

Independent Party of Oregon

Legislation for Smooth Transition to Major Party Operations

February 2015

The Independent Party of Oregon (IPO) now has 108,744 registered members--5 more than the threshold for major party status (5% of the total of all Oregon registered voters at the time of the November 2014 general election). ORS 248.006(1).

The Secretary of State may declare IPO to be a major party at any time but must make that determination "not later than the 275th day before the date of a primary election." That would be August 16, 2015.

Current statutes impose requirements on major party primaries that will be harmful to IPO in its formative years as a major party.

- 1. Restriction of candidates in major party primary to persons who have been members of the party for 180 days prior to the filing deadline (effectively 250 days before the primary election) (ORS 249.046).**

Under existing law, no one can run as a candidate in the IPO primary election in May 2016 who has not been a member of IPO for 250 days. The deadline to become an IPO member is thus September 10, 2015--which may be a mere 25 days after IPO is determined to be a major party by the Secretary of State.

As a fledgling major party, it will be difficult for IPO to recruit candidates for its primary election under this restriction. While an 8-month requirement is no problem for long-established major parties, which have stables of potential candidates, it will be a large barrier to participation by political novices who are not likely to plan to run more than 8 months in advance of the primary election.

PROPOSAL: Amend the statute to allow each major party to determine its own pre-primary party membership duration requirement.

2. Allowing anyone, including non-members, to win the major party primary by write-in of only a few votes.

Due in part to the above restriction, many partisan offices on the IPO primary ballot will likely offer no filed candidates. The ballot will show those contests but offer only the opportunity for write-in votes.

The same law requiring party membership for a candidate does not apply to write-in candidates. Thus, most of the IPO nominations for the 2016 election cycle may well be won by write-in candidates, most if not all of whom will have no connection with IPO. In fact, many of them will probably be the incumbent Democrats or Republicans for the offices at issue. Allowing the IPO major party nomination to be won by write-in Democrats or Republicans will not increase voter choice in the general election.

PROPOSAL: Amend the statute to allow each major party to determine for itself whether write-in candidates must be party members or whether a nomination is vacant unless a write-in candidate receives a significant number of votes.

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