

Prepared Statement on SB 785
Senate Rules Committee Hearing
Thursday, April 8, 2021

Good afternoon, I'm Kyle Purdy. I have worked on two presidential campaigns and more than a dozen Congressional campaigns. I am here today to ask you to support Senate Bill 785 to move the Oregon primary to Super Tuesday. I have been working on this nonpartisan voting rights issue since 2018. Currently, Oregon is the 46th state to vote. I realized that Oregonians do not have a choice or a voice in the presidential primaries because we vote a couple months after the race is already over. I set out to see if this could be fixed. I have researched this matter thoroughly, including reading all of the national party rules from the DNC and RNC. The national parties allow Oregon to move to Super Tuesday.

The presidential primaries run from February through June. February is reserved for four "special" states: Iowa, New Hampshire, Nevada, and South Carolina. The earliest date that the rest of the states can hold their primary is the first Tuesday in March, known as Super Tuesday. With 14 states voting on Super Tuesday, including California and Texas, it has essentially become a National Primary Day. If you're not on it, you're left out. By the end of March, nearly 2,800 delegates will have been awarded, and it only takes about 2,026 delegates to win the nomination. When we finally get around to late May, Oregonians are left with the "choice" of rubber-stamping the nominee that has already been selected by the other states, or perhaps casting a symbolic vote for the runner-up. Oregon has become irrelevant.

If Oregon were to move to Super Tuesday, voters would have the full range of candidates to choose from. Our neighbors, including Washington, California, Nevada, and Idaho all vote in March. By moving to Super Tuesday, we would effectively be joining them in a regional primary. Candidates will visit Oregon on their trips to the region, allowing Oregon voters to ask them questions and bring their concerns to the attention of the national media. Thanks to our vote-by-mail system, Oregonians would be able to begin voting right after New Hampshire (the 2nd state to vote) and before Nevada (the 3rd state). Moving to Super Tuesday will give Oregonians a choice and a voice.

My bill is intended to move the entire primary to March, so that there is no additional cost or voter confusion by splitting the primary into two separate elections. I believe that having an active and competitive presidential primary will increase voter turnout for downballot state and local races. I understand that this move would be a time conflict for legislators, who cannot work and campaign at the same time. To solve this problem, I propose swapping the timing of the short session in even-numbered years and the primary. This would both allow legislators to campaign and give Oregonians a real presidential primary. I have suggested May as that would normally be the time legislators are campaigning, and it also takes into account spring break and summer vacation. I do not intend for anyone to be working over the holidays, which is why I have been working with the County Clerks to adjust registration and filing deadlines as needed. The County Clerks have suggested moving the primary to March in all even-numbered years for consistency. I agree.

Technically, the national parties grant us a “bonus” of 20% additional delegates for voting in May. This bonus is an illusory consolation prize for not having a say in the election. It’s like being offered front-row seats at a concert – on the condition that you can only enter after it is over. I would rather have a meaningful primary for 80% of our current delegates than a meaningless primary with an extra 20%.

I ask that the Committee support SB 785 to give Oregonians a choice and a voice in the presidential primaries. Oregon should matter. I think it would be helpful to establish a work group to iron out the technical details. I would like to be a part of the work group and I am available if you have any questions. Thank you for your time and your service to Oregon.

-Kyle Purdy
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