



Two National Elections in One Year: Early Presidential Preference Primaries and the 2008 Election Cycle

A Voter Protection Primer

The 2008 U.S. presidential election is expected to make history—in a major way. Neither a sitting president nor vice president will be a candidate for nomination to the presidency, an anomaly in the U.S. electoral process that has not happened since 1952. It has been more than five decades since both major political parties have had an open campaign. Early announcements of contention by candidates are evidence to this fact. The impact of such a groundbreaking election on voters and election administration is equally important as its historical significance. Consequently, it is imperative that voting rights and racial justice advocates anticipate and prepare for the ramifications of the large-scale push for early primaries.

As the momentum of frontloading the 2008 elections gains speed, more and more states are moving their presidential preferential primary (“primary”) earlier in the election cycle. An estimated 30 states will cast their vote in the primary on or prior to Tuesday, February 5, 2008.¹ Of these 30 states, only eight will conduct either a Democratic or Republican caucus/primary before February 5,² which means that 22 states will conduct their primary/caucus on February 5. As a result, the traditional March “Super Tuesday” will change to a “Super-Duper Tuesday” in February.

The movement en masse of state primaries to February will be comparable in size to a “national election” preceding the November 2008 election. By the end of Election Day on February 5, approximately 61 percent of the eligible voting population will have the opportunity to cast their vote to pick their preferred presidential candidate.³ The remaining 39 percent of this population will cast a ballot after February 5. An additional eight states will conduct their primary or caucus by the end of February. In other words, we may have *two* national elections in 2008, one in February and another in November.

With both major political parties hosting widely contested elections, the frontloaded 2008 primary landscape resembles a single, nationwide election. With such large-scale changes on the horizon, it is inevitable that election activities taking place before, during, and after Election Day must be altered to accommodate the new schedule. Traditionally, voting and civil rights groups do not proactively engage in voter protection issues during the presidential preference or partisan primaries. However, with the equivalent of a national election occurring in early 2008, it is highly probable that voter protection issues similar to the 2002 Florida and the 2006 Maryland primary elections will move to the forefront, begging for a proactive response from the voting and civil rights community.

¹ Verified by the National Association of Secretaries of State and Independent Research. Note that these dates are subject to change.

² Id.

³ United States Election Project, Professor Michael McDonald, George Mason University

In advance of the 2008 primaries and general election, it is our collective responsibility to carefully consider four key questions:

- Will the conduct of the 2008 elections be fair and open to all voters?
- Will early primary/caucus dates increase or decrease the participation of communities of color in the choice of who will be the next president of the United States?
- Will election officials have the capacity and resources to conduct the 2008 elections without incident along with other elections scheduled November 2007 through November 2008?
- Will the primary calendar changes in 2008 affect efforts to recruit, train, and retain poll workers?

This primer explores these four questions— all of which are critical to the successful administration of the 2008 elections—in detail and offers suggested strategies for circumventing potential problems that may arise from the rescheduled presidential preference primaries and caucuses.

Will the conduct of the 2008 elections be fair and open to all voters?

Voter Registration and Deadlines

The ability of all voters to participate in a fair and open election is of utmost importance. One intended goal of moving primaries to earlier dates is to gain greater participation of the voting public. Yet, the changes may have the opposite effect. Earlier primaries mean registration deadlines will be earlier in the year, accordingly. Many potential voters will be unable to vote in their state primaries because of failure to meet these voter registration deadlines, which is unfair. Only a small percentage of the electorate will vote unfettered by deadlines after voter registration deadlines for the majority of eligible people expire.

By their nature, voter eligibility and registration deadlines impede one's right to exercise their vote. The timing of such deadlines restricts the right to vote. Stringent voter registration deadlines require prospective voters to register well in advance of the actual election. With significant changes to registration deadlines expected, those who are unaware of the deadlines and fail to register accordingly will be unable to exercise their right to participate in our democracy. States with more stringent voter registration deadlines will have a disparate impact on would-be voters who want to exercise their right to vote but who are restricted because of failure to meet an administrative deadline.

Voter registration deadlines vary widely among states. The following is a breakdown of state voter registration deadlines⁴:

- Voter Registration Deadline 1-7 days from the election: 1 state⁵
- Voter Registration Deadline 8-14 days from the election: 2 states⁶

⁴ Based on information for 50 states and the District of Columbia.

