

3. POLICY POSITION

REAFFIRMING SUPER TUESDAY

Background

For nearly two decades, southern leaders at one time or another have discussed and/or supported the concept of a regional presidential primary, in hope of boosting laggard voter turnout and focusing more attention on southern issues. The Southern Governors' Association (SGA) of the Council of State Governments endorsed the concept in the mid-1970s, while the Southern Legislative Conference (SLC) first endorsed a southern regional primary in 1982, with the hope that the southern states could implement the regional primary in time for the 1984 presidential nomination process.

Because of limited time, the regional primary was not implemented in 1984, but in 1985 southern legislators endorsed the concept of a regional primary, to be held the second Tuesday of March in 1988. By 1987, 13 of the 15 SLC states had agreed to participate in this regional primary, which became known as "Super Tuesday".

With the southern states uniting behind Super Tuesday, there were many more candidate visits to the South prior to Super Tuesday than there had been in 1984. Candidates visited not just the large cities but also small towns, helping to stimulate interest in the megaprimary. Over 1/3 of all registered southern voters, or over 13.5 million voters, exercised their right to vote on Super Tuesday, which was by far the largest primary day, ever held in the United States.

As the start of the 1992 presidential nomination contests is only a year-and-a-half away, several states are either contemplating or have already taken action to change their presidential primary dates in 1992. More states are changing their dates as they realize that party nomination battles have in recent years been ending earlier and earlier; by June it has not been uncommon in recent years for such battles to have been long since over. Unfortunately, many states are contemplating such changes without thought to regional concerns or considerations, with the possible end result being that the nomination process becomes too long and tiring to many voters.

Recommendation

The Southern Legislative Conference reaffirms its support for Super Tuesday in 1992, with the understanding that several of our states will not be able to participate in it because of costs, conflicts with other elections, or for other reasons.

While Super Tuesday did receive its share of criticism, it is generally agreed that the event was a major victory in and of itself for the region, helping to bring candidates to the region to address pertinent issues, and helping to increase voter turnout vastly over what it was in 1984. The success of Super Tuesday has also encouraged states in the Midwest and the West to examine the possibility of a regional primary in their region. Without ruling out further improvements or possible changes to the regional primary, the Southern Legislative Conference believes that it is in the best interest of the South to retain Super Tuesday in 1992 and beyond.

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