

CHAPTER 15

REFORMING THE PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARIES

A workable and effective plan for reforming the presidential nominating process would seek to achieve the following goals:

1. Requiring all states to hold presidential primaries rather than Iowa-style caucuses.

The advantages of presidential primaries over Iowa-style caucuses are well-known. Primaries are conducted all day long, generally from 7 A.M. to 7 or 8 P.M. Caucuses are held only at one time of day, usually at 7 P.M. in the evening. It takes about 10 or 15 minutes to vote in a primary. Attending a caucus usually requires one to two hours of time.

The biggest drawback of caucuses, however, is that, in the Democratic Party, they tend to be dominated by liberals. In the Republican Party, they tend to be dominated by conservatives.

Primaries are much more democratic and representative of majority opinion than caucuses. All 50 states should be required to conduct presidential primaries under the same state laws that govern state elections for governor and U.S. senator.

2. Shrinking the present lengthy primary calendar into a more workable period of time.

The 2008 nominating calendar for the Democratic Party began with the Iowa caucuses on February 3 and did not end until the South Dakota and Montana primaries on June 3. The 2008 primary and caucuses calendar thus stretched for more than five months, only one month short of half of a year.

It makes sense to design a shorter calendar in which party members in all 50 states can participate but which takes place in a less-extended period of time.

Ideally, the presidential primary season should be limited to 8 weeks, slightly more than one-third the length of the present 20-weeks-plus schedule.

3. Creating a nominating system that does not overly favor or overly neglect any particular state or any particular region of the country.

The present primary and caucuses system tends to favor states that vote early and ignores states that vote late. New Hampshire has long enjoyed a favorable position, and more recently so has Iowa. The situation with the Democratic Party in 2008, when the nominating process extended to all 50 states, was quite unique and not likely to be repeated very often.

Under an ideal nominating system, states voting late in the process should have as much influence as states that vote early.

Does this mean New Hampshire will have to give up its position as the first presidential primary, and Iowa will have to give up holding the first presidential caucuses? Yes. The nomination of major party candidates for the office of president of the United States is too important a process to be dominated by one state or another. New Hampshire and Iowa can be expected to resist this change, but it must be made.

4. Allowing two weeks between primary dates.

Under the present lengthy and haphazard primary and caucuses schedule, often there are as few as four days from one important primary or caucuses date to another. In 2008, for instance, Iowa held its caucuses on Thursday, January 3. Only three days later, on Tuesday, January 8, New Hampshire staged its primaries. Michigan held a primary on Tuesday, January 15, and just four days later, on Saturday, January 19, caucuses were held in Nevada and a Republican primary in South Carolina.

Such a crowded schedule is unfair to candidates and voters alike. Candidates campaign hard prior to one primary or caucuses date, then have to rush on to the next set of primaries and caucuses. No time is given to rest after an important primary or caucuses day, catch one's breath, and carefully and rationally plan campaign strategies for the next series of primaries and caucuses.

The same kind of pressure is applied to the voters. The citizens of one particular state often have little time to consider what happened on a previous primary or caucuses day before they are voting in a primary or

attending a caucus themselves.

An ideal nominating system would concentrate primaries on particular days, preferably Tuesdays for the sake of tradition, and leave at least *two weeks* before the next day of primaries takes place.

5. Mitigate One-Winner News Coverage.

The news media report the results of primaries and caucuses as if there is only one winner. Even when as many as eight or ten candidates are running for a party nomination for president, the news media will concentrate almost all news coverage on the one person who received the most votes in the particular primary or caucuses. The result is to generate overly strong momentum for the one winner of the primary or caucuses and severely downgrade the competitive chances of highly qualified candidates who finish second or third. *One-Winner News Coverage* is one of the major causes of *early closure*.

A reformed presidential nominating system should be structured so as to mitigate the tendency of the press to declare just one winner in each presidential primary.

6. Automatically eliminating losing candidates, thereby making all candidates who survive to the next "round" of primaries appear as winners.

Under the present nominating system, candidates decide for themselves when they have been defeated by another candidate. They decide for themselves when to withdraw from the race, and they often wait too long before withdrawing. An ideal nominating system would automatically eliminate the losing candidates following each set of primaries.

Those candidates who are winning delegates would move on to the next "round" of primaries. The candidates who move on would be regarded as winners by the voters and the news media, even though they might rank in some place other than first place in the delegate count. Those who "win" and move on would receive the customary bounce in

voter support and campaign contributions.

This might best be described as a *Sports Playoff System*. Losing candidates, the ones failing to win significant numbers of delegates, would be automatically eliminated. Winners would survive to play in the next round, exactly as is done in “playoff” competition in sports.

7. Requiring proportional allocation of delegates according to the percentages of the vote received in the particular state.

Under the present nominating system, a number of states have "winner-take-all" primaries in which the candidate who finishes first receives all of that particular state’s delegates. Winner-take-all primaries often enable one candidate to build a strong early lead in the delegate race, thus contributing to early closure and helping to make late-scheduled primaries *irrelevant*.

One method of spreading the nominating race over the entire primary calendar is to require that the delegates be apportioned to the candidates in the same rough percentages as the vote received in the particular state. Thus all of the more successful candidates would win some votes in each state, and this would make the race more competitive over a longer period of time.

8. Require closed presidential primaries in which only registered Republicans can vote in the Republican primary and only registered Democrats can vote in the Democratic primary.

One reason to reform and strengthen the presidential nominating system is to simultaneously strengthen the two major political parties, the Democrats and the Republicans. Allowing only registered party members to vote in a particular party's presidential primary will encourage “undeclared” or “independent” voters to register in one of the two major political parties. A salutary collateral effect will be to strengthen the role of the political parties in state elections as well as presidential primaries. Closed primaries will also prevent opposition party voters

from “crossing over” to vote for the party candidate for president they believe will be easiest to defeat in the general election in November.

