

## Primaries in Scott County Are – Unfortunately – No Contest

Written by Kathleen McCarthy  
Wednesday, 14 May 2014 09:53

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The Iowa primaries are Tuesday, June 3. Voter turnout for midterm elections is dismally low, but the turnout for midterm *primaries* is even worse. Consequently, incumbents are all but guaranteed advancement to the general election. To add an additional layer of protection for incumbents' re-election, Iowa primaries are closed – meaning that only people registered to vote as Democrats and Republicans can participate in their respective party's primary.

Check out the listings of the candidates who will be on the ballots on June 3 for Republicans ([RCReader.com/y/2014R](#)) and Democrats ([RCReader.com/y/2014D](#)). Note that out of 25 seats up for election on the Democratic ticket, only two are contested in the primary. If you don't live inside state Senate District 45 (where Mark Riley is challenging incumbent Joe Seng) or in state Representative District 97 (where Carol Bohel and Jay Saxon are running to fill an empty seat), there are no races on the Democratic primary ballot in which casting a vote matters. And there is no candidate for county treasurer or District 94 state representative on the Democratic primary ballot.

(Note: Jonathan Narcisse attempted to challenge 22-year state-Senate veteran Jack Hatch for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination, but in a bizarre double-standard ruling, the Iowa Supreme Court kicked Narcisse off the primary ballot due to a technical error on three of the petition pages submitted. It was bizarre because, only two years prior, Joe Seng was allowed on the ballot under a Finding of Fact & Determination of Law by Iowa Secretary of State Matt Schultz and Iowa Attorney General Tom Miller that stated Seng's similar technical error was not

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sufficient to preclude him from being on the ballot. The Polk County District Court determined that Seng's ruling was "extrinsic evidence" that Narcisse was not allowed to submit to the court as part of his case. The Iowa Supreme Court upheld the strange precedent the district court established by citing a decidedly extrinsic election-law case from Arizona as justification for excluding Iowa's own determination of law as evidence – simply because the court labeled it extrinsic. Details can be found at [RCReader.com/y/narcisse](http://RCReader.com/y/narcisse) .)

Over on the Republican primary ballot, there are some actual races with stiff competition. And there are also some seats that Republicans are apparently conceding to the Democrats, with no candidates.

Vying to run in November for the dynasty seat Senator Tom Harkin is relinquishing after 30 years in office are Sam Clovis, Joni Ernst, Marc Jacobs, Scott Schaben and Matt Whitaker. The winner of this primary will face off against Bruce Braley, who runs unopposed on the Democratic primary ballot. (Braley was nearly challenged by Quad Cities native Bob Quast, who had the 4,000-plus petition signatures to get on the ballot but had some "invalidated because they signed on the wrong county petition or didn't write down their address as required," the *Des Moines Register* reported [[RCReader.com/y/quast](http://RCReader.com/y/quast)]. Quast is stating he will be seeking enough new petition signatures to be on the November ballot for the Senate seat as an independent.)

With no candidates on the ballot, Republicans are conceding (at least if there's no independent challenger who successfully files by the late-August deadline) the following seats to the Democrats: Scott County attorney (incumbent Mike Walton runs unopposed), Scott County recorder (incumbent Rita Vargas runs unopposed), state Representative District 90 (incumbent Cindy Winkler runs unopposed), state Representative District 89 (incumbent Jim Lykam runs unopposed), state Senate District 45 (Riley faces incumbent Seng), Iowa attorney general (incumbent Miller runs unopposed), and Iowa treasurer (incumbent Michael Fitzgerald runs unopposed).

Mark Lofgren, Marianne Miller-Meeks, and Matthew Waldren are in the GOP primary for the right to face off against U.S. Representative Dave Loebsack in the District 2 congressional race. (Scott County was moved out of District 1 into District 2 when Iowa lost a seat two years ago.) Tom Hoefling is taking on Terry Branstad for the GOP gubernatorial nomination.

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The most contended race on the ballot in Scott County is undoubtedly for for the county Board of Supervisors. Six GOP candidates are vying for three seats currently occupied by Republicans. Running are incumbents William Cusack and Carol Earnhardt and challengers Diane Holst, Jarod Powell, Ralph Johanson, and Jay Sommers. (Larry Minard is retiring.) On the Democratic ballot are two candidates assured a spot on the November general-election ballot, James Laird and Brinson Kinzer.

In Iowa, independents account for approximately 38 percent of registered voters. This means one-third of Iowa's voters are left out of the primaries unless they are willing to cross over to one of the two parties to participate. Hopefully, with the low threshold of political pain for doing so in this particular primary, independent Scott County voters could feasibly engage to revitalize the Board of Supervisors by voting in new, younger candidates, reflecting a more diverse representation of the county in terms of age, sex, residence, and private-sector experience. The current five supervisors all live in Davenport, and only one has ever run a business, or had the responsibility for employing people. The other four have made their entire careers in government and politics. Different attitudes prevail when the money and budgets managed are one's own. The someone-else's-money mindset has resulted in the county budget doubling over past 14 years, while the Scott County population has only increased 5 percent.

Meanwhile, the large bloc of independent voters is seriously disenfranchised because the only way supporters of a specific candidate can cast a vote is to request the ballot on which their candidate is running. So if an independent or Democratic voter happens to support a Republican challenger, he/she must request a Republican ballot to cast a vote for that challenger. That would be easy enough except the voter is then automatically registered as a member of that ballot's party – in other words as a Republican in this example. This auto-register feature inconveniences voters because now each must take the additional step of re-registering as an independent or Democrat before the general election in November.

In the past, having to declare a party other than your own to participate in a primary has been a huge deterrent to electing challengers to replace incumbents. While understandable, it is unfortunate that most voters have been unwilling to make the temporary jump to a different party even to support a worthy candidate. The two-party leadership counts on voters' inability to overcome this hurdle, making closed primaries an effective means to retain incumbents in office. But what if ... ?

Considering the enormous number of voters who are genuinely disillusioned with both parties, perhaps this is the election in which voters are willing to do things differently. Especially if there are candidates, regardless of party, who have the leadership qualities to penetrate the status

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quo. I believe that most of us often vote the person over the party when our intellect discerns character amidst all the political rhetoric. Voters are moving toward candidates who offer actual solutions, with specifics about their visions for representing their constituencies that can be measured over time. Rhetoric is a strategy, not an ideology.

Moving forward, county government will take on a far more important direct role in American lives. This is no less true for Scott County. Nearly every federal program, whether mandated or voluntary – everything from health, education, and the environment to transportation, communications, and homeland security – will be implemented mostly through the counties, via grant funding and all the strings attached to it. Scott County needs vigilant supervisors willing and able to bring greater transparency, stewardship, and consistent accountability in managing the county budgets and staff, and representing Scott County taxpayers.