⁵ Vermont

⁶ Alabama, South Dakota

- Voter Registration Deadline 15-20 days from the election: 10 states⁷
- Voter Registration Deadline 21-25 days from the election: 4 states⁸
- Voter Registration Deadline 26-29 days from the election: 19 states⁹
- Voter Registration Deadline 30 days from the election: 6 states¹⁰
- Election Day Voter Registration: 8 states¹¹
- No Voter Registration: 1 state¹²

Only three states have voter registration deadlines that are 14 or fewer days from the election, only eight allow voter registration on Election Day, and only one state has no voter registration deadline. Most states require voters to register at least 21 days (three weeks) prior to the election to vote in the presidential preference primary/caucus. In South Carolina, the voter registration deadline is 30 days before the election. Therefore, should an unregistered person want to vote in the Democratic Presidential Primary scheduled for January 29, 2008, she would need to register to vote by Saturday, December 29—of the preceding year! If her husband wanted to vote in the Republican Presidential Primary on February 2, 2008, he would need to register to vote by Wednesday, January 2, 2008.

The inequalities are evident as we observe that new voters, who will caucus in Iowa¹³ on January 14, 2008, or in New Hampshire on January 22, have the opportunity to register to vote on Election Day. Therefore, a prospective South Carolina voter who may want to vote in the primaries will be closed out of the presidential preference process before the first votes in the nation are cast to pick a presidential nominee. The same will be true for would-be voters in Arizona, Delaware, Georgia, Florida, Louisiana, Missouri, New Mexico, New York, Nevada, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, and Virginia.

State party caucuses ought to waive the state voter registration deadlines to encourage voter participation, which will give an even playing field to more voters nationwide. Most voters will turn their attention to the presidential nomination process at the beginning of the year—after the holidays—when opportunities to evaluate the candidate positions are most readily available. Then, states and the political parties should in 2007 begin to advertise voter registration eligibility requirements and deadlines so that more persons can register and choose to participate in America's first national election in 2008.

Election Day Registration

Given the paradox that some potential voters will be closed out of the presidential preference process before the first votes are cast for a presidential nominee, Election Day

⁷ California, Connecticut, Kansas, Maryland, Massachusetts, Nebraska, Nevada, New Jersey, Oregon, West Virginia

⁸ Delaware, New York, North Carolina, Oklahoma

⁹ Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Missouri, New Mexico, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia, Washington,

¹⁰ District of Columbia, Mississippi, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina

¹¹ Idaho, Iowa, Maine, Minnesota, Montana, New Hampshire, Wisconsin, Wyoming

¹² North Dakota

¹³ The Iowa Democratic Party's caucus rules allow for caucus day registration. It also allows for 17-year-olds who will be 18 years old within six months of the caucus to register.

Registration (EDR) is a viable option that must be explored by state legislatures. EDR simplifies participation for new voters and voters who have recently moved.

A Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement working paper reports that EDR increases youth voting activity in presidential elections by an estimated 14 percentage points, and by an estimated four percentage points in midterm congressional elections.¹⁴ In the 2000 general election, three of the five top states for youth voter turnout had Election Day registration.¹⁵ To date, New Hampshire is the *only* state of the eight EDR states¹⁶ that has a primary scheduled before February 5, 2008.¹⁷

Election Day registration would afford people who miss the voter registration deadline another chance to register on Election Day. In effect, a person previously disenfranchised would now be able to cast his ballot along with other voters. In many states, registration deadlines occur weeks before Election Day and often before unregistered persons are fully aware of issues and candidates.¹⁸ At the time of the voter registration deadline, there is generally little media and publicity about the elections as compared to coverage immediately preceding the election.¹⁹ The actual competition between candidates gathers momentum closer to Election Day so interested and excited would-be voters who miss the deadline cannot make a difference with their vote.²⁰

By January 29, 2008, voters in eight states would have the opportunity to vote in the presidential preference primary/caucus. Four of the eight states will hold either a Republican or a Democrat caucus. The other four states will hold a primary.²¹ The issues and results of these primaries/caucuses will receive quite a bit of media and voter attention the week between January 29, 2008, and February 5, 2008, when another 22 states participate in the election process. Voters in Maine and Idaho will have the opportunity to listen and assess the election results as of January 29, 2008, before they cast their ballots up until Election Day.

