



# NASS

National Association  
of Secretaries of State

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PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARIES

## TESTIMONY BEFORE THE U.S. SENATE RULES COMMITTEE

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**Testimony of Hon. Trey Grayson, Kentucky Secretary of State  
Before the U.S. Senate Rules Committee  
Co-Chair, National Association of Secretaries of State Subcommittee on Presidential Primaries**

Chairman Feinstein and Ranking Member Bennett, I want to thank you on behalf of the members of the National Association of Secretaries of State for inviting me and my colleague, Iowa Secretary of State Michael Mauro, to testify before you today. I also want to acknowledge Senators Klobuchar, Alexander, and Lieberman for their dedication to improving the presidential nominating process. As you may know, their legislation—S.1905—closely mirrors the NASS Rotating Regional Presidential Primary/Caucus Plan, which I am here today to discuss. I plan to tell you why the 2008 calendar is a major cause for concern, what our regional primary plan is all about, and then I'll end with a few thoughts on what must be done.

**The 2008 Presidential Nominating Calendar**

The 2008 presidential nominating schedule is the most front-loaded in U.S. history. Thirty-five states are already on track to vote in January or February—more than three times the number that had done so in 2000—and that number could grow by at least two or three more. (*NASS 2008 Presidential Primary/Caucus Calendar is Appendix A*)

Some commentators have noted that we will have a de facto “national primary” taking place on February 5, with twenty states voting—including large population states such as California, Illinois, New York, and New Jersey. But if you think of it that way, it will be a “national primary” in which roughly half of our nation’s voters will have no voice. States holding their primaries in March or later are likely to be counting meaningless votes.

While we cannot predict all of the negative impacts of the 2008 calendar at this time, there are a few outcomes that are already clear from the front-loading trend: it makes the presidential campaigns even longer, it requires candidates to begin running even earlier, it compels them to raise even more money and to rely all the more on big media, it drastically reduces the odds for late entrees and dark horses, and even as more states lurch forward, it leaves almost forty percent of our voting population effectively disenfranchised.

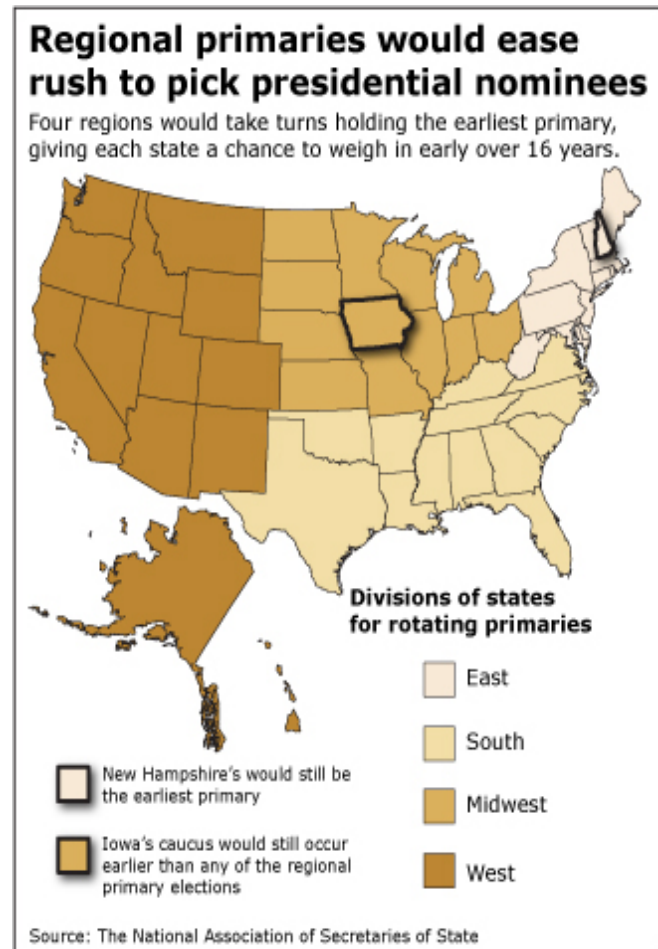
As an aside, it should be noted that the process is now so absurd that states like Florida and Michigan, which jumped to the head of the pack by ignoring national party rules, are so intent upon wielding early influence that millions of voters in those states may not get to cast ballots that actually count. As a native Kentuckian, I appreciate a good derby, but this is too much. The process has gone awry, and it needs to be fixed.

**NASS Rotating Regional Presidential Primary Plan**

Since 1996, the National Association of Secretaries of State (NASS) has been urging the adoption of rotating regional primaries designed to replace the free-for-all process that currently exists with a more rational system that gives every state a reasonable opportunity to play a role in the selection of presidential nominees. While it is not a perfect plan—no system is—it is a drastic improvement over the current process in a number of ways.

