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Editorial: Clear the ballot clutter and save tax money, too

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There's no compelling reason why party central committee contests should clutter California ballots – and on the public's dime at that.

All those races confuse voters, who have no clue who the candidates are and often don't bother to vote in them. They add to the cost of running elections when counties are scrimping and saving to preserve essential services.

County election officials are well justified in pushing to get these offices off local primary ballots.

The savings statewide could reach \$7.5 million per primary. Jill LaVine, Sacramento County's registrar of voters, says it costs her county about \$300,000 to certify the party candidates and count the votes. Last June, they comprised about one-third of all candidates on Sacramento's ballot.

Party central committee seats have been on primary ballots since at least 1939. But these are not public elected offices; instead they are internal governing boards for the Democratic, Republican and other political parties.

"It's as if we were running the Kiwanis Club election," San Diego County Registrar of Voters Deborah Seiler told The Bee's Loretta Kalb. Not quite, but the parties should handle – and pay for – choosing their own leaders, in caucuses or by whatever method they want.

The California Association of Clerks and Election Officials is lobbying the Legislature to make the change in time for the June 2012 primary, when the new top-two election system will only make the problem worse.

This issue is all teed up for some enterprising legislator who wants to turn all that talk about looking out for taxpayers into real action.

Who will step forward and successfully carry the bill? Voters and taxpayers are waiting.

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