



Testimony of
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Majority & Minority Policy Committees
of the Senate of Pennsylvania

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Good morning. I would like to thank Senate Majority Policy Committee Chairman Corman and Minority Policy Committee Chairman Kasunic for the invitation to testify this morning on proposals to advance the date of Pennsylvania's Presidential Primary.

My name is David Patti. I have served for more than five years as the President and CEO of Pennsylvanians for Effective Government – a business association that operates one of the state's very first political action committees and an educational foundation dedicated to improving and promoting citizenship through an informed electorate that exercises its right to vote.

I am not here to advocate for, or against, changing the date of the Commonwealth's Presidential Primary, but to provide some insight and perspective to a few important issues.

Pennsylvanians for Effective Government, or PEG as we are usually known, was founded in 1972 and has been involved in Pennsylvania elections for 35 years. I have personally been involved in Pennsylvania government, politics and elections for more than a quarter century. I hope that I can be helpful to your study of this issue.

Some of my comments will be directed generally to the concept of an earlier Primary Election, however, I will try to tie these comments back to three specific proposals currently introduced as legislation:

- House Bill 289 prime sponsored by Rep. Readshaw which would move party primary elections for all offices to the second Tuesday of February, or February 12, 2008.
- House Bill 63 prime sponsored by Rep. Buxton which would move the 2008 Primary Election to March 4, 2008 – the first Tuesday in March which in recent Presidential Elections has been called “Super Tuesday.”
- Senate Bill 516 prime sponsored by Senator LaValle which would likewise move the Presidential-year Primary – albeit in this case for 2008 and 2012 – to the first Tuesday in March.

Let me start by saying that many other states are considering moving their Presidential Primaries to an earlier date and in fact the “New Super Tuesday” might become the first Tuesday in February, so Pennsylvania would still lag a major portion of the nation if any of these bills became law. States who have committed to or are considering the February 5, 2008 Primary Election date include Alabama,

Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Kansas, Michigan, Missouri, Nevada (GOP), New Jersey, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Tennessee and Utah.

Across the nation most supporters of early presidential-year Primaries reason, “This will make us a player in the selection and nomination of candidates.” Let me note that President Bush was in Pennsylvania more than 40 times in 2004. This is a testament to our importance in the General Election if not the Primary Election process.

As far as Pennsylvania’s importance in the nomination process, we should remember that technically speaking Pennsylvania’s Presidential Primary is a “beauty contest” and the delegates selected are not legally bound to any candidate when they get to their party’s nominating convention. The parties have their own rules, of course. And, certainly winning the popular vote in Pennsylvania would shape a positive impression of a presidential candidate with a national audience; however, the real election is that of the hundreds of delegates. This makes me wonder how presidential candidates would approach an early Pennsylvania primary and whether they would concentrate more on delegate recruitment and grass roots, than the big earned media and paid media campaigns we associate with these races.

With this caveat in mind, I would like to talk to you about four important elements of any proposal to advance the date of Pennsylvania’s Presidential Primary Election:

- The potential economic benefits to the Commonwealth of political spending in an early primary.
- The potential impact of the proposal on the Primary Elections for other offices.
- The potential impact of the proposal on voter turnout, mitigating voter apathy, and increasing interest in civics and the public process.
- The potential impact of the proposal on raising the issues of industrial and urban states within the national domestic policy agenda.

Economic Benefits

I have been asked to discuss the potential economic benefits of an early Primary and am happy to do so. The chairman of the Federal Election Commission has predicted that the 2008 Presidential election might be America’s first \$1 billion campaign. I am certain he is correct, and I understand that everyone wants their piece of this pie. I hope, however, that we’d never adopt this or any other election law proposal “just for the money.” That would be sad.

Napoleon said, “An army travels on its stomach.” He should see a modern political campaign. Political entourages and the media packs that follow them spend serious money on hotels, food, entertainment, gasoline and jet fuel. An early Primary would be like having a couple of very good conventions in the state. I did some back of the envelope calculations and since the biggest of the campaigns may have as many as 60 or 70 field people in a state with the candidate, let’s say that there could be 500 campaign operatives and 500 traveling media in Pennsylvania leading up to an early and meaningful Primary. The cadre might spend a combined total of \$200,000/day on food, lodging and ground transportation. Add to this sum the rental of hotel conference rooms and ballrooms for media and fundraising events; fire halls and tent rentals for less formal events; coffee, donuts and food for everything. There would be other variable expenditures too. Let’s say that – all in – the candidates will spend a collective \$250,000 day during the most intense part of the campaign in an early Primary state.

