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Was The Second Primary Worth It?

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Well, was it worth it?

Was yesterday's primary runoff election deserving of the time, effort and taxpayers' dollars funneled into it?

The election was the second of two prima-

ries leading up to the Nov. 2 general election. It came just 21 days after the first primary. And the ballot carried only 18 names in just nine contested races.

Lured to the polls yesterday were just 50,323 voters (unofficially), a measly 14 per cent of Pinellas County's registered electorate.

Despite the meager turnout, it was a complete election effort and it cost taxpayers a minimum of \$120,000 or at least \$2.38 for each vote cast. (The cost figures are based on the number of voters who went to the polls and don't include 2,068 absentee ballots.)

So was it worth it?

Many Pinellas party leaders, election officials and state lawmakers were saying "No" this morning.

They were noting, as many former northern residents know, that other states elect public officers with a single primary followed by a general election and Florida might save money by doing the same.

Florida law requires a runoff when no can-

Florida law requires a runoff when no candidate running for office gets a majority of the votes cast for that office in the first primary. A majority is 50 per cent plus one.

In Pinellas, however, all but one of the candidates who won the first primary but were forced into a runoff won in the second round. Incumbent State Rep. George Hieber, R-Dist. 58, placed second Sept. 7 only to win yesterday. He defeated Peter J. Caroline and, ironically, one of Hieber's proposals as a legislator was to eliminate the runoff system.

The two-primary system is generally regarded as a holdover from days when Democrats dominated politics in Florida and fielded several candidates for public office. The runoff was instituted to prevent a "sleeper" or "dark-horse" candidate from getting a small percentage of the vote spread over a number of candidates and emerging as the winner with a simple plurality.

In such situations, the results of the primary elections were tantamount to the general. Because of the party's dominance, the Democratic primary victor was the customary winner in the general.

But in counties like Pinellas, where the two parties have achieved near balance in numbers of registered voters, officials questioned the necessity of the second primary.

Both county party chairmen, Democrat

Howard Lawrence and Republican Ray Aden, said they felt the second primary could be eliminated. Disgusted at yesterday's poor voter turnout, the chairmen said second primaries have a history of not attracting voter interest.

Suggesting elimination of the second primary might promote the two-party system by working to strengthen the minority party, State Rep. S. Curtis Kiser, R-Dunedin, and chairman of the Pinellas legislative delegation, said a single primary might improve politics in Democratic-dominated north Florida, for example.

Agreeing it is difficult to justify the expense of a second primary, Kiser said, however, that an attempt to change the primary election law in the Legislature would not carry much promise in a House and Senate which are overwhelmingly Democratic.

Also calling for an end to the second primary was Pinellas Elections Supervisor Jeanne Khoyi Nelson, who stressed the expense of a countywide election. There have been four this year.

Favoring a second primary, though, was State Sen. Richard Deeb, who said he fears a single primary could be manipulated by a candidate clever enough to spread out his opposition. He said it would be possible for a candidate to win a single primary over a number of candidates and still not be his party's true choice as nominee.