

The 1981 Idaho Legislature...

Most legislators oppose May presidential primary

(Editor's note: This is the 15th of 16 articles giving the views of East Idaho legislators and the leadership on the salient issues shaping up for the coming session. This is on the primary election and convention party system.)

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Most legislators say they don't like the May presidential primary and a number also favor changing the present party convention system.

However, there are some who like the presidential primary system, which indicates there could be a full-fledged floor fight if such a proposal is presented and passes a committee.

The Idaho Legislature changed the election laws five years ago instituting the May presidential primary and moving the regular primary from August where it has been for more than a decade. Some 20 years ago, the primary was in June and if a congressional or gubernatorial candidate didn't get a majority in case three or more entered, then there was a runoff between the two highest. This system lasted only a couple of years in view of the light vote turnout.

The movement for party convention changes took on impetus only last weekend when the Idaho Republican Executive Committee favored a proposal for gubernatorial and congressional candidates to receive 20 or 25 percent of the convention backing to get on primary ballot. They also favored closing registration 10 days before the election and require a 30-day residency. The party chieftains said bills to this effect will be introduced in the coming session.

In East Idaho, the only two who like the presidential May primaries and no changes in the party convention system are Sen. Vearl Crystal, R-Rigby, and Rep. Elaine Kearnes, R-Idaho

Falls.

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The entire leadership responding to a Post-Register questionnaire want to eliminate the May primary and move it to August or September and also believe the party conventions should be given more power to make them more interesting.

Their views indicate there could be some chances for changes but what the leadership favors is not always what the remainder of the legislators want.

Senate Minority Leader Ron J. Twilegar, D-Boise, said he sponsored the law that enacted the May preferential primary but now has changed his position and favors the primary be moved back to later in the year.

Senate President Pro Tem Reed Budge, R-Soda Springs, said he is firmly opposed to a May primary because it is a cost to the taxpayers and favors moving the primary back to August. He also would like a strong party structure for conventions but did not indicate specifics.

House Speaker Ralph Olmstead, R-Twin Falls also favors the May primary change but indicates no support for requiring convention approval for party nominees.

House Majority Leader Darwin Young, R-Blackfoot, feels the same way, saying "I think the election process is far too long, especially on the national level. If we move the primary to September then state conventions must approve delegates to national conventions but I'm not sure I favor changes in the nomination laws."

House Minority Leader Melvin Hammond, D-Rexburg, also said he would prefer an August or September primary, rather than in May.

Senate Majority Leader James E. Risch, R-Boise, likes the May primary and favors convention approval for top party nominees.