We have to wonder, however, if there are as many as 20 Primaries ahead of Pennsylvania’s, how many days would the campaigns be here? There are at least 20 days of full scale madness leading up to the New Hampshire Primary and at least 10 “day trips” before that closing month. That would mean

something like \$7.5 million. But the campaigns and the media would not be here very much if we're the 24th Primary. They couldn't be. They would have to be elsewhere.

There is also the campaign spending for direct mail and broadcast media to consider. There would be some spending on print media too, but for the most part – “print is dead” in politics. Direct mail is the most cost-effective way to reach voters because it goes directly to registered voters with a known voting history and predictable voting behavior. The advent of micro-targeting has increased the precision of direct mail. Most of the presidential campaigns, however, are likely to contract with vendors and mail houses located outside of Pennsylvania. The Commonwealth has some firms in the business, but the main beneficiary of this spending is the US Postal service and many of the printers and paper producers are located elsewhere. Moreover, direct mail is giving way to direct email.

Broadcast media –television and radio – spending accounts for about half of all funds spent in a Presidential Campaign. With the vast size of Pennsylvania compared to New Hampshire, it will not be possible for Presidential candidates to have the face-to-face time with voters that characterizes smaller state early Primaries. TV will be an important tool. If Pennsylvania was truly going to be one of the first state's to hold a Presidential Primary election, then we might think of a media buy of 1000 gross ratings points per week for the opening weeks of the Pennsylvania Presidential Primary and 1500 points per week for the closing two weeks. Not every campaign will be able to afford a buy like this. In very round terms I estimated about \$3,800/point for a statewide buy next year. A campaign that bought 1000 points for two weeks and 1500 points for two weeks would spend nearly \$20 million. In this way, we can see that collectively the Presidential candidates could spend more than \$100 million on Pennsylvania media – but only if our Primary is one of the very first Primary Elections. (Remember 15% will leave the state in “commissions” to the purchasing agents.) Again, if 20 or more states have their presidential-year primaries before ours, spending on direct mail and broadcast media in Pennsylvania will remain low relative to the group of “early” states. I should also add that if Pennsylvania would become one of 20 or so states to hold its Primary on the first Tuesday of February we would most likely find that only the handful of candidates who think they could actually win would advertise highly in the state. Those who know they would not fair well in Pennsylvania would be advised to spend their money in states where their chances are better and their costs are lower.

Indirectly there would be other economic benefits to the Commonwealth. As candidates travel the state, Pennsylvania's cities, small towns and attractions would be the backdrop on the nightly network news. It would be a tourism promotion bonanza. Can you imagine the scene on Gobbler's Knob next February 2 as Senators Clinton and McCain fight to position themselves next to Punxsutawney Phil?

Impact on Other Elections

If we are to hold all major party primary elections for all Federal and State offices on Tuesday, February 12, 2008 – and if we don't change our current election law in other ways – we will require candidates for office to file their nomination petitions by December 4, 2007 and allow them to begin circulating petitions as early as one week after Election Day. If, by the way, we would try to duplicate the New Hampshire Primary Election date at the end of January and change nothing else we would be allowing 2008 candidates to circulate petitions before Halloween 2007. This could bring a whole new meaning to “trick or treat.”

A petition process that begins in this calendar year causes several problems. Some are obvious: this makes a logistical nightmare for the Pennsylvania Department of State Bureau of Elections and each of the 67 county election bureaus as they try to handle paperwork for two different election cycles that nearly overlap. One can imagine that county election bureaus might fear increased costs including overtime pay.

I think we can also surmise that the proximity of 2008 petition circulation to the 2007 General Election would divert attention away from the culmination of very important, if less glamorous, statewide judicial elections and municipal elections for the courts of common pleas, county commissioners, county administrators, city mayors, city councils, borough and township officials, and school boards. In many, many Pennsylvania communities these will be very important elections this year. Announcements of retirements and 2008 primary challenges would compete for attention with 2007 election efforts.

