

YES I-872

Vote for the person, NOT the party

Initiative Measure 872

Advantages of a Qualifying Primary for Washington State

The federal courts have ruled that Washington can no longer conduct “blanket primaries”, as it has for nearly seventy years. During the 2004 session, the Legislature adopted a new type of primary, called a “qualifying primary” or a “top-two primary”. However, Governor Locke extensively vetoed that bill, eliminating the qualifying primary and creating instead a nominating primary in which voters will only be able to vote for the candidates of a single party in the primary.

The Washington State Grange opposes primaries in which voters are restricted to voting for candidates of only one party and does not want to see political parties gain control of the primary. Initiative Measure 872 establishes a qualifying primary which will give voters the freedom they enjoyed under the blanket primary — to vote for any candidate they prefer for each office.

Independent Voters Should be Free to Support Any Candidate in the Primary

Most of the voters in Washington are independents who “vote for the person, not the party.” They want to support and vote for the candidates that they feel are the most qualified and will do the best job – without regard to the political party of the candidate.

Voters do not want to be restricted in the primary to voting on the candidates of only one party because, for many voters, this prevents them from expressing support for all the candidates they want to see elected. Initiative 872 gives voters this freedom to choose any candidate in the primary.

Qualifying Primaries are More Competitive

Under Initiative 872, the two candidates with the most votes in the primary win and go on to the general election ballot. No political party is guaranteed a spot on the general election ballot. Parties will have to recruit candidates with broad public support and run campaigns that appeal to all the voters.

Under Initiative 872, this will be especially true in “safe” legislative districts that are historically dominated by one party. In a nominating primary system, there may be several candidates from the dominant party in the primary, but only one of them advances to the general. Often, this is the only candidate on the

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general election ballot. If Initiative 872 is approved, voters in the general election will always have a choice between the two most popular candidates in the primary.

Elected Officials Will be More Representative of the Public

Qualifying primaries are more likely to produce public officials who represent the political preferences and opinions of a broad cross-section of the voters. Candidates will need to appeal to all the voters, partisan and independent alike. They will not be able to win the primary by appealing only to party activists. A party nominating primary takes control of the primary away from the voters and gives it to the leadership of the political party organizations. The qualifying primary gives voters the kind of control that they exercised for seventy years under the blanket primary.

Initiative 872 Protects Voter Privacy and Increases Participation

Under I-872, voters will never have to declare party or register by party in order to vote in the primary. In the primaries in 2000, the turnout in Washington was more than twice as high as in states with party primaries – because voters in this state could support any candidate on the primary ballot.

The Qualifying Primary is Constitutional

A majority of the US Supreme Court clearly distinguished the two types of primaries. They described the qualifying primary in the following way,

“Each voter, regardless of party affiliation, may vote for any candidate, and the top two vote getters (or however many the State prescribes) then move on to the general election. This system has all the characteristics of the partisan blanket primary, save the constitutionally crucial one: Primary voters are not choosing a party’s nominee.”

Because the voters are not selecting party nominees, a qualifying primary does not interfere with any constitutionally-protected interest of a political party. The Grange specifically drafted Initiative 872 to conform to this ruling by the US Supreme Court.

A Qualifying Primary Will be Better for Minor Party Candidates

Minor parties will be able to participate more effectively in a qualifying primary system than in nominating primaries. In a qualifying primary, minor parties are more likely to focus their efforts on “grassroots” legislative offices than on statewide and federal positions. If they compete aggressively in districts where one of the two larger parties is not running any candidates, they will have a good chance of qualifying a candidate for the general – and of winning more support for their party than in the past. Initiative 872 creates a level playing field for all candidates in the primary.

YES



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