

“No Fault” Absentee Voting and Other Changes for 2010 Elections

We'll be voting for candidates for the Democratic, Green, and Republican parties in the **February 2, 2010 Primary Election**. Among the offices that are up for election this year are one of Illinois' U.S. Senate seats, all the U.S. Representatives, the Governor and other state-wide offices, 4th District State Senator and all the State Representatives (although none of the seats representing Oak Park or River Forest are contested in the primary), some Circuit Court judges, and the Cook County President, Assessor, Clerk, Sheriff, Treasurer, Water Reclamation District Commissioners, and all the Cook County Board Commissioners. Here are some of the things you should know, followed by some of the key dates for the February primary.

No-fault Absentee Voting. In the past, a voter had to sign an affidavit that the voter would not be able to get to the polling place on election day in order to qualify for an absentee ballot. With a change in Illinois law, we now can choose to vote via absentee ballot without giving any reason. Given the early Feb. 2 primary date, you may not want to take a chance on the weather, but instead choose to apply for an absentee ballot. Applications may be obtained beginning Dec. 24 up through Jan. 28 by calling the Cook County Clerk at 312-603-0906 or going to www.voterinfonet.com, or stopping by the office at 69 W. Washington in downtown Chicago. Absentee ballots must be postmarked by February 1 in order to be counted, or you can vote absentee in person up to February 1 at the 69 W. Washington office.

The advantage to Absentee voting is that you can make your choices up to the day before the election and can do so in the comfort of your own home. In contrast, to utilize **Early Voting**, you must go to a specific site (such as the Oak Park Village Hall).

There are special rules and dates that apply for absentee voting by military or overseas voters and voters who live in nursing homes or who are in the hospital. College students are also eligible for the Student Absentee Voter Program, which allows them to receive absentee ballots automatically at their parents' homes or at their school addresses for all elections held during the next 2 years. Check the website or contact the County Clerk's office for more information.

Longer Grace Period Registration. While the deadline for normal voter registration is January 5, there is again Grace Period Registration at the 69 W. Washington office of the County Clerk until January 26. If you utilize the Grace Period Registration, you'll also have to immediately vote when you register.

Reduction in Precincts. The Cook County Clerk has reduced the number of precincts in suburban Cook County, which should save \$750,000 per year. In many cases precincts which shared the same polling place have been combined, so you may be voting at the same location. The Clerk's office should be sending out postcards prior to February 2 which will identify your precinct and polling place. But you can also check where you'll voting by typing in your address on the home page of the voterinfonet.com website. Closer to the election, you can also access a sample ballot to see everyone who will be on the ballot for the party you select.

Checking Whether You Are Registered. Voters can go to www.voterinfonet.com to verify they are registered.

Ballot Selection. For the primary, voters will need to select either a Democratic, Green, or Republican primary ballot if they want to vote for candidates. This does not mean that the voter

is registering as or joining any of those parties. If there are any referenda on the ballot, a voter could choose a non-partisan ballot, but that voter will only be voting for the referenda, and not any candidates.

Chicago residents. The information above remains the same, except that you'll need to utilize the Chicago Board of Elections website – <http://chicagoelections.com> -- , or phone number 312-269-7870, or the office which is also located at 69 W. Washington in downtown Chicago (but on a different floor from the Cook County Clerk's election office).

Key dates for the February 2 Primary (these all appear on a bookmark the OPRF League has prepared that is available at any League-sponsored events):

- Dec. 24 – Jan. 28: apply for Absentee Ballot
- Jan. 5: last day to register to vote, except for
- Jan. 6 – Jan. 26: Grace Period Registration at Cook County Clerk's office
- Jan. 11 – Jan. 28: Early Voting at selected sites
- Jan. 29 – Feb. 1: in-person absentee voting at Cook County Clerk's office

Whether you choose Grace Period Registration and Voting, Absentee Voting, Early Voting, or voting at your polling place on February 2, **BE INFORMED AND VOTE! IT DOES MATTER!**