

Wolfe: Tuesday's significance in election history



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Gavel to Gavel: Why Tuesday?

On the heels of the presidential election, precisely how (if) the Electoral College works is a hot topic. Google it; there are plenty of good articles. A more pressing question is why the presidential election is always held on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November.

As it turns out, there is a reason. In 1792, having Election Day in November was beneficial because harvest would have already been completed – not an unimportant consideration in an agrarian society – and winter storms would not have yet begun.

Though communication in the 1700s was not instant like it is today – with no Internet and all – there was still a problem: Word of results in early-voting states would get out, potentially influencing later-voting states. In close elections, the states that voted last could very well determine the outcome.

This is why, several years ago, the major TV networks implemented a policy against broadcasting results from the East Coast until polls on the West Coast closed. This led to a uniform date for the presidential election, which was signed into law by Congress in 1845.

It established Election Day for all states as the Tuesday after the first Monday in November – the date already being used at the time by the state of New York.

All of this is fine, but why Tuesday? Tuesday was chosen because most people traveled by horse and buggy. Back then, farmers needed a day of travel to get to the county seat, a day to vote and a day to get back home – all without interrupting the Sabbath.

Simple math and a flow chart will tell you that left only

Tuesday and Wednesday. Wednesday was excluded, because that was the day everyone went to market and either sold or bought their corn and tofu.

Thus, Election Day falls on Tuesday, right after the first Monday in November. Of some note and disappointment to Oklahomans, Election Day is actually a civic holiday in some states. Just not here.

All of this reminds me of the words made famous by Alice Cooper during his 1970s run for president: "I'm your top prime cut of meat/I'm your choice/ I wanna be elected." All candidates should be so honest.