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Speakout Column

Time might be ripe for the idea of a rotating regional primary

It's being called *Tsunami Tuesday* – February 5, 2008 – when at least eighteen states will hold their presidential primary to determine the nominees of both parties. Seven states will have already held primaries or caucuses before this tidal wave hits, and as yesterday's *Rocky* editorial warned, we could see New Hampshire's primary in mid-December *of this year*.

Few political pundits argue that this race to be first is a good thing. Voters are likely to grow apathetic to the presidential contenders a full year before they go to the polls to elect the next leader of the free world. But state lawmakers all across the country can't seem to help themselves; South Carolina was the latest to buckle to the pressure, moving their primary to January 19.

I commend Colorado lawmakers, who acted a bit more rationally earlier this year when they passed legislation giving the major political parties the *option* of holding their caucuses on February 5 – the Democrat state party already took the bait, and the Republican's will likely follow suit soon.

One potential silver lining to the 2008 Mad Dash may be that the idea of a rotating regional primary will gain traction. The concept has been percolating for years – the National Association of Secretaries of State adopted such a plan in 2000. Last month U.S. Senator's Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Lamar Alexander (R-TN) and Joe Lieberman (I-CT) introduced federal legislation that would create a rotating regional system.

Senate Bill 1905, the "Regional Presidential Primary and Caucus Act of 2007" divides the nation into four regions that will rotate holding their presidential primary or caucus during either the first week of March, April, May or June.

The U.S. Elections Assistance Commission would be required to hold a lottery to determine which region will hold their primary in March 2012. If Region Two is selected for the March primary, for example, then states of that region will hold their primary during the first week in March, Region Three states would hold their primaries or caucuses in April; Region Four states in May and Region One states in June. Regions would rotate in 2016, with Region One states holding their primary in March, Region Two states moving up to April, Region Three states in May and Region Four states in June.

Colorado, along with the other western states, would be in Region Four. Visit my website, www.sos.state.co.us and go to the "Press" page for more information on the plan.

It's important to note that the legislation would not require a state to hold a presidential primary or caucus – currently Kansas is the only state to opt out of the 2008 chaos. However, if a state decides to hold a presidential primary or caucus, it would be required to follow this schedule.

The legislation is not perfect. The bill carves out exceptions for New Hampshire and Iowa, allowing them to hold their primary prior to the first week in March; the rationale being that New Hampshire and Iowa have a long and rich tradition of holding their presidential contests first. That may be so, but opening the door for two states to operate outside the schedule will likely lead to other states clamoring to do the same. A rotating regional system will only work if it applies to every state in the union.

After we've dried off from *Tsunami Tuesday* and after we've suffered through eleven and a half months from the first state primary to the final vote tally, it will be well worth taking a careful look at a rotating regional system.

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