However, eligible people in the other 20 states voting on February 5, 2008, who missed their state's voter registration deadline and who just began to focus attention on the election will be unable to vote. Those potential voters in Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Illinois, Kansas, Mississippi, Montana, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, Texas, Tennessee, and Utah cannot take into consideration the election results of January and will be foreclosed from the process because they missed the voter registration deadline.

When properly administered, EDR enhances the voter registration system and the election process. In states without EDR, a voter who is properly registered, but does not appear on the rolls, can cast a provisional ballot. EDR would allow a mistakenly

¹⁴See Mary Fitzgerald, "Easier Voting Methods Boost Youth Turnout," February 2003, *available at* <http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/WorkingPapers/WP01Fitzgerald.pdf>.

¹⁵ See http://www.civicyouth.org/quick/youth_voting.htm.

¹⁶ Idaho, Iowa, Maine, Minnesota, Montana, New Hampshire, Wisconsin, Wyoming.

¹⁷ Iowa recently adopted EDR. However, the state will use caucuses to pick its presidential preference. The Democratic Party's caucus rules allows for caucus day registration.

¹⁸ See Demos Policy Brief, "Voters Win with Election Day Registration: A Snapshot of Election 2006," *available at* http://www.demos.org/pubs/voters_win_web.pdf.

¹⁹ Id.

²⁰ Id.

²¹ The caucus states are: Nevada, Wyoming, Alaska, and Iowa. The primary states are: New Hampshire, Florida, South Carolina, and the District of Columbia.

excluded voter to vote in the election by re-registering at the polling place without delay and without utilizing a provisional ballot. A state with EDR would not need provisional ballots and would save money and administrative time because they would not be required to determine voter eligibility until canvassing the provisional ballots after the election.²²

The frontloading of the presidential preference primaries will strain the resources of some election offices. States should adopt EDR because it would alleviate the economic burden by saving resources that would otherwise be spent on costly provisional ballot administration and contests. Idaho, Maine, Iowa, and New Hampshire have already implemented EDR and will not spend unnecessary time or resources on provisional ballots. Instead, election officials in these states can encourage their voters to actively listen and debate the issues and candidates right up until Election Day. Party caucuses, unburdened by state voter registration deadlines, can adopt “caucus day registration” as a tool to ensure maximum voter participation in the process.

Youth Voting

Young voters—voters between the ages of 18 and 29—showed a trend of increased turnout in the 2004 and 2006 elections.²³ While young voter turnout for primaries has hovered at slightly more than nine percent,²⁴ the trend of increased young voter turnout in federal and federal mid-term elections may extend to the 2008 primaries. The states scheduled to hold primaries before February 5, 2008, reflect percentages of young voters comparable to the percentages of the young voting populations in states across the country, which varies from ten percent to 17 percent.²⁵

The primary calendar has unique implications for the young voter demographic. Frontloading the primaries will require election administrators to establish new, corresponding, voting registration deadlines. This group is likely to respond poorly to changes in voter registration deadlines as young voters are more likely than older voters to abstain from voting when the deadlines and procedures are unclear to them.

The 2004 Vanishing Voter Project,²⁶ an election engagement project based at Harvard University, conducted nationwide surveys of young voters and found that young voters

²² See Demos Policy Brief, “Voters Win with Election Day Registration: A Snapshot of Election 2006,” available at http://www.demos.org/pubs/voters_win_web.pdf.

²³ On Election Day 2004, 4.3 million more 18–29 year olds voted than in 2000, a nine percentage point increase in turnout (from 40 to 49 percent). In 2006, young voter turnout increased for the second major election in a row at an increase of two million (24 percent) more than in 2002. See Young Voter Strategies, “Young Voters by the Numbers: A Large, Growing, Diverse, and Increasingly Active Electorate,” February 2007, available at <http://www.youngvoterstrategies.org/index.php?tg=fileman&idx=get&inl=1&id=1&gr=Y&path=Research&file=Young+Voters+by+the+Numbers.pdf>.