First, no state or region dominates the selection process. The NASS plan divides the country into four regions by geography: East, South, Midwest and West (*NASS Regional Plan Map pictured at right*). Regional primaries are held in March, April, May, and June, with the order of the regions rotating every four years. A lottery drawing determines the order of the regions the first time the system goes into effect. The next presidential election year, the region that voted first moves to the end of the sequence, and the other regions move forward. As a result, the regions take turns going first (once every sixteen years).

Second, regional groupings foster increased voter participation. Studies in 2004 showed that fewer than eight percent of the eligible electorate cast a ballot before the nomination was effectively decided. Meanwhile, eight states cancelled their primaries outright because their contests had no impact on the outcome of the race (Kansas has done so for 2008). By staggering the voting over a period of four months, voters get a longer look at the candidates. It also allows more people to have a say in selecting the candidates before the nominations are effectively decided.



Graphic by **Danny Dougherty** - [Stateline.org](http://Stateline.org)

Finally, our plan encourages better campaigns. The NASS system provides a more reasonable timeframe for campaigning and it can alleviate some of the fundraising pressures that drive lesser-known candidates out of the competition. New Hampshire and Iowa retain their early status to allow under-funded and lesser-known candidates to compete through retail politics rather than the costly media-driven campaigns required in larger states. By design, the plan also encourages candidates to become well-versed on public policy issues affecting all regions of the U.S.—not just those taking priority in early primary states.

There are other reform proposals out there, but none has been debated and approved by a bipartisan group of state officials with expertise in election administration. We are very proud that the Carter-Baker Commission on Federal Election Reform endorsed our proposal in its 2005 report and that the *Washington Post*, *Boston Globe*, *Chicago Tribune*, and other major and regional newspapers have also endorsed our idea.

## **Implementation of the NASS Plan**

NASS hopes to convince the major political parties to proactively adopt the rotating regional primary system at the 2008 national conventions, which would then go into effect for 2012. Our members have also passed a resolution requesting that the Republican Party consider changing its rules to allow revisions to the presidential nomination process outside of its conventions, which currently limit reform discussions to one short window of time every four years.

In order for our plan to take full effect, NASS must secure the support of both the Republican and Democratic Parties and the rotating regional system must receive legislative approval in the states.

However, I must also add—not as a NASS representative, but in my own personal view as Kentucky Secretary of State—that Congress is likely to have to act in order to bring about any real reform. Thus far, the states and the national parties have been unable to rationalize the process and no one seems to be looking out for the national interest.

The NASS plan strives to more clearly define the presidential campaign cycle and to provide voters and candidates with the opportunity to focus on issues that are relevant to each region of the country. We know that when people feel that candidates are addressing issues of direct concern to them, their likelihood of voting increases – which is the ultimate goal of our plan.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide the details and the rationale behind the NASS Rotating Regional Presidential Primary Plan. We are encouraged by the added attention that federal legislation brings to this issue. Thank you again for this opportunity and I would be happy to answer any questions.

**APPENDIX A****NASS Calendar of 2008 State Primaries/Caucuses**

Last updated: September 12, 2007

**NOTE:** This calendar is a working draft based upon state election office reporting and credible media reports. Dates are subject to change. In some states, these contests are non-binding and separate caucuses or conventions are scheduled to determine delegates to the national conventions.

**2008 Presidential Nominating Calendar****TBD:** New Hampshire**JANUARY 2008**

- **January 5:** Wyoming (R)
- **January 14:** Iowa
- **January 15:** Michigan
- **January 19:** Nevada, South Carolina (R)
- **January 29:** Florida, South Carolina (D)

**FEBRUARY 2008**

- **February 1:** Maine (R)
- **February 5:** Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Idaho (D), Illinois, Minnesota, Missouri, New Jersey, New Mexico (D), New York, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Utah
- **February 9:** Louisiana
- **February 10:** Maine (D)
- **February 12:** District of Columbia, Maryland, Virginia
- **February 19:** Hawaii (D)<sup>1</sup>, Washington, Wisconsin

**MARCH 2008**

- **March 4:** Massachusetts, Minnesota (D), Ohio, Rhode Island, Texas, Vermont
- **March 8:** Wyoming (D)
- **March 11:** Mississippi

**APRIL 2008**

- **April 22:** Pennsylvania

**MAY 2008**

- **May 6:** Indiana, North Carolina
- **May 13:** Nebraska, West Virginia
- **May 20:** Kentucky, Oregon
- **May 27:** Idaho (R)

**JUNE 2008**

- **June 3:** Montana, New Mexico (R), South Dakota

**AUGUST 2008**

- **August 25-28:** Democratic National Convention in Denver, Colorado

**SEPTEMBER 2008**

- **September 1-4:** Republican National Convention in Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota

*NOTE: Kansas has opted not to hold a presidential primary election in 2008.*

<sup>1</sup> Hawaii's Republican Party is not technically holding a presidential primary or caucus. Delegates will be selected during a week-long period in February, but they will not be committed to any candidates as part of the vote.