

Senate Constitutional Amendment No. 4

RESOLUTION CHAPTER 2

Senate Constitutional Amendment No. 4—A resolution to propose to the people of the State of California an amendment to the Constitution of the State, by amending Sections 5 and 6 of Article II thereof, relating to elections.

[Filed with Secretary of State February 19, 2009.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

SCA 4, Maldonado. Elections: open primaries.

Existing provisions of the California Constitution require the Legislature to provide for primary elections for partisan offices, including an open presidential primary election, as specified. The California Constitution also provides that all judicial, school, county, and city offices are nonpartisan offices, and a political party or party central committee is prohibited from endorsing, supporting, or opposing a candidate for such an office.

This measure, which would be known as the "Top Two Primaries Act," would provide for a "voter-nominated primary election" for each state elective office and congressional office in California, in which a voter may vote at the primary election for any candidate for a congressional or state elective office without regard to the political party preference disclosed by the candidate or the voter. The measure would further provide that a candidate for a congressional or state elective office generally may choose whether to have his or her political party preference indicated upon the ballot for that office in the manner to be provided by statute. The measure would prohibit a political party or party central committee from nominating a candidate for a congressional or state elective office at the primary, but the measure would permit a political party or party central committee to endorse, support, or oppose a candidate for congressional or state elective office. The 2 candidates receiving the 2 highest vote totals for each office at a primary election, regardless of party preference, would then compete for the office at the ensuing general election. This measure would require the Legislature to provide for partisan elections for presidential candidates, political party committees, and party central steering committees.

This measure would designate the Superintendent of Public Instruction as a nonpartisan office.

If the measure is approved by the voters, it would become operative on January 1, 2011.

Resolved by the Senate, the Assembly concurring, That the Legislature of the State of California at its 2009–10 Regular Session commencing on the first day of December 2008, two-thirds of the membership of each house

concurring, hereby proposes to the people of the State of California that the Constitution of the State be amended as follows:

First—This measure shall be known and maybe cited as the “Top Two Candidates Open Primary Act.”

Second—The People of the State of California hereby find and declare all of the following:

(a) Purpose. The Top Two Candidates Open Primary Act is hereby adopted by the People of California to protect and preserve the right of every Californian to vote for the candidate of his or her choice. This act, along with legislation already enacted by the Legislature to implement this act, are intended to implement an open primary system in California as set forth below.

(b) Top Two Candidate Open Primary. All registered voters otherwise qualified to vote shall be guaranteed the unrestricted right to vote for the candidate of their choice in all state and congressional elections. All candidates for a given state or congressional office shall be listed on a single primary ballot. The top two candidates, as determined by the voters in an open primary, shall advance to a general election in which the winner shall be the candidate receiving the greatest number of votes cast in an open general election.

(c) Open Voter Registration. At the time they register, all voters shall have the freedom to choose whether or not to disclose their party preference. No voter shall be denied the right to vote for the candidate of his or her choice in either a primary or a general election for statewide constitutional office, the State Legislature, or the Congress of the United States based upon his or her disclosure or nondisclosure of party preference. Existing voter registrations, which specify a political party affiliation, shall be deemed to have disclosed that party as the voter’s political party preference unless a new affidavit of registration is filed.

(d) Open Candidate Disclosure. At the time they file to run for public office, all candidates shall have the choice to declare a party preference. The preference chosen shall accompany the candidate’s name on both the primary and general election ballots. The names of candidates who choose not to declare a party preference shall be accompanied by the designation “No Party Preference” on both the primary and general election ballots. Selection of a party preference by a candidate for state or congressional office shall not constitute or imply endorsement of the candidate by the party designated, and no candidate for that office shall be deemed the official candidate of any party by virtue of his or her selection in the primary.

(e) Freedom of Political Parties. Nothing in this act shall restrict the right of individuals to join or organize into political parties or in any way restrict the right of private association of political parties. Nothing in this measure shall restrict the parties’ right to contribute to, endorse, or otherwise support a candidate for state elective or congressional office. Political parties may establish such procedures as they see fit to endorse or support candidates or otherwise participate in all elections, and they may informally “nominate” candidates for election to voter-nominated offices at a party convention or

by whatever lawful mechanism they so choose, other than at state-conducted primary elections. Political parties may also adopt such rules as they see fit for the selection of party officials (including central committee members, presidential electors, and party officers). This may include restricting participation in elections for party officials to those who disclose a party preference for that party at the time of registration.

(f) Presidential Primaries. This act makes no change in current law as it relates to presidential primaries. This act conforms to the ruling of the United States Supreme Court in *Washington State Grange v. Washington State Republican Party* (2008) 128 S.Ct. 1184. Each political party retains the right either to close its presidential primaries to those voters who disclose their party preference for that party at the time of registration or to open its presidential primary to include those voters who register without disclosing a political party preference.

Third—That Section 5 of Article II thereof is amended to read:

SEC. 5. (a) A voter-nomination primary election shall be conducted to select the candidates for congressional and state elective offices in California. All voters may vote at a voter-nominated primary election for any candidate for congressional and state elective office without regard to the political party preference disclosed by the candidate or the voter, provided that the voter is otherwise qualified to vote for candidates for the office in question. The candidates who are the top two vote-getters at a voter-nominated primary election for a congressional or state elective office shall, regardless of party preference, compete in the ensuing general election.

(b) Except as otherwise provided by Section 6, a candidate for a congressional or state elective office may have his or her political party preference, or lack of political party preference, indicated upon the ballot for the office in the manner provided by statute. A political party or party central committee shall not nominate a candidate for any congressional or state elective office at the voter-nominated primary. This subdivision shall not be interpreted to prohibit a political party or party central committee from endorsing, supporting, or opposing any candidate for a congressional or state elective office. A political party or party central committee shall not have the right to have its preferred candidate participate in the general election for a voter-nominated office other than a candidate who is one of the two highest vote-getters at the primary election, as provided in subdivision (a).

(c) The Legislature shall provide for partisan elections for presidential candidates, and political party and party central committees, including an open presidential primary whereby the candidates on the ballot are those found by the Secretary of State to be recognized candidates throughout the nation or throughout California for the office of President of the United States, and those whose names are placed on the ballot by petition, but excluding any candidate who has withdrawn by filing an affidavit of noncandidacy.

(d) A political party that participated in a primary election for a partisan office pursuant to subdivision (c) has the right to participate in the general

election for that office and shall not be denied the ability to place on the general election ballot the candidate who received, at the primary election, the highest vote among that party's candidates.

Fourth—That Section 6 of Article II thereof is amended to read:

SEC. 6. (a) All judicial, school, county, and city offices, including the Superintendent of Public Instruction, shall be nonpartisan.

(b) A political party or party central committee shall not nominate a candidate for nonpartisan office, and the candidate's party preference shall not be included on the ballot for the nonpartisan office.

Fifth—This measure shall become operative on January 1, 2011.