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The Second Choice Vote

A Detailed Explanation From Okeechobee News

By Judge J. E. Lovvorn

About once in every two years most of us devote enough time and study to the Bryan Primary Law to understand the workings of the Second Choice Vote, more or less; then we are apt to forget all about it till another campaign year rolls around, then find we have to learn it all over again.

The trouble with many voters is that they never get the principle of the thing quite clear enough in their minds to remove all doubt and suspicion until after the primary is over, and they begin to see how second choice votes count up and wish they had taken the trouble to mark a second choice, and then and there they resolve that never again will they overlook a duty so plain. But those good intentions go to keep company with their follows for paving purposes for another two years.

Let me say at the very outset, for the benefit of those who may have some degree of confidence in my judgment as well as my integrity and my impartial viewpoint, A Second Choice is just exactly what its name implies, and it is just as much the right and the duty of the voter to mark it as it is to mark a first choice. There is absolutely no possibility of your second choice vote's being used to defeat your first choice; neither is it possible for any candidate to be elected by second choice votes unless he receives enough first choice votes to make him one of the two highest men.

Let us look into the matter a little with open minds and see if we cannot make such analysis of the principles involved as will make the whole matter clear to our understanding once for all time.

Sir William Blackstone, the great commentator on the Laws of England, lays down this formula to enable one to intelligently interpret any law: "Keep constantly in Mind Three Things: (1) The Old Law, (2) The Evil of the Old Law, and (3) The Remedy for the Correction of That Evil."

The Two Primary Plan

Let us do that in this case.

Before the adoption of the second Primary Law with its second choice votes, Florida had a Double-Primary law which provided for the holding of a Second Primary Election to be held after the first one is over, and a new campaign had be waged wherein the two highest candidates for each office would run the race over, and permit those voters who had squandered a vote on one of the low men to go to the second primary and express a preference between the two highest men who rally only the second choice of the supporters of the low men eliminated by the first primary.

Of course, this applied only to races with more than two candidates, and to cases where no man got a clear majority of all the votes cast for that office. But the second primary must be held, regardless of the expense and trouble, and the worst feature about it, the supporters of the two highest men in the first primary and vote again for their respective favorites to keep up their strength because the final result hinged entirely upon the vote cast for each candidate in the second primary.

Now, let us read that over again and make sure we understand the old Two-Primary Plan. Keeping constantly in mind the Old Law, and The Evil will help us to understand the remedy and how to apply it.

Then just imagine how you would feel after you had voted for your favorite candidate (your first choice) in the first primary, and found him come out in the count as one of the low men, as many good men do; and then—Suppose they refused to allow you to vote in the second primary notwithstanding the fact that you are qualified in every way. Wouldn't you feel keenly disappointed to find yourself disfranchised in this way? Well, that is precisely the same effect as which you fail to mark a second choice under the present law where there are more than two candidates for a given office.

Senator Bryan, the author of the present law, analized the old Two-Primary Law, and figured it out as a useless and expense to hold a Second Primary and require every voter to go back to the polls and vote all over again just because the supporters of some "also ran" had no opportunity in the first primary to mark a second choice as between the two leading candidates, neither of whom was his first choice. Now, that such voters have the opportunity to express such a preference, should we go back to the two-primary plan just because some of them are too indifferent to mark a second choice.

The Present Law

The new law was framed so that each voter may express his second choice at the same time and on the same ballot as his first choice; and it provides that the second choice shall be counted only in such case as used to call for a second primary and even then to count only as he intend it, and, theoretically the final result is the same as if two separate primaries had been held.

You will observe that we have been dealing chiefly with the Old Law and the Evil, but in this way the Remedy is automatically though gradually revealing itself with very little mental effort on our part. We have only to keep in mind that the second choice is only your vote in the "Second Primary" which is now held on the same day and on the same ballot and in every way completely merged into the first primary, Provided you mark your second choice vote, otherwise you automatically disfranchise yourself in the second primary by your negligence and indifference.

Let us assume a hypothetical case to help us unfold the workings: John Smith, Bill Jones, Bob Brown and Henry Johnson are candidates for Coronor of this county with 1,000 first choice votes to be cast. (Since there are no such office to be filled, we can deal with the problem impartially and without fear of being misunderstood.) John Smith receives 400 first choice votes, Bill Jones 300 first choice votes, Bob Brown 200 first choice votes, Henry Johnson 100 first choice votes. It is clear that no man has received a majority of all the votes cast for Coroner, thence, under the old law Brown and Johnson, the two low men, must be eliminated and Smith and Jones must run it over in a second primary, and see how the friends and supporters of Brown and Johnson will vote as between Smith and Jones, the two high men.

