

**Initiative #140
Presidential Primary Elections**

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

- 2 ♦ establish a presidential primary in Colorado that allows participation by
3 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 open to all
9 registered voters in Colorado. Presidential primary elections were conducted in the
10 state in 1992, 1996, and 2000. In other years, Colorado's political parties have
11 selected delegates for nominating presidential candidates using a caucus system.
12 Caucus participation is limited to voters who have affiliated with that political party at
13 least two months prior to the caucus. Voters at a caucus typically debate the merits of
14 each candidate and, in most years, a straw poll-style vote is then taken to determine
15 the candidate preference of voters. Based on the caucus results, the parties allocate
16 delegates to the national conventions.

17 **Process for presidential primaries.** The presidential primary election
18 established by Proposition ? will be held on a date set by the Governor, no later than
19 the third Tuesday in March. All registered voters in the state will receive a presidential
20 primary ballot by mail 22 days before election day. The presidential primary election is
21 the only issue that may be included on the ballot. Proposition ? does not impact the
22 existing primary election in Colorado, held in June, for other state, federal, and local
23 offices.

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

30 **Funding for presidential primaries.** Under Proposition ?, the cost of the
31 presidential primary election will be paid the state and counties. Counties will be
32 responsible for administering the presidential primary election, and they will be
33 reimbursed for a portion of these costs by the state. Currently, caucuses are paid for
34 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, even if that candidate subsequently drops out
4 of the race.

5 **Impact on political party caucuses.** Under Proposition ?, parties will still be
6 allowed to hold caucuses to handle internal party business. However, parties will no
7 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>

8 **Arguments For**

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

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

22 3) Proposition ? protects voter confidentiality by allowing voters to select
23 presidential primary candidates using a secret ballot. The current caucus system
24 requires voters to publicly declare their candidate preference, which can discourage
25 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.