



“IN THE KNOW:” (Almost) Everything You Want to Know about Voting in Philadelphia’s May 17 Primary

The Phillies are playing in St. Louis tomorrow night at 8:15 p.m. So there’s no excuse for not voting in tomorrow’s primary election by the time the polls close at 8 p.m.

There are no rain delays when it comes to elections. So, rain (which is predicted) or shine, tomorrow (May 17) is primary election day in Philadelphia. There are races for Mayor, City Council, Sheriff, City Commissioners, Register of Wills, statewide judges and local judges.

Who wins really matters. Despite all the TV attention and hoopla around presidential and congressional races, the people who hold local offices make more decisions that affect your everyday life, from the taxes you pay to the city services you get to the laws you live by. So it’s up to you to learn as much as you can about the candidates. (You can do this by going to our website: www.seventy.org.)

But this **IN THE KNOW** is not about who is running. It’s about you – the voter.

The Committee of Seventy has already told you a lot about what you need to do *before* tomorrow, such as registering to vote if you haven’t voted before or applying for an absentee ballot if you can’t vote in person.

But today we’ll tell you about your rights as a voter – and some of the things you could see at the polls tomorrow. We want you to have the best possible voting experience. Because if you do, you’ll probably become a lifetime voter.

If you still find yourself unsure about what to do tomorrow, or if you run into problems, call Seventy’s Election Protection Hotline: 1-866-OUR-VOTE (687-8683). We’ve been running a Voter Protection Program for over 100 years and can answer (almost) any question you have.
- May 16, 2011

Can I vote for anyone I want tomorrow?

No. Tomorrow is a primary election. In a primary election – at least the way it works in Pennsylvania – you can only vote for candidates who are registered in the same political party as you. That’s because the primary determines who will be your party’s nominee or nominees in the November 8 general election. So if you’re a registered Democrat, you can’t vote for a Republican. If you’re a registered Republican, you can’t vote for a Democrat.



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I'm registered as an "independent." Can I vote tomorrow?

Independent voters and members of parties other than the Democrats and Republicans can't vote for any of the candidates in the primary. But you can vote on ballot questions, which involve government actions that can't happen without voter approval and are not attached to any political party. There is one question on the city's May 17 ballot. You can read about it by going to http://www.seventy.org/Elections_May_2011_Ballot_Question.aspx.

What if I can vote but don't like any of the candidates?

You can cast a write-in vote for someone you do like. You can even vote for yourself. There's a write-in box next to the office for which you want to write in another candidate's name. Press the write-in button in the box. Then press the red flashing button at the top of the voting machine to open the write-in window. Write or stamp your candidate's name on the paper inside the window. Then pull the black shutter down over the name.

Can I only vote for one candidate for each office?

That depends on the office. Let's take the Mayor. If you are a Democrat, you have a choice between Michael Nutter and T. Milton Street. You can only vote for one of them. If you are a Republican, you have the choice between Karen Brown and John Featherman. You can only vote for one of them.

What about City Council?

That's a different story. There are two types of members on City Council: District and At-Large. District Council members represent specific parts of the city. There are ten districts in the city so there are ten District Council members. You can only vote for one person running to be your party's nominee for District Council. Council At-Large members represent the entire city. There are seven Council At-Large members. You can vote for up to five people running to be your party's nominees for Council At-Large. There are 14 Democratic Council At-Large candidates and nine Republican Council At-Large candidates on tomorrow's ballot.

Do I have to vote for all five Council At-Large candidates?

No, you don't. Five is the *maximum* number you can vote for. You can vote for five, four, three, two or one candidate – or for no one at all.

What's the best way to help my favorite At-Large candidate or candidates win the primary?

The top five Democratic Council At-Large vote getters will face the top five Republican At-Large vote getters in the November 8 general election (plus any minority party candidates who qualify for the general election ballot). Voting for your favorite At-Large candidate or candidates – and for no one else – is the best way to help them get the most number of votes. It's called "bullet voting."



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How will I know how many candidates I can vote for?

Don't worry. It tells you right on the ballot. Democrats and Republicans can only vote for **one** candidate for each office with three exceptions: Council At-Large (up to five candidates); Judge of the Court of Common Pleas (up to ten candidates); City Commissioners (up to two candidates).

One of my favorite candidates just dropped out of the race. If he is still on the ballot, can I vote for him?

Sometimes candidates drop out of the race after it's too late to put a sticker over their names on the ballot. You *could* vote for these candidates tomorrow. But a court order could also ensure that votes for candidates who have dropped out of the race don't count. Think about whether you want to cast a vote that won't count.

How can I tell if my vote counted?

After you choose all the candidates you want to vote for – which you do by pressing the box next to the candidates' names (red lights will go on) – you have to press the green "VOTE" button. (It's big – you can't miss it.) When you do, the red lights will go off. That is the signal that you are finished voting and your vote has been recorded.

What if I forget to press the "VOTE" button before leaving the voting booth?

