

SENATE BILL REPORT

SJM 8022

As of January 22, 2008

Brief Description: Proposing a regional presidential primary.

Sponsors: Senators Fairley, Swecker, Pridemore, Roach, McDermott, Kline and Kohl-Welles; by request of Secretary of State.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Government Operations & Elections: 1/21/08.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS & ELECTIONS

Staff: Sharon Swanson (786-7447)

Background: The series of Presidential primary elections and caucuses is one of the first steps in the process of electing the President of the United States. The primary elections are run by state and local governments. A state primary election usually determines which candidates for president will be supported by that state at the national convention of each political party.

States vie for earlier primaries in order to claim greater influence in the nomination process, as the early primaries can act as a signal to the nation, showing which candidates are popular and giving those who perform well early on the advantage of a bandwagon effect. Candidates can ignore primaries which fall after the nomination has already been secured, and would owe less to those states politically. As a result, rather than stretching from March to July, most primaries take place in a compressed time frame in February and March.

Washington's presidential primary is scheduled for February 9, 2008.

Summary of Bill: The United States Congress, without delay, provide for a rotating regional presidential primary system in 2012.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: This is a request bill from the Secretary of State's Office. The current election process and primary schedule is crazy. As of 2000, nine states were running a primary. In 2008, the number has risen to 30. This is an irrational system. It's not healthy for the process, for the candidates, their staff, or the voters. This

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system promotes a need for more money and less contact with the individual voters. It's all about who can raise the most to spend on advertising. The nomination for President can be all but wrapped up by March. What are the candidates and the voters to do until July? A regional primary system would break the country up into four regions for the purposes of presidential primaries. Currently, February 5 is a defacto national primary. Nearly one half of the voters are not heard on that day. The current system does not promote the winning of elections based on shoe leather, rather it focuses on winning by raising the most money.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Sam Reed, Secretary of State; Megan Moreno, Office of the Secretary of State; Greg Kimsey, Washington State Association of County Auditors.