The Regional Primary Idea

Mr. MONDALE. Mr. President, when I introduced S. 2741, a bill to create a system of regional presidential primaries, I indicated I hoped it would help resolve the problems that candidates face in ways in which we might improve the chaotic means by which we presently nominate our Presidential candidates. I am very pleased that has been the case; a number of editorialists and commentators have focused on this problem and suggested a variety of ways in which we might improve the system.

I have also been greatly encouraged by the voluntary actions of a number of States to create regional primaries. Vermont, the State of Oregon, Idaho, and Nevada will hold their primaries on May 25, creating the same thing in the Pacific Northwest. I am confident that both of these regional experiences—even though they are only experiments—will add im­

hope my colleagues will join me in watching with interest these new political phenomena on the American political scene.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the following editorials on the current system of primaries be printed in the Record.

There being no objection, the editorials were ordered to be printed in the Record, as follows:

[From the Washington Star, Jan. 10, 1975]

Primary Reform Needed

The presidential primary season is getting into swing, and a more toruous, exhausting, frustration-inducing and often most un­

ples without the exhausting ritual that is close to being a charade out of the entire electoral process.

There have been some intimations that neighboring states themselves might get together to create a kind of collaboration that ought to be encouraged. The urge to do so may be considerably greater by the time the primary season is over.

What the federal government does ought to be limited, however, to persuasion. Primaries are, after all, a matter of state con­

cern. The states can agree or disagree on how and when they choose their convention delegates with a minimum of direction from the top.

The candidates themselves, when all is said and done, are likely to be the foremost salesman for regional primaries. They will have learned the hard way.

[From the New Prague (Minn.) Times, Dec. 29, 1975]

Uniformity Needed in State Primary Dates

Over-emphasis on regional primaries has given rise to those state presidential primaries held in late winter and early spring months—out of all proportion to their ultimate bearing on the outcome of the presidential race.

For more than a dozen years, the Times has urged that a federal presidential primary election law be adopted providing that in all states, the presidential primary elections be held on the same date and under the same ground rules, nationwide.

Now, Senator Walter F. Mondale of Minnesota has proposed legislation providing for a regional system with the country divided into five regions, and the primaries to be held on six successive Tuesdays in May and June of each election year. Date for each region would be determined by lot. The reason for designating the regions and the five weeks of election is to give the candidates an opportunity to present their cause.

While we have advocated the one date nationwide, we assume that Senator Mondale and his staff have given the matter considerable research and study, and we will go along with whatever decision is made. But something is done about the present, somewhat ridiculous situation.

[From the Detroit Lakes (Minn.) Record, Dec. 29, 1975]

Regional Primaries Are a Good Idea

One of the best political ideas so far as we get into the upcoming Presidential election year is Senator Mondale’s plan for a regional system of Presidential primaries.

The current system of primary elections in the states which hold them (Minnesota doesn’t) is at best hodge-podge and time consuming for the candidates and at worst, misleading and confusing to the voter, such as in states where you vote for a state ticket and then a Presidential ticket, the candidates the delegates are committed to, a practice which wouldn’t be allowed under Mondale’s proposal.

But to the states’ rights people get worried, though, we should emphasize that Mondale’s bill would still leave it up to the individual states as to whether or not to hold a Presidential primary. But the states which want to hold one would have to hold it on the date assigned to that region.

Under the Mondale plan, the assignment would be divided geographically into six regions, with each region holding its primary on a designated Tuesday between late March and mid-June. The six election days might be two-weeks apart and would be assigned to the regions by lot, considering many Americans’ disillusionment with the political system.

The process would require candidates to enter the primaries in at least one state of each region in order to receive federal matching campaign funds, the bill specifies. The states will be required to hold a primary but if they elected to do so they would have to hold it on the date assigned.

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other party—the Mondale bill appears to have won the first round—there is still a long way to go to choose the method by which national convention delegates shall be selected.

Perhaps there are better plans than Mr. Mondale’s. But to be the only plan requires the support of the major political parties, and that has not been forthcoming. The important thing is for Congress to get busy on this matter. It is too late to do anything next year, but something can be done before another presidential election year rolls around.

[From the St. Peter (Minn.) Herald.

A REGIONAL PRIMARY...

We do not often agree with Senator Walter Mondale with regard to almost any subject—but we think he is on the right track with the legislation he offered in Congress this past week to create a regional system of presidential primary selections. There may be some specific objections to the details of his proposal, but fully agree with him that the proliferation of state primaries from less than a dozen in 1960 to 30 in next year’s election has become “malignant growth that has this country around the neck.”

