ELECTING THE PRESIDENT: A GUIDE TO THE ELECTION PROCESS

Thank you for joining our series about the election of our president and other leaders. Running twice a week through mid-October, this series will help students in the classroom — as well as citizens of all ages — understand the election process.

DAY 6: WHAT’S THIS ON MY BALLOT? — STATE ELECTIVE OFFICES

The presidential race is not the only item on the November 6 ballot. Washingtonians vote for officials in three branches of state government — executive, legislative and judicial. Let’s take a look at some of the other offices for which candidates are contending.

WHO’S UP FOR ELECTION?

Executive Branch Officials
Candidates for governor and all statewide offices will be on the November 2012 ballot. Eight Washington state elected officials — more than in most other states — share power with the governor.

- Governor — runs the executive branch of state government. He or she hires and supervises 40 state agency directors, including agencies that run state prisons, issue licenses, provide health care and other social services and protect the environment. The governor writes 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 state and local governments follow the rules for how public tax dollars are spent.
- Attorney General — oversees the state’s 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 — oversees 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. Establishes and oversees the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act reforms for Washington state.

State legislature
There are two houses of the legislature — the House of Representatives and the Senate. Members of the state legislature make the laws during a legislative session that begins in early January. 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 2012. 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 2012.

Judicial races
In Washington, judges must run for election, although some of them may get their start on the bench by being appointed to fill a seat vacated in mid-term. 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 party.

Voters choose judges of the Supreme Court, courts of appeals, superior courts, district courts and municipal courts for terms of varying lengths. The primary election is very important because many judicial races get decided in the August state primary. Supreme Court positions will be on the November general election ballot and there are usually a handful of other judicial positions on which voters must make a decision.

Now that you know about each office, you can learn more about the candidates who want to fill these jobs.

LEARN MORE
Research a state race. Though some of these races may not get as much attention, there are good ways for voters to do their “homework.” Go to votingforjudges.org to learn about judicial candidates; go to VOTE411.org and The Seattle Times to learn about all the candidates.

VotingforJudges.org

NEXT: BECOMING AN INFORMED CITIZEN

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