

Precinct Committeeperson

If you want to be a full member of the County Democratic Executive Committee (the DEC), to be able to fully vote and have full opportunity of holding office in the Party, you must run for election in your precinct on the August 30, 2016 ballot by completing form DS-DE 24C, Candidate Oath for **Precinct Committeemen and Committeewomen** <http://dos.myflorida.com/elections/forms-publications/forms/committee-person-forms/> , have it properly notarized, and physically turn in the original notarized Oath to the County Supervisor of Elections by the deadline date (sometime in June) of the general election year.

A DEC may fill vacant precinct committee positions by appointment.

There is no filing fee and no other campaign reports are required. You can contribute money towards asking your neighbors in your precinct to vote for you on the primary ballot, where your name will appear. You don't have to keep track of your expenses, if any, and you don't have to report. You may or may not have an opponent. This election occurs once every four years. If you win with a plurality (there are no runoffs, and ties have been handled with a coin toss) then you will be a Committeewoman or Committeeman (as far as I know, a person's gender is that which you say you are). You will be a member of the County Executive Committee which has bylaws and operates within the Florida Democratic Party bylaws.

There may be one Committeewoman and one Committeeman per precinct except for precincts with 1001 or more registered Democrats, which may have up to two men and two women. Between four year intervals, you can apply for appointment to a vacant position in a precinct or to an at-large position, which appointment is by the Democratic Executive Committee, with a screening process which is sometimes slow.

Deadwood Need Not Apply

Beyond this, you can be a volunteer at any time with the Party or with candidates. You can also contribute money to the Party or to candidates, which is also very appreciated. The most important thing is that the Broward Democratic Party (the DEC) needs volunteers not executives. If you like to let others do the work, you don't have to apply. If you are recruiting others to join the Party as Committeepersons, please make sure they are active and seriously committed to volunteer to get out the vote for Democrats by knocking on doors and making phone calls, registering voters, and doing other work to elect Democrats.

What are the 7 Duties of Committeepersons?

Neither Florida nor Broward Democratic bylaws define the duties, other than to be and remain a Democrat (there is also a loyalty oath required at swearing-in which is in December), and you must not support any non-Democratic opponents of Democrats (except, if you wish, in judicial races), and you must show up for regular meetings of the Party.

Lacking an official statement of duties, I have researched Committeepersons around the United States to describe better the duties, which are:

- be a good member of the community

- spread the word of the Democratic Party
- help register Democrats
- help shape the issues for the Democratic Party
- choose candidates to best represent the issues and the people
- help Democratic candidates get elected
- assist your neighbors of all political parties to reach their elected officials and participate fully in a healthy, conscientious, democratically representative process in accord with the Constitutions and other laws of the land

In understanding the role of Committeepersons, it is important to look at the Florida and U.S. national political systems in a larger context. In Florida the Precinct is the basic unit of geopolitical organization and there is usually up to one Democratic Committeewoman and one Democratic Committeeman in each precinct. In many large cities of America they may be called Wards and there is sometimes also even in Florida a two-tiered level of local political organization.

Parallel Political Organizations, Some Good, Some Bad

For the most part, the Democratic Party has healthy, strong relationships with issues organizations involving organized labor, the environment, minority communities, and education. We also have billionaires who like our candidates and issues, we have small business people who knock on doors with us, and we have retired members of the military services who make phone calls, and we have inventors who register voters, and we also have volunteers who are anthropologists and agronomists, zoologists and (probably) Zamboni drivers.

Unfortunately, due to the nature of power, in times when a political party is very entrenched it can act as a shadow government (“political machine”), and the Ward Committeepersons, Precinct Captains, whatever they are called, may be part of a patronage system in which there is bartering of power and favors. In contrast to the historical patronage of Party-appointed jobs historically in some big cities, there can also be another kind of shadow government involving outsourcing of government contracts to the friends of elected officials and to clients of lobbyists who got the elected officials elected. In modern Florida the growth of the lobbyist industry and professional campaign managers has shaped the political landscape, so that political parties are less powerful or have shifted their roles, and Precinct Committeepersons have a less defined role than in the older urban centers of the US. Democrats nationally and historically had steered more goodies through patronage, especially when organized labor was strong, while Republicans have traditionally steered candy through outsourcing projects to millionaires and budget-breaking tax-cuts to billionaires.