Coupled with the suggestion that President Ford appoint a broad-based bipartisan citizen’s commission to study all aspects of selecting presidential nominees, including party rules, campaign financing and candidate qualifications, the regional primaries, as well as primaries, the regional primary system would, in our view, produce some sensible result to what has become a sort of senseless rat-race for both candidates and voters. Moreover, it would reduce what is now an even greater danger than ever before the lasting candidates’ situation will simply be “brokered” at party conventions by power brokers within the political parties...with little or no public input into the process.

Under Mondale’s bill the nation would be divided into six regions. States holding primaries in a given region would have to vote on the same day. Each region would be assigned a different date, by lot, at the discretion of the Federal Election Commission. Dates would be set from late March to mid-June.

Cross-over voting by members of opposing parties would be restricted. Ballots would have to reflect the candidate preference of the voter, for persons running for national convention delegate.

Each presidential candidate seeking federal matching funds for a campaign would have to enter at least one primary in each region. Minnesota, for instance, would be included in a region with Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa, Wisconsin, Michigan and Illinois.

The Minnesota senator, in explaining his proposal, used his own experience in his own sort of “test run” a year or so ago. He termed the present system of selecting nominees as a “mindless process from the candidates’ perspective, too often a self-defeating one for the parties and frequently an ineffective one for the nation.”

Mondale’s bill would divide the nation into six regions, each of which would hold its Presidential primaries on one of six designated Tuesdays between late March and mid-June of Presidential election years. The six dates would be assigned by lot to the six regions by the Federal Election Commission five months before the first primary.

The bill would still leave it up to states whether or not they want to hold a primary, but if they do it must be on the date assigned to that state’s region.

Mondale hopes his bill will end the “disproportionate and unfair advantage” some states have. It would compress the primary period into a shorter time; and conserve the candidate’s energies and resources, as well as enabling the public to focus the candidate’s attention on regional concerns.

Mondale’s bill is worth considering very closely, and it is to be hoped Congress will act on it with some haste. Frankly the present system leaves a lot to be desired, not least the fact that the Presidential election race starts some 18 months before the actual election, which is ridiculous.

Primary, too, are dragged out over a long period of time, which is unnecessary. Packing them into three-month periods two weeks apart will enable the candidate to focus his attention on one part of the country at a time, rather than hopping from one primary to another thousands of miles apart.

Not least one of the benefits that might be realized from this plan is a savings in money for candidates, some of which now comes out of the taxpayers’ pockets.

Whether or not it would shorten the election race remains to be seen. Candidates might be more motivated, in advance, but at least the meat of the campaign is compressed into three months before the actual election, which is ridiculous.

It has been demonstrated to the point of boredom that “money talks” in our present election campaign system. It may be hard to keep it going again, but because it is a basic truth of the system, it becomes absolutely necessary that controls and limitations on campaign donations and spending and the formation of campaign fund sources be systematized.

We are coming to believe that only through some form of public financing...is the most likely possibility so far attempted...can such controls and limitations be imposed.

[From the St. Peter (Minn.) Herald. Dec. 5, 1975]
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PLAN FOR WATERVILLE, MAINE

Mr. MUSKIE. Mr. President, the city of Waterville, in my home State of Maine, has been, I believe, among the most successful communities in the country in taking advantage of Federal programs to revitalize urban areas.

This recent and continued success is being built upon today, under the leadership of Mayor Richard Carey and a large number of active, energetic business leaders and concerned citizens.

Last summer, the city of Waterville was the first municipality in New England and one of the first 15 in the Nation to receive approval from HUD for its community development plan under the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974.

In presenting this to his constituents, Mayor Carey said:

Credit for this must be shared with all concerned, from HUD to committees to the general public. The City and HUD have set their own priorities and make our own plans—with only very broad Federal guidelines.

Mayor Richard J. Carey,

THE WHITE HOUSE:

Washington, D.C., February 24, 1795.

HON. RICHARD J. CAREY,

Mayor of Waterville,

Waterville, Me.

Mayor Carey: Last August, I had the honor of signing into law the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974.

This historic legislation was passed by the Congress to change the old, hellerisk system of helping our cities grow. The new act is designed to let the cities and counties of our Nation set their own priorities and make their own plans—with only very broad Federal guidelines.

I am pleased and delighted that your City has completed its own plan—and that it has been approved by the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

That is only the first step. I urge that you enlist all your citizens in helping to carry out this plan. This is a new direction in Federal policy and requires total public participation if it is to succeed.