

STATE NEWS WEEKLY SUMMARY CONTINUED

Voters can get official absentee application forms from the state or county election boards. The completed absentee ballots must be returned by mail to the election board in the county where the voters live.

Voters who become incapacitated after 5 p.m. on Tuesday preceding an election can get an absentee ballot through special emergency procedures.

—OKLA. DEPT. FOR REHABILITATIVE SERVICES
10/07/96

REFORM, LIBERTARIAN PARTIES COMPLAIN ABOUT REGISTRATION PROCESS

■(GIT) State members of the Reform and Libertarian parties complained Tuesday that potential Oklahoma voters were being denied the opportunity to register to vote as members of their parties.

"We are shocked and angered that many voters that are attempting to register as a member of the Reform or Libertarian parties are being turned away at the Oklahoma tag agencies, the League of Women voters and the Democratic and Republican headquarters," Reform Party state chairwoman Dale Welch Barlow said in a state capitol press conference on Tuesday. "Potential voters are being told that the Reform and Libertarian parties do not exist under Oklahoma law, which is false. Both parties were recognized as official parties in June, 1996."

Despite the parties' recognition, voter registration cards have not been reprinted. As a result, potential voters see only the names of the Republican and Democratic parties on the form, as well as 'no party,' as options for party registration.

"Is it collusion between the Democratic and Republican parties, or is it a sign that we have a disorganized State Election Board that is terribly inefficient?" she asked. "This situation is a slap in the face to any volunteer that took four months of their lives to get 78,000 voters to sign their petition to get

the Reform Party recognized in the state of Oklahoma."

Barlow said she was unaware of the problem until her office in Tulsa recently began receiving calls from potential voters who had been told they could not declare their membership in the party when registering to vote.

Similar sentiments were expressed by Libertarian Party candidate Agnes Regier, who is one of five candidates seeking the US Senate seat.

Members of both parties went so far as to tape record their conversations with voter registrars, specifically tag agents, as they denied them the opportunity to register as members of those parties.

Barlow and Regier said they would file a letter of complaint with State Election Board chairman Lance Ward regarding the situation. They also said they would ask that the election board fax a list of political parties in which registering voters could declare themselves members. Additionally, both women said their parties would begin voter registration drives of their own in an effort to bring more Reform and Libertarian members onto the rolls.

—SHAWN ASHLEY
10/08/96

HOUSE GOP LEADER CALLS FOR OPENING OF SOME ELECTIONS

■(GIT) The ranking Republican in the state House of Representatives proposed Monday partially opening some of Oklahoma's closed primary elections, renewing an idea he has previously advanced without success.

"Every two years, voters somewhere in Oklahoma are disenfranchised by our rigid voting laws," said Rep. Larry Ferguson, R-Cleveland.

Under Oklahoma's closed primary system, Democrats can vote only for Democratic Party candidates, and Republicans can vote only for GOP candidates. State voters can cross party lines only at the invitation of another party or absent such an invitation, in the general election.

As an example of the first instance, Oklahoma's independent voters won the right to participate in a primary in August when the Libertarian Party invited independents to cast their ballots in the race that selected the Libertarian nominee in the US Senate race. According to State Election Board Secretary Lance Ward, the move marked the first time in the state's history

such an invitation had been made.

To eliminate such limits, Ferguson proposes:

✓ That if one political party has two candidates for an office but the other party has no candidate for the post, skipping the primary election and automatically advancing the candidates to the general election, where all voters would be allowed to vote for the candidates; and

✓ That if one political party has more than two candidates for an office and no other political party has a nominee for that office, thinning the field of contenders to two in a traditional closed primary in which only voters of the candidates' party would be allowed to participate and then placing the top two vote-getters names on the general election ballot, where all voters would be allowed to cast ballots.

"Too many times, too many people are locked out of elections that affect them," the House Minority Leader said.

As an example, Ferguson pointed to a recent Pawnee County Sheriff's election in which 2,400 Democrats elected the chief law enforcement officer for the 15,575 residents of the county, which is located in his district. That, he said, deprived the 3,190 Republicans and 370 registered independents in the county of an opportunity to vote for sheriff.

The closed primary system also "distorts voter registration," said Ferguson, explaining that many times a voter will register under the banner of a locally dominant political party instead of the party that voter really prefers, just to be able to vote in races which the voter deems especially important.

"This is not about political advantage," said Ferguson, "since Democrats and Republicans alike would benefit from my plan. It's about fairness to the voters. I think it is time the Democrats did what is morally right and supported this proposal."

—SHAWN ASHLEY
10/08/96

COMMISSIONERS OF THE LAND OFFICE VOTE TO SELL TOBACCO STOCK

■(GIT) Commissioners of the Land Office (CLO) voted to sell \$4.2 million in tobacco stocks Tuesday at the regular meeting. Secretary Rob Johnson recommended to commissioners that the stock be sold by March

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"Your representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgement; and he betrays, instead of serving you, if he sacrifices it to your opinion."

Edmund Burke
speech to the electors of Bristol
Nov. 3, 1774