

February primary: Quirky ballot counts only for GOP

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Lyndon LaRouche will win the Democratic Party primary election in Michigan Feb. 22. Donald Trump will walk away with the Reform Party ballot, the day after results. No. They are the only candidates whose names appear on the ballot in the primary election for their respective parties.

Not that it matters. Neither party will recognize the outcome of voting in Michigan's open primary election.

Only the Republicans will. This quirky aspect of the presidential primary ballot is the result of the way Michigan election law interacts with party politics.

Might it just serve to confuse voters?
"The media has done a fairly

good job of explaining that Republicans vote in the primary election Feb. 22 and that Democrats will vote in caucuses in March," Elizabeth Boyd, communications director for the Secretary of State, said. "But I can't speak for all 6,540,000 voters in Michigan either."

The process for deciding which candidates would appear on the ballot began last November, Boyd explained. At the time, Secretary of State Candice Miller listed 11 names, including all of the Republican candidates — George W. Bush, John McCain, Steve Forbes, Orrin Hatch, Alan Keyes and Gary Bauer — and both Democratic contenders — Al Gore and Bill Bradley. The list also included three Reform Party candidates — Trump, Pat Buchanan and Jesse Ventura. LaRouche was not on the list. Election law allows the Secre-

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tary of State to draw up her list from those candidates who are "generally advocated" by the national news media to be potential nominees.

At the time, Miller said she did not believe LaRouche to be a serious contender.

But the law also allows candidates to add their names to the ballot through the petition process, and that's what LaRouche supporters did. Required to file 9,949 signatures, LaRouche's group turned in 22,652, of which the State Board of Canvassers found at least 10,800 to be valid, Boyd explained.

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dates to withdraw their names, which is exactly what Gore and Bradley did. The Democratic National Committee has decided it won't recognize the outcome of votes in "open primaries," because such primaries allow for crossover voting.

Instead, Michigan Democrats will vote for their candidate in "Iowa style" caucus meetings to be held around the state on March 11. Altogether in the room at the same time, Democrats will vote by raising their hands in those meetings.

So that leaves only LaRouche on the Democratic side of the primary ballot Feb. 22.

Ventura also withdrew from the Reform Party ticket in Michigan's primary. In the affidavit he filed with the Secretary of State's office, Boyd explained, he said he did not consider himself a candidate.

Buchanan also withdrew because, like Democrats, the Reform Party won't recognize the results of Michigan's primary.

In fact, the Reform Party isn't recognizing any individual state's results. Instead, it'll hold its own national primary election later this year.

So only Trump's name remains on the Michigan ballot for the Reform Party.

For Republicans, the ballot will count. And that's the main reason for the election. Republicans, who prefer the "open primary" process, will take citizens' votes in regular election polling

that day. The date of the primary was moved up this year by the state Legislature to increase the state's impact on the process. Michigan will be the first large industrial state to cast ballots for their nominee.

If the purpose of the Democratic party, in withdrawing from the open primary, was to eliminate crossover voting, it likely won't have that effect.

There is nothing in law, Boyd explained, and no system for cross-checking to determine if a voter casts ballots in both the Feb. 22 primary and the March 11 caucuses.

In the primary, any registered voter may participate.

In the caucus, Democrats ask only that voters declare themselves to be Democrats when registering. To participate in the caucus, voters need not be actual party members.

Democrat's response

Health care and safe schools

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Access to health care, retirement for senior citizens and safe, successful schools topped the list of the Democratic party's agenda when it responded to Gov. John Engler's State of the State Wednesday, Jan. 19.

Following tradition, the minority party puts out its view of what the state's agenda ought to be following the governor's annual speech. This year's address was read over Michigan Public Radio by Sen. Dianne Byrum, D-Onondaga, Rep. Patricia Lockwood, D-Fenton, and Rep. Andy Neumann, D-Alpena.

Byrum took up the issue of health care and Health Maintenance Organizations. "We have learned that almost one million Michigan residents still do not have health care insurance and many families fear that they will lose their coverage soon. We understand that families are frustrated when their health plans deny them access to services and do not let them get a second opinion.

Almost three million Michigan residents now belong to an HMO. It is time that we start taking their complaints seriously," Byrum said.

When patients do appeal HMO decisions, through the current Patient Bill of Rights system, she said, the state rules in favor of the patient only 26 percent of the time.

She proposed:

■ Giving customers the right to sue HMOs over health care decisions.

■ Creating a managed care ombudsman to assist consumers having difficulty with their HMO.

■ Improving the appeals process already in place.

■ Improving the quality of care in nursing homes.

■ Protecting communities from losing local hospitals.

■ Providing seniors with an affordable solution to "skyrocketing" prescription costs.

Lockwood said her party's top priority would be education this year, focusing in four areas: higher standards, smaller class sizes, improving building condi-

tions and making schools safer.

She proposed:

■ Using the latest techniques, including distance learning and technology, to act and achieve high goals.

■ Lowering class sizes by legislation for kindergarten through third grade.

■ Establishing a state fund to help school districts pay the interest on voter-approved voting bonds.

■ Setting up a statewide violence hotline, where students can report activities they believe may be a danger.

■ Legislation to make sure violent students expelled from schools are kept off the streets.

Neumann took up the issue of retirement. He proposed:

■ Using the state's tobacco settlement money and an additional \$30 million from the budget to help seniors cover the cost of prescription drugs.

■ Allowing seniors to defer property taxes to avoid being taxed out of their homes while in retirement and living on fixed incomes.

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Nominations accepted for Hometown Heroes

Hometown heroes in Oakland County — those who volunteer their time and effort for the betterment of their community and to help others — will be honored in a new awards ceremony slated for March.

Nominations are now being accepted for the Hometown Heroes Awards, to be given to volunteers in six categories — seniors, youth, boards and commissions, direct service, faith-based and business volunteerism.

The awards are being sponsored jointly by Lighthouse of Oakland County, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, Hometown Newspapers, Mirror Newspapers and Crain's Detroit Business.

They'll be handed out at a luncheon March 29 in the Townsend Hotel in downtown Birmingham, the first luncheon to be held in that facility's new addition.

The speaker for the event will be Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson.

The luncheon will be sponsored by Northern Trust Bank, located in Bloomfield Hills. With Northern Trust covering the cost of the event, it can then double as a fundraiser to spur even more volunteer activity in Oakland County, according to Noreen Keating, CEO of Lighthouse.

The \$40 per seat ticket price for attendance at the lunch will raise funds for A Volunteer Place, a new volunteer recruitment and placement center to be built in Birmingham. Its purpose is to connect volunteers to programs that need the help in northern Oakland County.

The center is a joint project between Lighthouse, Catholic Social Services, Oakland Family Services, St. Joseph Mercy Hospital, United Way of Oakland County, Volunteer Impact and AmeriCorps at Oakland University.

A ballot to nominate volunteers is printed elsewhere in this edition of the newspaper. Deadline for nominations is Feb. 25.

Winners will be selected by a committee of representatives of

the volunteer organizations participating in the Volunteer Place.

Keating said Lighthouse is seeking corporate sponsorships for tables at the luncheon, to allow volunteers to attend who might not otherwise be able to

afford to go. A table of ten is \$400. Contact Lighthouse at (248) 335-6752 to sponsor a table.

For more information call (248) 204-5053.

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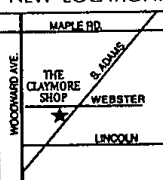
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