Additionally: a longer campaign suggests increased costs for office space, telecommunications and staffing. Pennsylvania state candidates would be fighting to get through the noise and clutter of the Presidential media and messaging. This would mean more TV advertising, more direct mail, and more “robo calls” for Pennsylvania’s legislative candidates. Many of the “reform groups” think there is already too much money in politics – I believe that an earlier Primary will drive campaign costs higher and make the search for campaign donations even more intense.

Lastly, I would suggest that other more subtle issues could be even more troubling. Pennsylvania’s long election cycle already makes it very difficult and very costly to be a candidate. Extending the election from a 10 month cycle to a 12 month cycle could force even more potential candidates to the sidelines. There are very few professions in which a person can take the frequent leave necessary to complete all the steps of a successful campaign. Moreover, very few individuals can forego income for long extended political campaigns. What kind of legislative candidates would we have if we make running for office more burdensome, more prolonged and more costly?

Impact on Voter Turnout and Voter Apathy

I do not have much in the way of empirical data to share with you, but I would suggest an early Presidential Primary could have a positive impact increasing voter turnout, mitigating voter apathy, and increasing interest in civics and the public process. Presidential races are sexy. Party primaries for state offices, generally, are not. The May 16, 2006 Primary Election was very interesting in its results, but participation remained relatively low. However, in a state where many legislative districts are frankly not competitive, one could argue that the Primary Election is the defining and important contest. A truly contested race for a Presidential nomination would increase turnout and votes for down ballot candidates.

New Hampshire residents are accustomed to speaking personally with nearly every Presidential candidate – and on multiple occasions with some of them. They feel engaged and empowered as part of the political process. I think we know anecdotally if not empirically that Pennsylvanians feel alienated and distanced from their government and political figures. Perhaps the excitement of a Presidential campaign seen up close and in person would help. As I said at the start of my testimony, however, President Bush was in Pennsylvania many times in 2004. Many Pennsylvanians did take the opportunity to attend rallies or line streets and highways for a chance to take part. A highly contested General Election may provide the same boost to our electorate.

Impact on the Domestic Policy Agenda

The states that currently hold early Presidential Primary elections are not indicative of the nation as a whole and are certainly not indicative of highly urbanized and highly industrialized states like Pennsylvania. Iowa, Nevada, New Hampshire and South Carolina are fine states populated with outstanding and upstanding citizens. BUT: these states are relatively small, predominantly Caucasian, and particularly rural. We seldom hear stories about gang violence in New Hampshire. I am sure they have some issues. No one is immune as the residents of Lancaster or Lebanon Counties know. Drug dealers and Internet predators are not unique to larger or more urbanized states. And, I know that small states have also lost their job producing industries. Foreign policy, of course, often dominates a Presidential race and will certainly figure prominently in the 2008 election. HOWEVER since we only hear a few seconds of a Presidential candidates’ actual voice and thoughts on national news it would be

nice if they were reacting or responding to the issues and challenges that face Pennsylvania and similar states. It would be nice if the long and tedious “analysis” and commentary of the media was directed at our lives and our issues. By the time the nominations are more or less settled, the candidates have honed their stump speeches, made their campaign promises and decided what will constitute the policy goals of that magical first 100 days. Making sure Pennsylvania’s issues are in the mix is a worthwhile and important consideration. I don’t know how effectively an early Presidential Primary would be in directing attention to the loss of manufacturing jobs, the challenge of protecting the environment when you’re on the receiving end of 3000 miles of dirty air, the strain to provide for the health and welfare of some of the nations oldest citizens, the struggle to pass along a small family business from one generation to the next when paying the inheritance taxes could wipe out a generation of hard work. But it would be nice to see our neighbors and our concerns in the national spotlight.

Conclusion

I would like to thank the Committees for this informative program and for the opportunity to provide some input. I hope that my remarks are helpful to your deliberations. Certainly some good would come from moving Pennsylvania’s Presidential Primary, but clearly such a move would put significant strains on our election system and could impinge our ability to recruit and elect talented people to our own state offices. I would be happy to take questions now, or as they occur to you in coming weeks. Thank you.