

Presidential Primary ~ Why do I have to select a party ballot?

When you request a Presidential Primary ballot, you must declare which party you are voting in. This declaration ONLY occurs for voting in the Presidential Primary. You are NOT declaring your party affiliation – you are only selecting the ballot on which you are choosing to vote.

The statute is in Chapter 57, which governs the details of presidential elections. See 17 V.S.A. 2704:

"A person voting at the primary shall be required to ask for the ballot of the party in which the voter wishes to vote and an election official shall record the voter's choice of ballot by marking the entrance checklist with a letter code, as designated by the Secretary of State, to indicate the voter's party choice. The names of all candidates on the ballot shall be listed in alphabetical order. Each voter may vote for one candidate for the presidential nomination of one party, either by placing a mark opposite the printed name of a candidate as in other primaries, or by writing in the name of the candidate of the voter's choice. (Added 1979, No. 199 (Adj. Sess.), § 1, eff. May 6, 1980; amended 1995, No. 38, § 4; 2003, No. 59, § 43.)"

From the Secretary of State's Office, here is a brief history of this statute's origin:

Some time in the 1970's the national parties pushed hard on Vermont to register its voters by party, which did not happen. The national parties want this information to be able to identify/target voters and to be able to run closed primaries.

Vermont pushed back because voters did not want to register with any one party - the same independent streak that causes Vermonters to get so upset about their choice of ballot being recorded.

The national parties threatened to take away Vermont's delegates to the national conventions, essentially silencing our state in the candidate selection process.

The compromise was this provision of state statute , which allows the national parties, every four years, to collect *some* data on what *may be* the party affiliation of Vermont voters.

Bottom line – if you choose to vote in the Presidential Primary, you must tell us which party's ballot you want. We must mark that choice on the checklist. It matters not to us which ballot you choose. You can vote your convictions, vote defensively or offensively – it makes no difference to those of us staffing the polls. We are required to follow the law and we appreciate your understanding.