

**Initiative #140
Presidential Primary Elections**

1 **Proposition ? proposes amending the Colorado statutes to:**

- 2 ♦ establish a presidential primary election in Colorado that allows
3 participation by unaffiliated voters.

4 **Summary and Analysis**

5 **Background.** Presidential nominees for major political parties are chosen by state
6 delegates at each party's national convention. Delegates to the national convention
7 are selected by each state based on the results of either a caucus or presidential
8 primary election. Proposition ? establishes a presidential primary election in Colorado
9 that is open to voters affiliated with a major political party and to unaffiliated voters.
10 Presidential primary elections were conducted in the state in 1992, 1996, and 2000.
11 In other years, Colorado's political parties have selected delegates for nominating
12 presidential candidates using a caucus system. Caucus participation is limited to
13 voters who have affiliated with that political party at least two months prior to the
14 caucus. Voters at a caucus typically debate the merits of each candidate and, in most
15 years, a straw poll-style vote is then taken to determine the candidate preference of
16 voters. Based on the caucus results, the parties allocate delegates to the national
17 conventions.

18 **Process for presidential primaries.** The presidential primary election
19 established by Proposition ? will be conducted as a mail ballot election on a date set
20 by the Governor, no later than the third Tuesday in March. No other issue may be
21 included on the ballot. Proposition ? does not impact the existing primary election in
22 Colorado, held in June, for other state, federal, and local offices.

23 **Participation of affiliated and unaffiliated voters.** Under Proposition ?, voters
24 are not required to affiliate with a political party in order to vote in the presidential
25 primary election. Under Proposition ?, each major political party will have a separate
26 presidential primary ballot for use by voters affiliated with the party. Unaffiliated voters
27 will receive a combined ballot that shows all candidates for each political party.
28 Unaffiliated voters may vote for a candidate of only one political party. If a voter
29 selects candidates of more than one political party on the combined ballot, his or her
30 ballot will not be counted.

31 **Funding for presidential primaries.** Under Proposition ?, the cost of the
32 presidential primary election will be paid the state and counties. Counties will be
33 responsible for administering the presidential primary election, and they will be
34 reimbursed for a portion of these costs by the state. Currently, caucuses are paid for
35 and conducted by the political parties.

1 **Pledging of delegates.** Under Proposition ?, the winner of a party's presidential
2 primary receives all delegates to the national convention, and the delegates are bound
3 to support the winner at the convention.

4 **Impact on political party caucuses.** Under Proposition ?, parties will still be
5 allowed to hold caucuses to handle internal party business. However, parties will no
6 longer use caucuses to determine the state party's choice for presidential nominee.

*For information on those issue committees that support or oppose the
measures on the ballot at the **November 8, 2016**, election, go to the
Colorado Secretary of State's elections center web site hyperlink for ballot
and initiative information:*

<http://www.sos.state.co.us/pubs/elections/Initiatives/InitiativesHome.html>

7 **Arguments For**

8 1) A presidential primary serves Colorado voters better than the caucus system.
9 The current caucus system is confusing and inaccessible to many voters. Caucuses
10 can be crowded, held at inconvenient times, and conducted by inexperienced
11 volunteers. A presidential primary election eliminates the logistical difficulties of
12 conducting caucuses. Under Proposition ?, a presidential primary will give voters
13 several weeks to cast their ballots by mail or at a vote center, and the election will be
14 conducted in the same manner as all other elections by experienced county election
15 officials.

16 2) All registered voters in Colorado should be allowed to participate in the
17 selection of presidential nominees, even if they are not affiliated with a political party.
18 Unaffiliated voters make up more than one-third of all registered voters in the state.
19 Proposition ? gives these unaffiliated voters a role in selecting presidential nominees
20 and may increase voter participation.

21 3) Proposition ? protects voter confidentiality by allowing voters to select
22 presidential primary candidates using a secret ballot. The current caucus system
23 requires voters to publicly declare their candidate preference, which can discourage
24 participation by many voters who do not wish to make their preference known.

1 **Arguments Against**

2 1) Proposition ? shifts costs to taxpayers, as the state and counties will be
3 required to spend at least \$5 million every four years to conduct a presidential primary
4 election. Under a caucus system, taxpayers save money because caucuses are
5 conducted and funded by the political parties. Taxpayers should not be required to
6 pay the costs of nominating contests for political parties. The measure also places an
7 administrative burden on counties to conduct an additional election every four years.

8 2) Political parties are private organizations that have the right to select
9 presidential candidates without influence from people who choose not to affiliate with
10 the party. Under current law, unaffiliated voters who wish to participate at a caucus
11 can declare their party affiliation ahead of time and attend. Presidential candidates
12 are national leaders representing their party, so it is important that only persons
13 associated with the party have a role in selecting the nominee.

14 3) Proposition ? eliminates the valuable role caucuses play in selecting
15 presidential candidates. Caucuses encourage voters to debate and discuss
16 candidates and important issues affecting Colorado and the nation. During
17 presidential election years, caucuses provide a unique opportunity for voters to be
18 active participants in the political process.

19 **Estimate of Fiscal Impact**

20 **State spending.** Proposition ? increases state spending in the Secretary of
21 State's Office by about \$210,000 in budget year 2018-19 and by \$2.7 million in
22 budget year 2019-20 when the next presidential primary election will be conducted
23 under the measure. After budget year 2019-20, state spending will increase every
24 four years during presidential election years to conduct the presidential primary
25 election.

26 **Local government spending.** Under Proposition ?, counties will have costs of
27 about \$5.3 million in budget year 2019-20 to conduct a presidential primary election.
28 Counties will be reimbursed about \$2.6 million by the state to offset these costs. After
29 budget year 2019-20, spending by counties will increase every four years to conduct
30 the presidential primary election.