There's a name for people who do this: "fleeing voters." Officials who are working at the polls are instructed to try to catch fleeing voters before leave. If they can't, the votes of "fleeing voters" are cleared and will not count.

Can I stay in the voting booth as long as I want?

The Pennsylvania Election Code says that each voter (except visually impaired voters using an audio voting device) has three minutes to vote, unless no one else is waiting. We've never seen anyone with a stop watch, but try to be courteous to the next voter if there are long lines.

Am I allowed to ask for help?

You are entitled to help from anyone you choose if you can't read, write or speak English well or are unable to enter the voting booth or operate the voting machine. But that person can't be your employer, an officer of your union or the person in charge of the polling place (who is called the "Judge of Elections").

I'm taking my grandmother to vote and she only speaks Spanish. What can I do to help her?

You can help her. Or, if she doesn't want you to know who she's voting for, many polling places will have Spanish/English interpreters. If not, and you need one, call 215-686-1500. This is also the number to call for other foreign language interpreters.



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When and where can I vote?

The polls are open from 7 a.m. until 8 p.m. After you registered to vote, you should have received a card in the mail telling you where to vote. If you are unsure about where to vote, visit Seventy's online Citizen's Guide (<http://guide.seventy.org>) or call 1-866-268-8603.

I've been reading a lot about voter ID lately. Do I need to bring an ID to vote tomorrow?

Only if you are voting for the first time ever or voting for the first time in a new division (if you moved from one place in the city to another). You have to show your identification to the person who keeps the list of registered voters (this is called a "poll book."). After the first time you vote, you don't have to show ID; you only have to sign your name on the voter list.

What kind of identification should I bring?

Pretty much any official photo ID, such as a driver's license, student ID card, military ID card, or a U.S. passport will do. But if you don't have photo ID, you can bring an official document that has your name and address, such as a utility bill, paycheck, or bank statement. For a complete list of acceptable forms of ID, please look here:

http://www.seventy.org/Elections_Voters_Rights_Responsibilities.aspx

What if I forget my identification?

You can fill out what's called a "provisional ballot" and get a receipt. A provisional ballot is a paper ballot that election officials will count if they confirm you were registered correctly. It has all the same choices as the ballot inside the voting booth.

I moved but forgot to reregister to vote. What should I do?

You can go back and vote at your old polling place. But you can only do this once. Then you need to reregister in your new division. The deadline for registering to vote for the November 8 general election is Monday, October 10, 2011. You can download a voter registration form in English or Spanish by going to http://www.seventy.org/TakeAction_Register_to_Vote.aspx.

What if I did register, but my name is not in the voters' list at my polling place?

If your name does not appear in poll book for some reason, call the Committee of Seventy's hotline – 1-866-OUR-VOTE (687-8683) – to make sure you are at the correct polling place. Or ask the Judge of Elections to call Philadelphia's voter registration office to confirm that you are registered. If this can't be confirmed, you can request a provisional ballot. Your vote will count if election officials determine after the primary that you were registered correctly.

I thought I was going to be away and voted by absentee ballot. But it turns out I'll be home tomorrow. Can I still vote in person?

Yes, you can. But your vote won't count twice. Your absentee ballot will be voided.



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I thought I was going to be home and didn't apply for an absentee ballot. But it turns out I'll be away tomorrow. Can I still vote?

You're probably out of luck since you also missed the deadline for getting an emergency absentee ballot. But let's say you are unexpectedly in the hospital and can't get to your polling place. You can have a representative file a request for you to vote with the Court of Common Pleas in Room 285, City Hall. You can do this today or up until 8 p.m. tomorrow. There are forms you need to fill out for this to happen and they have to be notarized. Go here to get the forms: http://www.seventy.org/Elections_Absentee_and_Alternative_Ballot_Information.aspx

I have a criminal record? Am I allowed to vote?

In most cases, yes. You may not vote only if you have been convicted of a felony (the most serious kinds of crime) and are currently in prison or a halfway house serving your sentence. But if you are finished your sentence (or if you are out on probation or parole, even if you are living in a halfway house), or if you are in jail awaiting trial or serving a sentence for a misdemeanor (the less serious kinds of crime), then you are absolutely allowed to vote.

What happens if I don't have a permanent address?

You can still vote, although you do have to provide an address of some kind. Residents who are homeless may register to vote using an address where they receive mail, such as a homeless shelter.

I'm disabled. How can I find out if my polling place is handicapped accessible?

In Philadelphia, the City Commissioners (who operate elections) have a list of fully accessible polling places, which they publish in local newspapers and is also available here: <http://phillyelection.com/aceng.htm>

That's enough for now. If I think of other questions, what should I do?

You can call us today or anytime tomorrow on our Election Day hotline at 1-866-OUR-VOTE (866-687-8683).

The Committee of Seventy is a non-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to free and fair elections in the Philadelphia region. If you have a comment on this IN THE KNOW, or want to suggest topics we should address in the future, please let us know: info@seventy.org.