Second Primary in Effect

But, under the new law we have already held the "Second Primary" by marking Second Choice votes. So, we proceed to count the second choice votes of the Brown and Johnson supporters only to find out who would be elected Coroner, theoretically, if a second primary were held. Let us assume that we find that 250 of these 300 Brown and Johnson supporters have marked Bill Jones as second choice, while only 50 have marked John Smith as second choice. This indicates quite clearly that had a second primary been held, and each leading candidates friends remained loyal, the final vote would show: Smith 450 votes, and Jones 500 votes, and so Jones would be elected Coroner, notwithstanding Smith received 100 more first choice votes.

We will now assume a different result in order to preserve the relative dignity of first and second choice votes: Suppose that only 200 of these Brown and Johnson supporters had marked Bill Jones as second choice while the remaining 100 had marked John Smith as second choice. These added to their first choice votes would give each man a total of 500 votes which would be a tie in the aggregate number of votes received, and would at first appear to call for a second primary anyway. But the law is so nearly perfect that it recognies that John Smith now has the strongest claim to the office of Coroner, because he had an advantage in first choice votes which are regarded as superior in dignity to second choice votes only when the aggregate votes makes a tie.

In order to consider another good use of the second choice votes, we will assume a voter whose first choice for Coroner is Johnson; yet this voter can see that the real contest appears to be between Smith and Jones, and as between them he prefers Jones. Here he has a chance to compliment his friend Johnson with his first choice vote and still mark Bill Jones as second choice and make it count just as effectively for him as though it had been a first choice vote, unless it should happen to make a tie in which case it would not have the same dignity as a first class vote as explained above. Right here it should be remarked that if Johnsons friends are habitually used to ignoring the second choice vote privilege, and this habit is well known to the politicians who are supporting John Smith, then the temptation is strong for them to induce Henry Johnson into the race for the sole purpose of nullifing the votes of his friends which would otherwise go to Bill Jones. A failure to vote a second choice may be equivalent to a failure to vote at all; and may be compared to cutting a stick for your political opponent to whack you on your political head. It is not only safe to mark a second choice, but it may be unsafe not to do so.

A Deciding Factor

In the race for Governor are five candidates, and it is quite likely that the race may be settled by second choice votes. Moreover, it may be settled by those voters who, though really preferring one of the weaker men, still have the vision to identify the two strongest men, and cast second choice for that one of them who is preferable, or least objectionable, if you prefer to put it that way. To bring the matter nearer home, there are three races in this county with four candidates in each, and it is certain some of these, perhaps all, will be settled by second choice votes. These candidates have a right to the full voting strength of their supporters, and they expect it either by first choice or second choice votes. Let me repeat: You cannot possible injure your first choice by marking a second; neither can you help your first choice by omitting to mark a second.

I realize that this article is already too long; but so is ten years too long for an electorate of average intelligence to remain in doubt and suspicion about so vital a thing as their suffrage. I want to keep on until I have made out the case for the second choice vote, which I personally regard as one of the most advanced pieces of election machinery of which any state can boast. It is high time our voters, women as well as men, took an hour off to study and understand this fundamental function of their franchise, and rise above that old hobgoblin scare about there being some deep laid mystery or sinister trick attached to the marking of a second choice.

Many Lose Their Man

Many a man has caused the defeat of his own first choice candidate by talking against the practice of voting a second choice; thus causing other voters to withhold their own second choice votes which would otherwise have gone to his friend and elected him. Right here, I cannot say it plainly without saying it frankly and bluntly: When a candidate or his workers makes the immodest request that you mark a first choice vote for him and a second choice for nobody, he may think himself very shrewd, while you may think him very greedy; but—you are both mistaken; he is only very ignorant. Now remember that old adage: "None of us know anything except what we learn, and only the small part of that which we remember"; and another to the same purpose: "It is no shame to BE ignorant; but is a shame only to REMAIN ignorant."

Our trouble with the second choice voting is that it comes up spasmodically and passes on for such a long enterval that we do not devote enough time to a study of the underlying principles involved to carry it in our minds through the long period of enforced inactivity until another political campaign gets under way. For instance, I once harbored the hallucination that I understood the Bryan Primary Law, but since I started to write this article I have observed some features of it that I had so completely forgotten that I cannot even recall that I ever knew them before. So, there's some hope for all of us yet.

"He who knows and knows he knows;
He is wise, follow him.
He who knows and knows not he knows;
He is asleep, wake him;
He who knows not and knows he knows not;
He is a child, teach him;
He who knows not, and knows not he knows not;
He is a—politician, shun him."

Adapted from the Arabian Proverb.

Clearwater Notes

(Special to The Tribune)

CLEARWATER, May 30.—Frank Shank, former deputy clerk of the circuit court, has sold his property at the intersection of Turner street and Bay avenue to Harvey Martin. The purchaser has indicated his intention of improving the residence and also erecting an apartment house on the corner lot.

Mr. and Mrs. Shank and daughter moved to St. Petersburg some months ago, Mr. Shank being connected with the Suwanee hotel.

