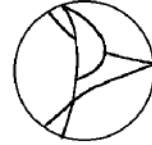


Community Matters

Voter Registration Deadline April 20

By: Patricia A. O'Malley

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If you want to vote in the primary election on May 19, you must register by April 20. In a *primary* election, the political parties – mainly the Democrats and Republicans – choose the candidates who will represent them in the *general* election in November.

This year's primary will cover state judges, including the Common Pleas, Commonwealth, Superior, and Supreme Courts, and the local magistrates. The Allegheny County Sheriff's seat is also up for election. The municipal positions include some school directors, council members, mayors, tax collectors, constables, and elections officials.

Those local officials have a great deal of influence over your daily life. They set policies and priorities for our schools and our towns. They hire teachers, police officers, and other local employees. They decide how to spend our tax dollars. If you want to be a part of those decisions, you must register to vote.

After you register, REMEMBER TO VOTE! Don't worry about the new voting machines. If you can work an automatic banking machine or a TV remote controller, you can work a voting machine. If you're nervous about it, there is more information and a demonstration on the Allegheny County Elections Division website, www.county.allegheny.pa.us/votereducation. There is also help available at the polling place on Election Day.

If you don't know for whom you should vote, now is the time to do some research. In my experience, television commercials and campaign literature are practically useless in giving information. They are designed to make you remember and feel good about the candidate. You can visit the candidates' own websites, attend campaign events like rallies and town meetings, and read in-depth news coverage and voters' guides. In the end, vote for the candidates who reflect your views most closely. No single candidate will be perfect, but you know what's important to you.

It is illegal for *anyone* to keep you from voting. You cannot be fired from your job or evicted from your home, for voting. No one can tell you how to vote. If you can't get to the polling place on Election Day, you can get an absentee ballot, but don't wait too long. The deadline to return absentee ballots is May 15, 2009.

You can find more information about voting and some of the issues from the League of Women Voters of Greater Pittsburgh, Community Information Center. Go to www.palwv.org/pittsburgh. An excellent guide is available at www.votespa.com. Click on the "Guide for New Citizens".

To find out where to vote, or for more information, visit www.county.allegheny.pa.us/elect. If you don't have a home computer, you can use one at any public library in Allegheny County.

A summary of the voter registration rules

WHO: *In order to register, you must:*

- Be a US citizen for 30 days or more on election day
 - Be at least 18 years old on election day
 - Be a resident of Pennsylvania, and your election district, for at least 30 days on election day
- You *do not* have to have a residence to register to vote. You can be homeless, but you must have a mailing address.
- You may be able to vote if you have a criminal record. Go to www.votespa.com for details.
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WHAT:

- In order to vote in a *primary* election (in May of each year) you must register in a political party.
 - You do not have to register in a party to vote in the *general* election (held in November).
 - You can change your party registration any time you wish.
 - Even if you haven't voted recently, you are still registered. Call the Election Division or check www.votespa.com to be sure.
 - If you moved, changed your name, or want to change your political party, you must register again.
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WHERE: *The Allegheny County Election Division office is located in the County Office Building.*

542 Forbes Avenue
Room 604
Pittsburgh, PA 15219 (Downtown)
Phone: (412) 350-4500
Fax: (412) 350-5697

WHEN

April 20, 2009	Registration forms must be in the Elections Division office, or postmarked, for the May 19 Primary Election
May 12, 2009	Last day to apply for a civilian absentee ballot for the May 19 Primary Election
May 15, 2009	Last day for County Board of Elections to receive completed absentee ballots

HOW: *Registration forms are available in several places:*

- Allegheny County Elections Division office, 604 County Office Building, Downtown
 - Many state and local government offices
 - Most state and local legislators' offices
 - Many public libraries, community agencies, and state liquor stores
- You can also find the form online at www.dos.state.pa.us/voting. You can download, print, complete, sign, and mail the form to the address below. It must be postmarked by the registration deadline. Return the completed form to:

Voter Registration Section
Allegheny County Division of Elections
542 Forbes Ave., Room 609
Pittsburgh, PA 15219-2953

For More Information:

League of Women Voters, www.palwv.org/Pittsburgh, 412-261-4284

PA Department of State, www.dos.state.pa.us/voting

Allegheny County Election Division, www.alleghenycounty.us/elect, 412-350-4500

Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts, www.aopc.org

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