SMALL STATES FIRST, LARGE STATES LAST

A *Small States First, Large States Last* reform should be applied to the presidential nominating system. This reform will concentrate the state primaries on only five dates. These five primary dates are two weeks apart. Therefore, the entire primary season should last only eight weeks.

The most important characteristic of this *Small States First, Large States Last* reform is that it concentrates the most populous states, with the largest numbers of delegate votes, on the last of the five primary days. With so many delegate votes at stake on the final day of the primary season, no candidate will be able to “lock up” a party nomination for president prior to the last primary day. Thus, voters in states voting on the last primary day will be more likely to be participating in a meaningful primary.

This *Small States First, Large States Last* reform therefore is *back-loading* the presidential nominating system with the larger-population states. Smaller and medium-sized-population states, which will be voting on the four earlier primary days, will make the “first cut.” These states will narrow the presidential field in each party from a large number of contenders until, on the final primary day, there will be just two. The larger-population states will make the “final cut,” choosing between the last two surviving candidates on the fifth and final primary.

When the *Small States First, Large States Last* reform is combined with a *Sports Playoff System*, early presidential primaries produce *multiple winners* on the first four primary days rather than just one winner. This will increase interest in the candidacies of other contending finishers, because they will automatically be advancing to the next “round” of primaries. This will strongly mitigate the *one-winner news coverage* that currently leads so swiftly to *early closure*.

Here is the *Small States First, Large States Last* calendar of presidential primaries as it would have appeared if used in the spring of 2008:

SMALL STATES FIRST - 2008**SMALL STATES FIRST; LARGE STATES LAST
PLUS A SPORTS PLAYOFF SYSTEM
OF STATE PRESIDENTIAL
PRIMARIES AND CAUCUSES****FIRST DAY - TUESDAY, APRIL 1, 2008**

STATE	DELEGATES*
DELAWARE	12
DIST. OF COL.	14
MONTANA	14
NEVADA	14
NEW HAMPSHIRE	16
NORTH DAKOTA	18
SOUTH DAKOTA	18
ALASKA	19
ARKANSAS	20
WYOMING	20
S. CAROLINA	37

TOTAL DELEGATES FIRST DAY = 202
 CUMULATIVE TOTAL = 202

NUMBER OF CANDIDATES RUNNING = UNLIMITED
 NUMBER OF CANDIDATES SURVIVING = 8

*** Delegate numbers for each state are from the Republican Party in 1996. The number of Democratic delegates for each state would be larger but in roughly the same proportions as the number of Republican delegates.**

SECOND DAY - TUESDAY, APRIL 15, 2008

STATE DELEGATES

VERMONT	12
HAWAII	14
RHODE ISLAND	16
NEW MEXICO	18
IDAHO	23
NEBRASKA	24
IOWA	25
UTAH	28
MISSISSIPPI	33
OKLAHOMA	38

TOTAL DELEGATES SECOND DAY = 231

CUMULATIVE TOTAL = 433

NUMBER OF CANDIDATES RUNNING = 8

NUMBER OF CANDIDATES SURVIVING = 6

THIRD DAY - TUESDAY, APRIL 29, 2008

STATE	DELEGATES
MAINE	15
W. VIRGINIA	18
OREGON	23
KENTUCKY	26
COLORADO	27
LOUISIANA	30
KANSAS	31
TENNESSEE	38
ARIZONA	39

TOTAL DELEGATES THIRD DAY = 247
CUMULATIVE TOTAL = 680

NUMBER OF CANDIDATES RUNNING = 6
NUMBER OF CANDIDATES SURVIVING = 4

FOURTH DAY - TUESDAY, MAY 13, 2008

<u>STATE</u>	<u>DELEGATES</u>
CONNECTICUT	27
MARYLAND	32
MINNESOTA	33
MISSOURI	36
WASHINGTON	36
WISCONSIN	36
MASS.	37
ALABAMA	40
GEORGIA	42

TOTAL DELEGATES FOURTH DAY = 319

CUMULATIVE TOTAL = 999

NUMBER OF CANDIDATES RUNNING = 4

NUMBER OF CANDIDATES SURVIVING = 2

FIFTH DAY - TUESDAY, MAY 27, 2008

STATE	DELEGATES
NEW JERSEY	48
INDIANA	52
VIRGINIA	53
MICHIGAN	57
N. CAROLINA	58
OHIO	67
ILLINOIS	69
PENN.	73
FLORIDA	98
NEW YORK	102
TEXAS	123
CALIFORNIA	165

TOTAL DELEGATES FIFTH DAY = 965

CUMULATIVE TOTAL = 1964

NUMBER OF CANDIDATES RUNNING = 2

NUMBER OF CANDIDATES NOMINATED = 1

Rules

1. All states must hold presidential *primary elections* conducted by the state under state election laws.
2. All states must hold *closed* presidential primaries. Only registered members of the particular political party can participate in that political party's presidential primary.
2. All delegates in each state must be *committed* to a particular presidential candidate.
3. All delegates in each state will be allotted to candidates in *proportion* to the percentage of the vote each candidate received in the primary election. Candidates who receive less than five percent of the vote will not be allotted any delegates.

4. The selection of presidential candidates to advance to the next round of primaries will be determined by the *total* number of delegates a candidate has won in all primaries held to date.

5. If, at the end of the fifth round of primaries and caucuses, no candidate has a majority of the total number of delegates, the nomination shall be decided at the political party *national convention*. There may not be a majority if sizeable numbers of delegates are committed to previously eliminated candidates. Delegates committed to a particular candidate in a presidential primary will be required to vote for that candidate only on the *first ballot* at the national convention.