Lobbyists and campaign consultants play an important and valuable role in the political process, but sometimes when these relationships are too close and too close to elected officials, the result is a toxic brew of bad government, insider dealing, and the only way of stopping it is for folks to go to prison.

We have laws on these things because corruption of politics is disgusting. Do you remember President Richard Nixon famously saying for the tape, “it would be wrong” in planning a cover-up? Seemingly harmless political favors, if carried too far, can foster a system of exclusion and discrimination. Fortunately corruption in politics is eventually self-correcting, and hopefully the Democratic Party will remain above corruption and true to its purpose to helping the people. Ideally a healthy political party

will find ways of engaging its main volunteers in social activities that are a legal, ethical, and intangible reward for volunteerism.

The Vaccine Against Corrupt Politics is Called "Grass Roots"

Like any organization, a church, a bowling club, or a political party must provide something for their members. Food, music, humor, idealism, and fellowship are good kinds of glue to hold an organization together. I find that frequently certain people love working with certain other people and make great teams both because they are all dedicated but also because they like being with each other and having fun on the campaign trail. For others, the excitement of getting honest people elected is reward enough for volunteering to the Democratic Party.

The Democratic Party Organization

Committeemen and Committeewomen are voting members of their County Executive Committee. The Democratic Executive Committee is often dubbed the DEC. Republicans also have a County Executive Committee, the REC. The County Executive Committee is part of a larger state organization. Florida State Statutes set up a process for the election of Executive Committee people, by a direct vote of the people in their precinct. The Bylaws of the Florida Democratic Party go into more detail on the relationship of the County Executive Committee and the state, and more detail on the election of Committeepersons in their precincts and their appointment at-large.

The Bylaws of the County Democratic Party are largely based on the Florida Democratic bylaws, but also go into detail on the Area Leader organization which is how precincts are loosely organized within the Management Committee which includes the County Officers (Chair, Vice Chairs, Secretaries, Treasurer, and State Committeewoman and State Committeeman).

In Florida, the main difference in the organization of the Democratic Party Executive Committee from the Republican Party Executive Committees is that the Democratic State Committeepersons are elected by the Precinct Committeepersons, that is the members of the County Democratic Executive Committee, whereas Republicans elect their State Committeepersons by a direct vote of the registered Republican voters at the polls. So if you think that direct elections are more Democratic, that distinction goes to the Republicans.

Back to the Party Elections

Every four years, in the partisan primary which by law will be held hereafter in August during the year of the national presidential election, there is an election of Committeemen and Committeewomen in their precincts. Candidates for Committeeperson who are opposed will be on the ballot both at their polling places and in the early and absentee ballots. As with partisan primaries in general, mostly diehard Democrats will be voting, therefore the tendency is for opponents to show what good they are for the Party (the "Real Dems") and what bad Democrats their opponents are, but hopefully after the election the victors and the fallen will realize that was all fluff and will still be able to have a beer together.

In December on a date and location set by the Chair, there will be an organizing meeting in which a Chair and other officers are elected by nominations from the floor. Any Committeeman or Committeewoman who is elected (or who was elected unopposed and was therefore not on the ballot) can vote as well as run for the County Officer positions. Except, the First Vice Chair must be of the

opposite gender as the Chair. Again, I'm assuming people pick their gender and I'm not sure what happens when a man is elected to be Committeewoman and vice versa, which occasionally occurs.

Typically in the quadrennial Party officer election, there will be partial or complete slates, there will be a certain amount of friction and disinformation by opposing camps, and hopefully no lawsuits.

Persons who were appointed including at-large appointments have no vote in the organizing meeting and might even pleausurably be unable run for Chair or other Officer position. Except Democratic members of the Florida House and Florida Senate whose districts include the County are automatic members at-large, and have one vote each.

If you were a visitor from Mars or even one of the signers of the U.S. Constitution (which does not mention political parties), you might think the whole process of Party organization as bizarre, even toxic, however it is usually an inevitable process of democracy. And as bad as democracy is—what a mess it is—democracy is the best and only kind of government for a free people.

So do join the Democratic Party with smile and remember how good politics moves a nation forward to help all the people and bad politics starts horrible wars and destroys economies. Think positive! You will make a good difference!