²⁴ The youth share of the vote in Democratic primaries was 9.84 percent in 2000 and 9.85 percent in 2004. See the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, “Youth Voting in the 2004 Democratic Primaries,” March 8, 2004, available at http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/FactSheets/FS_2004_Dem_Primary.pdf.

²⁵ Iowa, 14 percent; Nevada, 13 percent; New Hampshire, 11 percent; Wyoming, 14 percent; South Carolina, 12 percent; Florida, 11 percent. See the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, “State by State: Youth Voter Turnout & Voter Registration Laws,” available at <http://www.civicyouth.org/Map.htm>.

²⁶ The Vanishing Voter Project is an ongoing study conducted by the Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. The Vanishing Voter Project conducts national surveys to assess the public’s election involvement and to

are more likely to cite eligibility obstacles as reasons for their failure to vote.²⁷ A third of young non-voters, compared with one-fifth of older ones, said that their reason for not participating was that they moved and had not yet registered at their new location.²⁸ Young non-voters were more likely to cite registration mistakes or lack of registration information as a reason why they did not vote.²⁹

Each state with a primary scheduled to occur on or before February 5, 2008, will also have to schedule a corresponding voter registration deadline that is likely to occur in late December or mid-January. Most colleges and universities will have winter breaks during this time, which will stymie late campus-based voter registration efforts. Colleges and universities with large out-of-state student populations will be particularly vulnerable to the voter registration deadline changes because they are likely to leave their campuses over the winter break.

An alternative consideration is that young voters may not participate in the frontloaded 2008 primaries, preferring instead to wait until November to vote for a candidate who has emerged from the primaries and won young voters' favor during the convention and debate cycles. Studies show that young registered voters tend to make up their minds later in the political cycle. In 2006, young voters were the most likely age group to make their voting decision on Election Day. An overwhelming 44 percent of young voters decided for whom to vote in the U.S. House election within a week of Election Day, compared to 28 percent of the electorate as a whole.

Clearly, youth comprise a voting bloc that no one can afford to overlook in 2008. In addition to their growing strength in numbers, youth voters are more racially and ethnically diverse than older voters, according to the 2006 midterm election exit polls. Eleven percent of young voters classified themselves as Hispanic/Latino, larger than the proportion in the electorate as a whole (six percent). Thirteen percent of young voters self-identified as Black, compared to ten percent of all voters. Therefore, voter protections must be in place for young voters—a powerful and diverse voting population—to ensure that they have access to the ballot and that their votes are counted.

Will early primary/caucus dates increase or decrease the participation of communities of color in the choice of who will be the next president of the United States?

One reason states are pursuing early primaries is to engage a larger, more diverse group of voters to vote for the best and strongest presidential nominee. The system is designed to give candidates an opportunity to present their platforms and views to a broad range of voters and allow them an opportunity to see, hear, question, and compare the candidates. But, the new changes may sabotage this system and prevent rather than encourage diversity among voters. The compact schedule created by scheduling primaries earlier in

promote awareness of and participation in the electoral process. See the Vanishing Voter Project website, *available at* http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/presspol/vanishvoter/2004_Releases.shtml.

²⁷ See Thomas E. Patterson, Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics, and Public Policy, "Young Voters and the 2004 Election," p. 6, *available at* http://www.vanishingvoter.org/Releases/Vanishing_Voter_Final_Report_2004_Election.pdf

²⁸ *Id.*

²⁹ *Id.*

the year also has a domino effect on registration deadlines and disenfranchises voters, which subverts the intended purpose for the change.

In Nevada, we see an example of this paradox at work. The National Democratic Committee gave Nevada the unique opportunity to have its first determining caucus on January 19, 2008, a decision made based upon ethnic and geopolitical considerations. If the Nevada Democratic Party adopts Nevada's statutory voter registration deadline, new voters will have to be registered by the third Tuesday before the election—January 1, 2008. Since January 1, 2008 is a holiday, the voter registration deadline would be extended and eligible people would be able to register to vote the following day until 5:00 p.m.³⁰

Although the goal is to increase ethnic and geopolitical diversity, unregistered persons in Nevada and South Carolina will need to register to vote in 2007 to vote in 2008, while people in Iowa and New Hampshire can fully engage in the process during the same calendar year. Incidentally, out of all of the states that have frontloaded primaries, South Carolina—home to seven Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)—presents arguably the greatest opportunity for young, African-American voters to play a decisive role in the presidential nomination process. South Carolina is also the first state in the primary process that will have a majority African-American congressional district participating in the nomination process.³¹

Will election officials have the capacity and resources to conduct the 2008 elections without incident along with other elections scheduled November 2007 through November 2008?

