

The Seattle Times Newspapers In Education presents

Electing the President: A Guide to the Election Process

Produced in partnership with the League of Women Voters



Thank you for joining our Wednesday series about the presidential election, produced in partnership with the League of Women Voters through November 5. Last spring's chapters are online at lwvwa.org and will help students of all ages to understand the people, the parties and the issues regarding our election process.

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State Elective Offices

We know that the presidential race, important as it is, is not the only item on the November 4 general election ballot. This week, as the election approaches, we take a look at some of the other offices for which candidates are contending. Voters may not have heard as much about these offices and candidates as they have heard about the presidency and about presidential candidates. Fortunately, there are good ways for a voter to do his or her "homework" and become informed. You can start by learning about the jobs, then look for information about the candidates who want to fill those jobs.

Who's up for Election?

Statewide elected officials: Eight Washington state elected officials — more than in most other states — share power with the governor. Candidates for governor and for all other statewide offices will be on the 2008 November ballot.

- Governor — runs the executive branch of state government. He or she hires and is the boss

of the directors of 40 state agencies, including agencies that run state prisons, issue licenses, provide health care and other social services and protect the environment. The governor must write the first draft of the state budget. He or she has the power to veto bills or parts of bills, including the state budget bill.

- Lieutenant Governor — presides over sessions of the state senate
- Secretary of State — supervises state and local elections, publishes the state voters' pamphlet and keeps the state archives
- Treasurer — manages the state's cash and debts
- Auditor — makes sure that everyone in state and local government follows the rules for how public tax dollars are spent
- Attorney General — in charge of the state's own staff of lawyers; has the responsibility of defending state laws if the laws are challenged in court
- Superintendent of Public Instruction — handles the state's responsibilities for public schools (with other responsibilities in the hands of local school districts)
- Commissioner of Public Lands — in charge of millions of acres of state-owned land, most of it forest land that can produce timber for the state to sell
- Insurance Commissioner — makes sure insurance companies treat their customers fairly and follow the rules

State Legislature: Members of the state legislature make the laws during a legislative session that begins in early January. Each of the state's 49

legislative districts has two representatives for a total of 98. All state representatives must run for office every two years (in even-numbered years), so all are up for re-election in 2008. Each district also has one senator. State senators are elected every four years in even-numbered years. Half of them are up for election in 2008.

Judicial races: In Washington, judges must run for re-election, although some of them may get their start on the bench by being appointed to fill a vacant seat. Judicial positions are nonpartisan. The idea is that judges should be selected based on their experience and other qualifications for judicial office — not on their political views. Voters choose judges of the Supreme Court, courts of appeals, superior courts and district courts for terms of varying lengths. Many judicial races get decided in the August state primary; a candidate who wins more than 50 percent of the primary vote is listed, unopposed, on the November ballot. Still, there are usually a handful of judicial positions on which voters must make a decision at the November general election. The Web site votingforjudges.org provides a rundown on all the judicial races.

Learn More:

- **Follow the Money!** It's often said that the best way to find out about the candidates is to see who supports them financially. Pick a candidate and see how much information you can find about the sources of his or her campaign money. Newspaper articles may provide clues. Online sources of information on campaign financing include fec.gov and opensecrets.org (federal offices) and pdc.wa.gov (state and local offices).

Your Representative in Congress

Members of Congress are federal officials, not state officials, even though they are elected from districts within the state. Their main job is to pass federal laws. Congressional committees also hold hearings to determine whether new laws need to be passed. Members of Congress spend time advancing the interests of their own state as well, while serving the needs of their constituents (meaning the people who live in their district). If a constituent has a problem that involves the federal government, the representative and his or her staff may work on getting the problem resolved.

Washington state is divided into nine congressional districts.

Voters in each district choose one congressperson to represent them in the U.S. Congress in Washington, D.C. Congressional elections take place every two years in even-numbered years, so all U.S. Representatives are up for election in 2008.