

# The Real Story: Early voting on the ballot this November

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Good Sunday morning and thanks for joining us on The Real Story. I remember who forced this November Connecticut voters will decide if they want the option of voting in person before Election Day in future elections. That question coming in the form of a referendum on this year's ballot with us this morning President of the League of Women Voters of Connecticut Laura Smith, the League of Women Voters is a leader in voting reform nationwide and here in Connecticut Smith has been a member of the league since 1999. While raising her family in Western Connecticut, Laura has served in a number of different elected town positions. She is also a certified elections moderator in the town of the city, excuse me of Norwalk. Thanks so much for joining us, Laura.

Thank you. Thank you. Glad to be here.

Great. Let's talk first about the possibility of early voting here. The Connecticut allow for early voting amendment is on the November 8 ballot as a constitutional amendment if passed. It would change the state Constitution to allow the Connecticut General Assembly to pass laws to provide for early voting in person here meaning a voter does not need to give an excuse for being unable to vote on election Day. So what is early voting? And what could this look like for Connecticut voters?

Well, it's interesting, it could look very simple or very complicated. That's one of the reasons why the question is to the voters just to amend the constitution so that the legislature can involve all the stakeholders so that we know how many days are acceptable, what each town will have to do to do it, but it's about in person voting. And if you've ever voted in person versus absentee, you know, that's a very special feeling. It's a good community thing. You feel like you've done your civic duty. So it's very important that we give folks another day another full day of voting, so that they can actually exercise that right in person just like they do on election day. But not everybody has ability to be there on a Tuesday. Between those hours, believe it or not, you know, people who take care of children take care of the elderly, people who have jobs that are shifts. So there's a lot of folks who would like to vote in person but are not able to on election day for a variety of reasons. Right now. 39

states have early voting laws, Connecticut, one of only 11 that don't Why hasn't Connecticut enacted it yet?

Well, some of it is because we have our election laws or the constitution. We are the Constitution state, in this case, it's a little makes it a little more cumbersome so that when we do make these kinds of changes, we need to go back to the voters to allow us to amend the Constitution to do so. We are actually one of four states that does not have form a form of early voting. So it's getting less and less

every year more and more states are doing early voting. Their voters really wanted it's helpful to folks who need to schedule transportation. And it's also just nice to why are we making it difficult for eligible citizens to vote right? It shouldn't be convenient. And so an extra day of in person voting would do just that.

You mentioned before one day, why is that one day so significant? Some might say, well, that's only one extra day. If you can come out on a Monday, why can't you come out on a Tuesday? So why is that one day so significant?

Well, there are some people that for instance, if you have a you're an elderly person and you can drive you might have to rely on someone else who has a schedule was a has a set schedule, so you might not be able to do it exactly on election day. So it's it's basically just to make it more convenient. Tuesday, you know, in my opinion, election day should be a holiday but it's not. So it's difficult for some to to get there by their transportation or at least this way, they like oh my gosh, this election day I forgot to vote. They don't have to think about it. There might be an extra day that they can go before election day so that they can get that done without having to worry about election day itself.

Can I Can voters have consider early voting before that constitutional amendment defeated in 2014 It would have allowed early voting and remove restrictions for absentee voting. Why do you think residents weren't ready for early voting eight years ago?

I think it really wasn't that they weren't ready. I believe most voters if asked when they want some kind of option besides Election Day. I think the question I don't know if you saw it, but it took up half the ballot. It was like a paragraph of legalese. And it wasn't very user friendly, if you will. So I think this time around, there's a lot more education about this. We've been talking about it for a long time ever since that defeat in 2014. And I think folks are starting to understand that the reason we have that ballot question down to one sentence this year is so that folks can easily understand what it means and vote

for it. So do you think voters are ready now you mentioned more and more states adding that early voting law do you think this year is the year?

I hope it's the year I think you know the unless I forget that this vote a vote on this question just gets us to let the legislature figure out what it looks like it's not automatically early voting. So it would take a year or two for the legislature to work out the details. So we actually would not be able to vote early. Probably for another two years.

All right in early voting often gets the blame for concerns about election security as well as mail in voting and absentee ballots. Does early voting threaten election security? Are there more risks if we implement this?

Not at all because the same rules that apply on Election Day with regard to security, the machines and the people that would manage them are the same. We have the same number of folks watching the the tabulator it would be in a certain secure location, there would be the same kind of rules that happen on

election day. So all of those checks and balances that are in place on election. Day would also be there for early voting.

Okay, now to ranked choice voting what is rank choice voting for those who don't know and how is it different from the way we vote now in Connecticut?

So rank choice voting I hope I explained this right because it is it is a little complicated, but it makes a lot more sense. It basically if you rather than saying okay, you vote for one person, you get to decide your top three choices. And then after that one person is eliminated, you still have a say and the next two choices. Say if there's three choices, you would have a say into that next choice would get ranked and therefore can continue. On. So it's kind of like you have more of a say in how the votes get can't get cast. Because your top choice doesn't make it but your second or third choice might make it so it actually gives the voter more options.