The decisions of many states to move their presidential preference primaries to January and February in 2008 will inexorably affect the capacity of election officials to conduct elections without incident. There are numerous issues that may directly affect election officials and their ability to conduct the 2008 elections:

- States that will conduct a November 2007 election must be prepared to conduct another election in just 60–90 days and will have less transition time between elections.
- The changes will result in some states conducting three elections in 2008. Multiple elections and shorter preparation times could lead to voter and election employee fatigue, increased voting machine wear and tear, and result in a greater number of errors. Moving the election date and conducting another election may incur significant, additional costs. Who will shoulder these costs? Will county election boards be reimbursed for the expense?
- Rescheduled primaries will likely make it more difficult for state officials to meet deadlines.

³⁰ Nev. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 293.1275 (2007).

³¹ Sixth Congressional District of South Carolina, represented by House Majority Whip James E. Clyburn (D-SC).

- Voter eligibility, registration, and other legal deadlines will be challenging, since they need to be addressed within the small time window overlapping two elections and the 2007 holiday season.
- Given that many of these deadlines and elections will occur in winter months, there is the potential for inclement weather conditions.
- Verified voting will be affected by the earlier timelines because there will be less time available to audit 2007 results and calibrate machines for the early 2008 elections.
- States that conduct early presidential preference primaries will have less time to prepare for the regularly scheduled state primary elections.
- Some modified election dates will coincide with major holidays and religious observances.
 - February 5, 2008, the day that 20 states will conduct their primary/caucus, is the day before Ash Wednesday. In some states, such as Alabama, there are different religious observances that would impact Election Day administration.
 - Dr. King's birthday observance will be on Monday, January 21, 2008. The New Hampshire caucus falls one day later, on January 22.

Expanded Purge Seasons

The 2000 election debacle in Florida, where illegal purges disenfranchised a multitude of voters, is not easily forgotten. While awareness of and adherence to election laws has improved drastically since 2000, routine list maintenance activities may become a pitfall for election officials in states with rescheduled presidential preference primaries and caucuses if they fail to realize that these changes will also affect the deadlines for completing their voter list maintenance activities.

Ninety days prior to a Federal primary or general election, the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA)—also known as the “Motor Voter Act”—prohibits states from systematically removing, or “purging,” the names of ineligible voters from voter rolls.³² Without careful planning, scheduling presidential primaries early in the year will influence the ability of election officials to comply with NVRA list maintenance procedures, and eligible voters may be purged from the voting rolls. Hurried efforts to conduct list maintenance before the NVRA deadline—which, in some states, may be as early as mid-2007—or failure to adhere to adjusted deadlines can lead to costly mistakes and widespread disenfranchisement.

Voting list maintenance generally happens toward the end of the year or in the early months of the New Year. Whether this list maintenance pattern is a function of necessity or simply a function of convenience, the existence of such a pattern suggests timely list maintenance is vulnerable to being overlooked in the rush to schedule early presidential preference primaries. To avoid purging problems, election officials will have to implement new list maintenance strategies and amend the timing of their list maintenance programs.

States holding presidential preference primaries as early as the first week in February 2008 are particularly in danger of bumping up against NVRA list maintenance deadlines, especially if a state will also hold a November 2007 state election. If the 30 states who will conduct early presidential preference primaries in 2008 want to update their lists in time for the election, they will have to complete their voter list maintenance programs by November 7, 2007—the day after the state election.

In order to lower their risk of untimely purging, states with early presidential preference primaries will have to conduct their 2008 list maintenance while simultaneously preparing for the 2007 general election. Without careful examination of the timing of current list maintenance programs and immediate planning to institute new dates for conducting those programs in a timely manner, local election officials may find themselves unprepared or lacking adequate resources to engage in this type of dual-track election preparation.

