

THE JOURNAL RECORD

Gavel to Gavel: Open primaries for Oklahoma

By: [Robert McCampbell](#) // GableGotwals // October 22, 2025



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Beginning October 29, 2025, Oklahomans will have an opportunity to sign a petition to allow a vote on [open primaries](#). State Question 836 seeks to replace Oklahoma's closed, exclusionary primary system with an "open primary" system. Under [SQ 836](#), all candidates for political office would appear on the same primary ballot, regardless of party affiliation, and ballots would include each candidate's party of registration or independent status. All registered voters would be able to vote in the primary, regardless of party affiliation, and the top two candidates would advance to the general election, regardless of party affiliation.

SQ 836 is a grass roots, nonpartisan initiative in which the proponents are a Republican, a Democrat, and an independent.

Nonpartisan open primaries are not revolutionary. Our state currently uses that system in municipal [elections](#), and SQ 836 would merely expand the system already familiar to voters. Currently, the nonpartisan, open primary system for legislative and executive offices is being successfully used in five states.

Under SQ 836, elections would be decided by Oklahoma voters. Every voter, including the 488,000 registered independents, would have a right to vote in all elections. Further, a candidate could not win an office without winning a majority of votes in the general election, when most Oklahomans vote.

Reform is necessary. Oklahoma ranked 50th in [voter turnout](#) in 2020 and 49th in 2024. Approximately 86% of federal, state, and county offices in Oklahoma did not have candidates from both major parties.

The [Oklahoma Supreme Court](#) recently approved SQ 836 to proceed with gathering signatures for the petition. The Court explained, "Proponents' asserted interests in allowing [independent voters](#) to participate, in electing the most popular candidates, in gaining efficiency, in increasing voter participation and turnout, in providing voters with greater choice, and in promoting fairness is sufficient to pass constitutional muster."

The Secretary of State set the 90-day period to collect signatures to start on October 29, 2025. A total of at least 172,993 signatures is necessary to get SQ 836 on the ballot in 2026 when Oklahoma voters can determine if SQ 836 will be adopted.

All registered voters in our state should have the right to vote in primary elections.

Robert McCampbell is a shareholder at GableGotwals Law Firm and represents the proponents of SQ 836.

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