You mentioned that it's a little bit complicated, but it makes more sense. Why do you think it makes more sense for Connecticut voters to vote this way?

Also, the thing that is interesting about rank choice voting, it also makes the candidates have to work harder, right? They can't just rely on on their first choice. If they don't like that they're done. If you're the second or third choice, it gives candidates another shot at being one of the choices for each voter.

Connecticut currently requires only a plurality, not a majority to win a primary or general election meaning candidates can win with less than 50% of the vote. Is that an issue being able to win with less than 50% of the vote?

Well, it's really all about turnout. So if people don't turn out, that's what the percentages are and they're always incredibly low during primaries. As we have seen we have a closed primary state so that makes it a little tricky, but it is it is kind of disturbing when you see those kinds of turnout rates but I think it is what it is people who show up are the ones who get to decide.

You mentioned Connecticut being a closed primary state obviously, that meaning only registered Democrats and registered Republicans can vote in their respective primary elections like we just had last month but open primaries what are they and is that something the state should be considering?

Open Primaries mean that in the open primary states, you don't have to come pick either ballot you can decide to vote on a democratic ballot or Republican ballot. It does make the candidates have to work a little harder for the vote. I know that in Alaska for example, they have like over I think over 60% of their folks are registered as independents or unaffiliated. So they, they have to work the candidates there have to work a little harder to win over everybody. They can't just count on the base of their party to get themselves elected.

Do you think that would apply? Well to a state here like Connecticut that also has a very large block of unaffiliated and independent voters?

Yes, I think it's I think we need to give voters voters a lot more choices. voters want to participate as much as possible. It's very frustrating to me as an elections, moderator when on primary day how many folks come in and are upset, not upset upset, but they're, you know, they're they're kind of like, Why Why can't I vote on I wanted to stay on affiliated I want to participate. And it's unfortunate that they're not allowed to participate because they're not party members. So I think it would be a useful tool. Yes.

If it were you working in this past primary election as moderator,

I actually did not work this primary season. We had a Norwalk had a another primary back in the spring, and I opted to, to stay to sit this one out, if you will, and you can only do that too many times a year. I definitely won't be there on election day. But for getting up at 330 in the morning on primary day. It was a little much for me, but I was not there. But I know that it was a busy day. But it's also a very, it's not as busy as it should be. And if we had open primaries, I'm sure there would be a lot more interest.

You mentioned your experience having people come to the polls. I know we heard that as well on election day. A lot of people showing up who are independent and unaffiliated. Do you think that is a concern? Here? Are people showing up to the polls do you think it has to do with voter education or closed primary or both?

I think some of it is education. A lot of folks moved in in the past few years from other states where they have they are allowed to vote in primaries. They have open primaries. So let's just assume that we being Connecticut and being progressive saying when it comes to voting rights, that we would have that and we do not so it's kind of like a learning curve. It's definitely an education. When we register voters we point out that to them when they register is on affiliated just so you know, that means that in Connecticut, it's a closed primary state and you won't be able to participate primaries however, unaffiliated voters have a lot of time before primary to affiliate. So they do have that option to affiliate like within up a week a week up until the primary to affiliate

hard right looking ahead to the general election now the democratic gubernatorial ticket. incumbent governor Ned Lamont and Lieutenant Governor Susan buysellads received the endorsement of the Griebel Frank for Connecticut party this week. Both Lamont and his Republican challenger Bob Stephan hausky. sought the endorsement of this party each pledging for support of ranked choice of voting if reelected, Lamont said he would propose legislation to authorize rank choice voting for state races and give municipalities the option in local elections. What does it mean for the state to have both these gubernatorial candidates in favor of rank choice?

Well, I think it sounds like it's a united front, at least on that issue. So that's a good thing. I think that they both sound like they're, they're encouraged they they want voters to participate and that's a good sign for democracy.

Anything else to add there about rank choice I know Lamont saying that he would introduce possibly legislation and you mentioned if this ballot referendum goes through for the early voting, it would take a little while. So same thing with rank choice. How long could it be until voters would actually see that reflected on their ballots?

I'm not really sure but it would be there would be a learning curve. We were also in a position right now where our voting machines are rather old or over 20 years old. So we want to consider that when we would be purchasing new equipment which should happen in the next few years. Just because our equipment is getting older, it needs to be updated. But I think that all of those things would have to take into account early voting, rank choice voting, and certainly the other thing that we've been pushing for for a while now no excuse absentee ballots, so all of those factors would have to come into play if we were to, once we do that state does think about purchasing new machines. So all of that is is going to be a heavy lift for our new Secretary of State whoever they are.

Well, thank you again for taking the time to speak with us this morning, Laura.

You're welcome. Glad to be here. And come