

Rumors have been going around the internet about the pitfalls of straight ticket voting. Here are the facts:

### WHAT IS STRAIGHT-TICKET VOTING?

Voters in some states can choose to vote for a political party's entire slate of candidates. This is called **straight-ticket voting** or **straight-party voting**.

Straight-ticket or straight-party voting is usually one of the first options on the ballot. It allows a voter to mark or cast a single vote that registers all candidates on the ballot from that party.

Straight-ticket voting is never required.

### WHAT STATES OFFER STRAIGHT-TICKET VOTING?

The rules for casting and counting straight-ticket ballots vary from state to state. Fifteen (15) offer straight-ticket voting in the November 4, 2008 election. These states are:

**Alabama**

**Indiana**

**Iowa**

**Kentucky**

**Michigan**

**New Mexico**

**North Carolina** – in all races **EXCEPT**  
for presidential electors

**Oklahoma**

**Pennsylvania**

**Rhode Island**

**South Carolina**

**Texas**

**Utah**

**West Virginia**

**Wisconsin**

### HOW ARE STRAIGHT-TICKET BALLOTS COUNTED?

The procedures for casting and counting straight-ticket voting vary from state to state.

In most states with straight-ticket voting, choosing the straight-party option counts all *partisan* offices on the ballot. Voting the straight-ticket option does not cast a vote in races for *nonpartisan* offices or for referenda and other ballot measures. **In North Carolina**, choosing a straight-party ticket **DOES NOT** include the presidential candidate. A North Carolina voter must cast a separate vote for president for his or her vote to count.

Generally, when a voter selects straight-ticket and also votes for a candidate in another party for a particular office, the vote for the specific candidate will be counted and the straight-ticket vote will not be counted. When a straight-ticket voter also votes for a candidate in the same party for a specific race, some states will count the specific vote while other states will cancel the vote as an over-vote.

## **CAN YOU VOTE STRAIGHT-TICKET AND ALSO VOTE FOR A CANDIDATE OF ANOTHER PARTY FOR A PARTICULAR OFFICE?**

Yes. In most states, a voter who votes a straight-ticket can “split” his or her vote and also vote for a candidate in another party for a particular office. In these situations, marking or writing in the name of a specific candidate will cancel out the straight-party vote and count the vote for the individual candidate.

For offices where there are multiple vacancies, a person who votes straight-party is casting only one vote when more than one vote is permitted. In some states, the voter can vote straight party and also cast separate votes for additional candidates up to the total number of vacancies for that office. If the number of votes cast exceeds the total number of vacancies for the office, the state may treat the vote as an over-count or may count only the separately cast votes.

## **WHAT IS THE EFFECT OF STRAIGHT-PARTY VOTING ON NONPARTISAN RACES AND BALLOT MEASURES?**

Ballots often include races for nonpartisan offices as well as special ballot measures. A voter who *only* votes straight-party is not casting a vote in the nonpartisan elections or on the ballot measures. To have his or her votes count, the voter must independently vote in each nonpartisan race and on each ballot measure.

## **IS STRAIGHT-TICKET VOTING SAFE?**

Straight-ticket can be confusing and you may miss important non-partisan races or important issues. The ballots in many counties do not provide instructions about the straight-ticket option. At least one study found that straight-ticket voting results both in “undervoting” (where the voter makes no selection) and “overvoting” (where the voter selects too many candidates). <http://www.umsl.edu/~kimballd/kspp02.pdf> Some organizations have also raised concerns that straight-ticket votes were not counted accurately in past elections.

## **CONCLUSION**

Straight-ticket or straight-party voting may appear quick and easy, but it can be confusing and you may miss important races and issues. Remember a voter can always decline to use the straight-ticket option and cast separate votes for each office and ballot measure.

## **QUESTIONS? PROBLEMS?**

**Call the Election Protection Hotline at 1-866-OUR-VOTE.**