

## OFFICERS 2010-2012

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# CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION OF CLERKS AND ELECTION OFFICIALS

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## COUNTY CENTRAL COMMITTEE & COUNTY COUNCIL ELECTIONS

### FACT SHEET

March 2011

### BACKGROUND:

County central committees and county councils are non-public offices comprised of members of political parties who are involved in party fund-raising and candidate-endorsement activities.

County elections officials have been required to conduct elections for these non-public offices in all direct primary elections for decades.

### WORKLOAD:

In direct primary elections, the number of county central committee/county council candidates who file for office constitutes as much as 91% of all candidates who file in a county's primary election. It is common for the number of central committee candidates to comprise 50% to 60% of all candidates in large counties. (See attached chart.)

This means up to 91% of a county election official's workload is devoted to central committee candidates, to answer questions, file nomination papers, check nomination paper signatures, handle ballot designation disputes, lay out candidate names on the ballot, provide oversized ballots to accommodate contests with six or more candidates and include six or more write-in spaces, tabulate larger ballots which slow the process, and provide certificates of election.

Unlike other candidates, county central committee/county council candidates do not pay filing fees. The cost of their elections is completely subsidized by county government.

### COST:

In the June 2008 primary election, county central committee/county council costs reported by 20 of the 58 counties totaled \$2.8 million statewide. Updated costs for the June 2010 primary election are being compiled.

Sacramento County, which represents about 4% of the registered voters in the state, calculates its central committee costs at \$300,000. Extrapolated statewide, this equates to \$7.5 million.

In June 2008, San Diego County, whose voters comprise 8% of the state's registered voters, estimated that central committees' share of primary election costs was \$400,000. Extrapolated statewide, this equates to \$5 million. While exact costs are difficult to calculate, it is clear that the cost is millions of dollars.

### PERCENT OF BALLOT CONSUMED:

Ballot "real estate" is a crucial issue for most counties' paper-based voting systems. A study conducted in San Diego County shows that central committee contests can consume up to 13% of the entire primary election ballot in some areas. This has caused nearly all counties to require longer ballots and, in many cases, an extra ballot card.

Ballot printing costs range from about \$.19 per ballot in Los Angeles, to \$.28 per ballot in San Diego, to \$.50 per ballot in Sacramento. In addition to the increased ballot printing costs, longer and/or extra ballots generate additional storage and handling costs.

With the introduction of the "Top Two" Primary, ballot space will be at an even greater premium.

**LACK OF VOTER PARTICIPATION:**

Most voters are unfamiliar with county central committee/county council candidates and do not vote in these contests. A study conducted in San Diego County of the June 2006 through June 2010 primary elections reveals that up to 76% of all voters in a primary election failed to cast any votes for central committee candidates listed on their ballots. This factual finding suggests that alternate methods of electing central committee candidates might be more effective.

**IMPACT OF CENTRAL COMMITTEE CONTESTS ON “TOP TWO” PRIMARY ELECTION BALLOTS:**

Until recently, the state had a “modified open” primary election system that restricted voters to the ballot of the party with which they chose to affiliate. Under the “modified open” primary, only those voters who were not affiliated with a qualified political party were able to select the ballot of any party which allowed them to participate. No party allowed unaffiliated voters to participate in their county central committee and county council elections. Counties printed a separate ballot for voters in each political party.

In June 2010, voters adopted the “Top Two” primary election system, which essentially eliminates separate partisan primary elections at the state level. Under this new system, all partisan contests will appear on a single ballot, and voters will be able to select candidates regardless of the voter’s or the candidate’s political party affiliation. County elections officials are studying the effects of the “Top Two” primary election system, and their findings show that some counties, such as Los Angeles County, will exceed the capacity of their ballots unless central committee and county council contests are removed and language on the ballot to describe the “Top Two” primary is shortened. Los Angeles County is faced with an inability to conduct the June 2012 primary election with its current voting system and considers it highly unlikely that it will have a new voting system in place by the June 2012 election.

Most counties estimate they will require at least one, and in many cases two, extra ballots unless central committee and county council contests are eliminated from the ballot and some ballot language changes are made to the “Top Two” Primary statutes.

In the 2012 primary election, Republican voters will have two or more direct primary ballots, plus an additional ballot for President and central committee contests. (The Republican Party typically does not permit unaffiliated voters to participate in their partisan primary elections.) If central committee and county council contests were removed from the regular ballot, the additional ballot could be eliminated. Assuming 5.3 million Republican voters, at an average cost of \$.28 per ballot, the inclusion of central committee contests will result in additional ballot printing costs in excess of \$1.5 million.

In the Democratic primary, the situation is even worse. Democrats allow unaffiliated voters to participate in their presidential primary but not in the central committee contest. This necessitates a separate ballot just for central committee contests for all Democratic voters. Assuming 7.5 million Democratic voters, at an average cost of \$.28 per ballot, this will amount to a cost of more than \$ 2.1 million. In addition, a separate ballot might be needed to enable unaffiliated voters to vote only in the Democratic presidential primary. Assuming 3.5 million unaffiliated voters, at an average cost of \$.28 per ballot, this will amount to a ballot printing cost of nearly \$1 million.

The combined cost of extra ballots for both major parties, assuming an average per-ballot cost of \$.28, will be \$5.6 million for printing alone. This does not include additional handling, storage, and tabulation costs, which are steep. It also does not include the cost of a new voting system for Los Angeles County.

In the 2014 primary, the effect of central committees is even more pronounced because it is the only partisan contest in the election. All voters will receive a generic ballot except those permitted to vote in central committee contests, who will receive an additional ballot. If all voters in parties that generally have central committee contests received this ballot—roughly 7.5 million Democrats and 5.3 million Republicans—the printing cost alone will be \$3.6 million.

This is a burden California counties can no longer afford.

**VIABLE ALTERNATIVES EXIST:**

State law could be amended to allow county central committees to select their central committee and county council members by caucus. A notice of the caucus could be printed in sample ballot booklets.

Alternatively, central committees and county councils could manage their own elections. Assistance from the county elections office may be possible in some cases. Tabulation could be accomplished by party members or by private firms that specialize in elections for private organizations.

And, finally, central committees and county councils could be billed by the county for their costs of the election in the same manner that cities, school districts and special districts are now billed and pay their share of the costs.