



Colorado's Presidential Primary Election

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As Colorado has grown, its status on the national electoral scene has also grown. We have become a bellwether state revealing national voting trends, and we've established a positive reputation as a state that encourages and facilitates voter participation. All registered voters now receive a mail-in ballot and enjoy many voting options, including convenient registration options.

Prior to 2020, from a nonpartisan voter point of view, Colorado still had two election problems: voter participation in the caucuses and primaries was restrictive, and the state primary election came too late to impact the national candidate selection process.

Restricted participation

In Colorado, there are more unaffiliated voters than members of either the Democratic or Republican parties; but up to now, the unaffiliated voter's say has never been represented in choosing a primary candidate. Often, the result was that extremists or "insider" candidates would win the primary slot that both parties would then present to the public for general election. Generated by the passage of Proposition 108 (in 2016), unaffiliated voters may now participate in state primary elections. Colorado now has a "semi-closed" primary process that allows unaffiliated voters to choose one party ballot, vote, and return that ballot.

Late primary moved to March 3rd

The second problem was that the Colorado primary election always came late in June, usually too late to influence the outcome of the presidential candidate selection. The solution came in the form of Proposition 107 (in 2016).

Beginning this year (2020), Colorado will hold a presidential primary election, major party caucuses, and a second statewide candidate selection primary in June. Colorado will be a part of the March 3 "Super Tuesday" primary along with Alabama, American Samoa, Arkansas, California, Democrats Abroad, Maine, Massachusetts, Minnesota, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont, and Virginia. According to Ballotpedia.org, more than one-third of American voters are expected to vote on this day. It will almost certainly have a big impact on paring down the candidates running for president on November 3, 2020.

Together, Propositions 107 and 108 have increased a voter's opportunities to impact Colorado's candidate selection process through multiple steps—a presidential primary

(March 3, 2020), a state-wide caucus process (March 7, 2020), a second primary for Colorado candidates (June 30, 2020) and the general election (November 3, 2020).

Colorado's March 7th caucuses are still important

Caucuses in Colorado have always seemed to be a murky process. Indeed, for the uninitiated voter, attending a caucus can be intimidating. The ideal of a group of neighbors holding a forthright discussion of issues and candidates and settling on preferences is seldom realized. State law requires caucuses, but the political parties must organize, run and pay for the events. The parties must raise their own money, and maybe you get what you pay for. But, to be fair, the major parties must follow complicated rules and processes to guarantee a fair caucus.

That doesn't diminish the importance of the caucuses, however. The change resulting from Props 107 and 108 will be the separation of the presidential candidate selection process from the rest of the caucus agenda. As we've watched Washington politics over the last several years, we've witnessed the amazing stopping power of a few U.S. Senators. In Colorado, the election of those Senators will still begin at the caucus level. Rather than focusing on a presidential preference in caucuses, voters will be choosing their preferences for Senate candidates and other state offices, delegates to the state assembly and convention, and party platform resolutions.

Because the Colorado presidential primary was moved to Tuesday, March 3rd, the two major parties selected Saturday, March 7th for caucusing. The Saturday caucus, with its focus on Senate candidates, other state offices, and the party platform, will allow more time for caucus-goers to discuss and evaluate options. Frankly, Saturday—as opposed to Tuesday evening—should make it easier for voters to participate. However, unlike the primary elections that will allow unaffiliated voters to participate, a voter must have affiliated with his/her chosen party by Friday, February 14th (22 days prior to caucus date). To be eligible to vote in a political party's precinct caucus, a voter must be a resident of the precinct for at least 22 days; registered to vote no later than 22 days before the caucus; and affiliated with the party holding the caucus for at least 22 days before the caucus (sos.state.co.us).