The peril to voters, who may be the victims of untimely or hurried purging, is even greater in states that will have three elections in 2008—a presidential preference primary, state primary, and presidential election. In these states, election officials may have little time after the presidential preference primary to prepare for the state election. If election officials in these states want to engage in list maintenance after the state primary, not

³² 42 USCS § 1973gg-6(c)(2)(A). The only exception to the 90-day window is the correction of registration records pursuant to the NVRA and removal at the request of the registrant, in compliance with state criminal conviction or mental incapacity provisions, and death of the registrant. 42 USCS § 1973gg-6(c)(2)(B) and 42 USCS § 1973gg-6(a)(3)(A), (B), and (4).

only will they have to comply with the NVRA 90-day rule, which requires list maintenance to end in early August in this instance, they will also have to make list maintenance part of their presidential election preparation plans, when in prior years it would have been done much sooner. Institutionalizing these types of changes will require careful planning and preparation.

Will the 2008 primary calendar changes affect efforts to recruit, train, and retain poll workers?

Six months prior to the midterm election in 2006, election officials were struggling to recruit and train sufficient numbers of poll workers. Prior to and following the November 2006 election, election officials nationwide heeded the call to ramp up poll worker recruiting efforts, revise training manuals, adopt uniform poll worker training standards, and institute policies to retain poll workers. Local election officials are still working to overcome a deficit in trained poll workers to help administer elections.

Yet, changes in presidential preference primaries and caucuses for 2008 introduce a new set of challenges to the poll worker process. Election officials will have less time to train poll workers between elections. Election officials may encounter greater difficulty retaining poll workers, who will be faced with heavier workloads and expectations, as the capacity of election officials is stretched thin by multiple elections held in compressed timeframes. If state elections held in 2007 are contested or require recounts, election officials will be responsible for facilitating these recounts and ensuring accuracy in ballot counting. The pressing question is: will the capacity of the election administrators be such that they can spend the time necessary to train poll workers—the direct links between election officials and voters—to carry out necessary functions on Election Day?

In light of the increased need for poll workers in 2008, election officials may opt to aggressively reach out to young voters to recruit them as poll workers. Inviting young voters to become poll workers would not only further engage a younger generation of voters in the political system, but would allow election officials to harness the tech-savvy skills of young in an increasingly technologically complex election system. However, in most states, you must be a registered voter to become a poll worker. Unfortunately, the advanced voter registration schedule for 2008 may reduce the opportunity for election officials to build an effective polling place administration team among young potential voters because the new deadlines will arrive during the college and university winter break and the revised deadlines generally inject greater ambiguity into the voter registration process.

Despite these projected challenges, poll worker recruitment and training efforts must continue so the chaos of 2006 primary elections in Maryland, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Florida, Michigan, resulting from poll workers shortages and improperly trained and supported poll workers, is not repeated. The serious electoral breakdown that occurred in the 2006 elections happened during a non-presidential election cycle at a time when turnout was relatively low. 2008 promises to be a historic presidential election year; early in 2007, presidential candidates already have amassed substantial funding for their broad campaigns, which will likely result in voter turnout increasing exponentially. With higher turnout, even minor breakdowns could paralyze the administration process and compromise election operations.

From Awareness to Action

Averting the anticipated consequences of the states' rescheduling of 2008 primaries requires advanced planning and preparation. The first step is elevating awareness among election administrators and voting and civil rights advocates. A thorough understanding the implications of the states' decisions to hold primaries earlier in the year will serve as a shield protecting the rights of voters. Beyond these first steps, however, it is urgent that election officials take immediate, proactive measures, including requesting additional funds to support the increased demands expected in 2008; exploring creative, practical solutions to address projected needs; multiplying efforts to recruit and train poll workers; gearing up for expanding monitoring of registration activities; and adjusting procedures to accommodate an accelerated election schedule.

The right to vote is essential to our democracy. It is our responsibility to ensure that date changes for the 2008 state primaries do not morph into discrepancies in Election Day practices that disproportionately affect rural, elderly, poor, minority and student voters. Under the new, early primary calendar, all voters must continue to have the opportunity to have a voice in the political process. Amid the excitement of the upcoming 2008 election and its distinction as being a pivotal election in our nation's history, the far-reaching impact of frontloaded primaries on America's voters must not be underestimated or ignored.