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Secretary of State Alex Padilla Statement on California Presidential Primary and Vote Count Process

SACRAMENTO, CA – Secretary of State Alex Padilla issued the following statement on California’s March 3, 2020 Presidential Primary Election and the vote counting process to expect.

“Californians should be assured that elections officials across the state work diligently to ensure an accurate and secure vote count,” Secretary of State Alex Padilla said. “All aspects of every election — from the printing and mailing to the counting of ballots — is administered by professional elections officials, not political parties.”

“For many years, California has instituted national best practices to maintain the integrity of our elections. State law requires voting systems be tested and certified before they can be used in California elections; voting systems are prohibited from being connected to the internet; and all votes must be cast on a paper ballot or have a voter verified paper audit trail. County elections officials are required to conduct logic and accuracy testing of voting equipment prior to every election, and audits after every election to ensure the accuracy and integrity of election results.”

“Voter accessibility is taken as seriously as election security. Voters have more options than ever before for casting their ballot, as voting-by-mail and in-person early voting opportunities have expanded. And to ensure the voting rights of all eligible citizens, we maintain important safety nets, including ‘Same-Day’ voter registration and provisional ballots.

“As California’s Chief Elections Officer, my ultimate responsibility is to the voters. Every voter deserves to know that their vote is counted and counted accurately. It may take California a little longer than other states to certify election results, but we prefer to take the time to get the vote count right.”

What are the first results we will be seeing on Election Night?

The first election results are typically ballots received before Election Day. County elections officials may begin opening vote-by-mail ballot envelopes up to ten business days before Election Day, but those results cannot be accessed or shared with the public until all polls close on Election Day.

Why do some counties show no precincts have reported, yet some votes have been counted?

Many county elections officials choose to tally and report these early voted ballots before results come in from precincts, which are sometimes far away from county headquarters. Early voted

ballots simply appear as raw vote totals because, in this initial stage, the ballots are not attributed to individual precincts.

Why have some counties not reported any results immediately after the polls close?

Each of the 58 county elections offices processes ballots differently, and the distances poll workers must travel from polling places to county offices vary greatly. State law requires county elections officials to send their first batch of results to the Secretary of State's office no more than two hours after they begin tallying votes after polls close on Election Day. County elections officials continue to report results periodically on Election Night until all precinct vote totals have been reported. County elections officials will continue to count ballots up to 30 days after Election Day.

When are vote-by-mail ballots counted?

Vote-by-mail ballots that are received by county elections officials before Election Day are typically counted on Election Day. Many more vote-by-mail ballots are dropped off at polling places, drop box locations, or arrive at county elections offices on Election Day. State law requires that vote-by-mail ballots postmarked on or before Election Day and received by county elections officials no later than 3 days after Election Day must be processed. The third day after this election is Friday, March 6. Depending on the volume of these types of ballots, it takes up to 30 days for county elections officials to verify voter records and determine if ballots have been cast by eligible voters. The frequency of updated results will vary based on the size of each county and the process each local elections office uses to tally and report votes.

How and when are provisional ballots counted?

In California, provisional ballots serve as a fail-safe method of ensuring all voters who show up to the polls can cast a ballot.

All provisional ballots are carefully checked by county elections officials to confirm that the person who voted provisionally is both registered and that they did not cast a ballot by mail or at another polling location on Election Day. Due to the additional human review and verification needed for provisional ballots, they are typically counted after Election Day and vote-by-mail ballots.

When will the vote counting period end and election be certified?

Election results will change throughout the canvass period as vote-by-mail ballots, provisional ballots, and other ballots are processed. Depending on the volume of these types of ballots, it may take up to 30 days for county elections officials to verify voter records and determine if ballots have been cast by eligible voters. The frequency of updated results will vary based on the size of each county and the process each county elections office uses to tally and report votes. County elections officials must report their final results to the Secretary of State by April 3. The Secretary of State will certify the results to the Governor by April 10, 2020.