A. E. Goethe has sold his residence at the corner of Vine avenue and Jones street to Mr. and Mrs. J. D. Beckett who will make it their home.

Mrs. W. I. Griffin of the Grey Moss Inn left Thursday for Jacksonville where she will take passage on a Clyde line steamship for New York city, to spend a month's vacation.

Miss Bernice Hudson, clerk in the city water department has returned from Hudson, where she spent a week with her parents.

Mrs. Josephine Bowman will leave Thursday evening for New York city. She intends to spend a portion of the summer in the vicinity of the metropolis.

Mr. and Mrs. Vane Randell and Capt. Theodore Randell, father of Mr. Randell have gone to St. Petersburg after visiting Mr. and Mrs. B. J. Randell. They arrived in the city on Monday from Madison.

Herbert I. Everett, who has been on the sales force of Evan H. Jones realty office during the winter is now with Yearwood & Wadford, on South Fort Harrison avenue at Park street.

Mr. and Mrs. T. P. White have returned to their home in St. Petersburg after a delightful visit of some days with Mr. and Mrs. J. D. Beckett.

J. A. White is a patient at the Plant hospital where he has undergone one operation and will have another. Neither of them are considered serious.

M. C. Williford has arrived in the city from Atlanta to accept a position with the White Way drug store, the place left open by the resignation of Harry Jerger who will be with Darwin Elliott in the new pharmacy to be opened in the Scranton Arcade on South Garden avenue.

Judge E. N. Ingram, G. D. Smith, B. O. Howard and Romey Lane of Pineville, Ky., arrived in Clearwater Wednesday. They are on a prospecting trip in Florida and called upon their old friend Assistant Engineer Evans in the county engineer's office at the court house.

S. D. Harris was in the city Wednesday from St. Petersburg, incidentally attending the trial of liquor law violators in the county court.

Capt. S. S. Sanders of Dunedin was among the many citizens of the northern part of the county who spent Wednesday in the court room interested listeners at county court.

Eldon McMullen returned home Tuesday evening from Gainesville, where he has been attending the University of Florida. Mr. McMullen will soon leave for Tennessee, where he will be member of an orchestra at a large summer hotel.

Walter Blair has returned from the east coast, where he represents the Skinner Machinery company, for a visit to his family.

Mrs. James Martin of Plant Park is entertaining her sister, Miss Mary Lamb of Palmetto, who is here for a few days before leaving for Arkansas to spend the summer.

Miss Charlie Mae Carter, teacher at the high school, will go to Richland, Ga., for her vacation.

Miss Margaret Aunspough drove to Safety HarborWednesday to visit her sister, Mrs. George McElven.

Jame Booth was among the St. Petersburg people seen on the streets of Clearwater Wednesday.

INVERNESS

INVERNESS, May 31—Miss Miriam Connor arrived Thursday from Tallahassee where she graduated from the State College Wednesday.

Mrs. E. W. Herron and little daughter Vinnette returned Monday from a three weeks stay in Jacksonville.

Miss Mamie Watson has gone to Perry where she will visit relatives for some time.

Miss Andrey Johnson is at home for the summer vacation of the State College in Tallahassee.

Bascom King has returned home for the summer from David Lipscomb College, Nashville, Tenn.

Miss Rozelle Watson came up from Lakeland Sunday for a short visit with Mrs. G. J. Boswell.

Miss Ida Lee Love has returned from Alachua and resumed her duties in the post office.

J. C. Whitaker is at home much much improved in health a refta syat of some weeks in a hospital in Waycross, Ga.

Mrs. A. S. King and son Herrick have returned from Nashville, Tenn., where they spent several months.

Carwin Whitaker is at home for summer vacation from Tifton, Ga., where he attended school the past term.

Mrs. H. V. Jones of Lakeland was a recent guest of Mrs. J. A. Carlson.

Mrs. J. C. Johnson has returned from a pleasant visit with her daughter, Mrs. Baker, of Dunellon.

Misses Helen and Idella Wells arrived this week from Kentucky to spend the summer with their parents, Judge and Mrs. J. A. Wells.

A. W. Lamar, jr., has arrived from Illinois to visit his parents, Dr. and Mrs. A. W. Lamar. Mr. Lamar expects to locate in Florida.

W. L. Lamar of Daytona, well known in newspaper circles of Florida, is a guest of his parents, Dr. and Mrs. A. W. Lamar.

Mrs. Mobley has returned to Florence, S. C., after a pleasant stay of several months with her daughter, Mrs. J. Frank Crawford.

URGE EXMINATIONS ONCE YER TO AID IN PRESERING HEALTH

CHICAGO, M 31.—To encourage the preservatio of health and increase the avego length of life among the 2100 workers of the Pennsylvania ilroad, a general notice has. beorposted by officials of that compan urging every employee to undert a complete physical examination nce a year—at the expense of the company.

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