

....the American Plan to reform presidential primaries

Every four years, Americans witness the grand spectacle of presidential elections, but each cycle primaries and caucuses are held earlier. In the 2008 cycle, most states will vote by February 5 –six months before the conventions.

To curb this free-for-all, parties have the power to implement a graduated, rotating primary schedule to give every state's voters a fair chance to meaningfully participate in presidential primaries while still promoting retail politics and a wide-ranging dialogue about the party's direction.

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AMERICAN PLAN FOR PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARIES



"The Way Democracy Will Be"

....reforming our broken primary calendar

BALANCE

America's presidential nominating process should be fairer, more inclusive and more effective. Because Iowa and New Hampshire get so much out of their self-promoted position of privilege, more and more states are beating down the door to vote early.

Front-loading a presidential primary may make sense for any one state, but collectively, the overloaded schedule effectively silences most voters. It puts a premium on early fundraising and allows front-runners to avoid the intense scrutiny they would face in a more competitive race once the real voting begins. With big states entering the early nomination fray, it becomes harder for dark horse candidates to have a fair shot at winning or injecting new ideas into what can be a remarkable vehicle for substantive debate and party-building.

Few defend the current system. Fortunately, reform is eminently achievable. Republicans nearly overhauled their nomination schedule with a strong reform proposal in 2000, and Democrats plan a major review after 2008. We could have a much better system by 2012 if parties act in the coming year.



“With scant thought given to the national interest, particular states pursuing what they fancy is in their interest are propelling the nation into a delegate selection process so compressed that it will resemble a national primary....[The American Plan] would occur over 10 two-week intervals, with the largest states coming last, or in some randomized or rotating clusters.”

George Will

THE AMERICAN PLAN

Summary:

The American Plan brings sanity and balance to a broken nomination process. Primaries and caucuses take place in 10 two-week intervals. The schedule features a gradual increase in the total population of randomly selected states and territories holding contests, starting with states collectively having eight congressional districts. The result is a fair schedule that allows parties to test retail campaigning, accommodates a diversity of candidates and prevents a rush to judgment.

How it improves elections:

The American plan is designed to begin with contests in primarily small-population states and territories, where candidates do not need tens of millions of dollars to compete. As a result, a wide field of presidential hopefuls can be competitive in the early going. A darkhorse candidate can do well in the early rounds, based more on the merit of their message than on massive amounts of money. Meanwhile, frontrunners can recover from early stumbles, and new candidates have a better chance to jump into the election if there is a perceived weakness in the field.

As the campaign proceeds, the aggregate value of contested states becomes successively larger, requiring the expenditure of larger amounts of money in order to campaign effectively. Every state would have an opportunity to be selected for a contest by the fourth round of voting. A gradual weeding-out process occurs, as less successful candidates drop out of the race. The goal is for the process to produce a clear winner in the end, but only after all voices have had a chance to be heard and all party backers to participate in choosing their nominee.

SUPPORTERS OF THE AMERICAN PLAN

There may be no single part of our political process where support for change is so widespread, including leaders of both parties, the National Association of Secretaries of State and the Carter-Baker electoral reform commission. Backers of the American Plan over the current system include:

- *The Philadelphia Inquirer*
- Young Democrats of America
- The California Democratic Party
- California Young Democrats
- Bill Brock, Former U.S. Senator and chair of Republican National Committee

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Based in Takoma Park, MD, FairVote is a leading national non-partisan, non-profit pro-democracy organization. We pursue an innovative, solution-oriented agenda that focuses on systemic change and increasing political participation.