

SF Chronicle 5/17/02 Today's letters:

#### PRIMARY NIGHTMARES

Editor -- I'm surprised at your support for a September primary (Editorial, "Primary election reform," May 15). While a September primary might sound appealing, the reality is different. A September 2004 primary would occur 49 days before the general election. I can't imagine how one could conduct, canvass, certify, allow for recounts and legal contests and be prepared for a general election in this time frame.

I took The Chronicle's advice and called an election official in New York to see how they conduct September primaries. After describing them as "nightmares" and "disasters," he explained that New York does not provide sample ballots to voters.

California election officials are dedicated professionals. We will strive to do the best for the voters. However, we can't do the impossible. The editorial states that "democracy is worth" the \$40 million price tag. However, as one of my colleagues noted, "Democracy might be 'worth it,' but it won't be worth anything if it is rendered inoperative."

BRADLEY J. CLARK  
President  
California Association of Clerks  
and Election Officials  
Oakland

SF Chronicle

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> This editorial is hard to believe...

> Primary election reform      Wednesday, May 15, 2002

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> IT'S TIME for California to rethink its primary-election schedule. The  
> current early-March primary date is extremely difficult on candidates for  
> legislative or congressional seats. They need to begin campaigning in  
> earnest the previous year. They then encounter a long lull between the  
> March primary and the period when voters start paying attention to the November  
> general election. The current time line is a deterrent to candidates and a  
> disservice to voters. California had moved its primary from June to March  
> as a way to regain clout in a presidential nomination process that was  
> getting more and more compressed. One possible solution is SB1775,  
> sponsored by Sen. Ross Johnson, R-Irvine. It would create two primaries in  
> 2002. The presidential primary would be held in March and the legislative  
> and congressional primaries would be held in August. Originally, the  
> Johnson bill had called for a September primary for the statewide and local  
> races. An aide to Johnson said the change to August was made because  
> elections officials said they needed time to get out ballot pamphlets and  
> resolve any challenges from the primary election. We believe most voters  
> would prefer a September primary -- after Labor Day, the traditional end of  
> vacation season. And this change is all about increasing participation in  
> the political process. California bureaucrats might look to New York,  
> which has a September primary in nonpresidential years, for ideas on how to  
> accommodate the tight turnaround. Johnson's bill faces an important hearing  
> today in the Senate Elections and Reapportionment Committee. A split-primary  
> scheme will cost money -- up to an additional \$40 million statewide -- as  
> well as inconvenience to elections officials across the state. Democracy is  
> worth it.

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