Salisbury • Warner • Webster

Paid Political Advertisement

Jim Danforth
for State Representative