

MT HJ 48 – Proposal to Move Montana’s Primary Election to March or April Survey Results

Administrative & Fiscal Impact

- Do counties have sufficient staff and funding to absorb increased election workload during December–January, when year-end financial reporting and audits occur?
- How would counties without a standalone election administrator manage overlapping election, finance, payroll, recording, and claims duties?
- How would moving the primary affect county officials who hold multiple roles, particularly Clerk & Recorders who are also:
 - Finance officers
 - Budget preparers
 - Treasurers
 - Superintendent of Schools
- Would preparation of county budgets (often occurring in March and April) conflict with primary election administration?
- How would the primary overlap with Treasurer duties, including preparation of Mobile Home and Personal Property tax bills and other statutory tax responsibilities?
- Would the state provide funding or staffing support to mitigate these impacts?

Election Judge Availability & Training

- How will counties recruit and retain election judges given:
 - The advanced age of the current judge pool
 - Winter travel conditions
 - Seasonal absences (snowbirds, ranchers)?
- When would judge training realistically occur, given holidays, weather, and staffing shortages?
- What is the anticipated impact on the number of polling places statewide?

Voter Access & Equity

- How will increased winter weather risks affect:
 - Voter turnout at polling places
 - Accessibility for rural, elderly, and mobility-limited voters?
- Are longer travel distances to consolidated polling places acceptable in rural counties during winter months?
- Does the proposed change risk impeding voters' practical ability to vote?

Campaigning & Public Engagement

- Will candidates realistically hold campaign events during:
 - The holiday season
 - Periods of severe winter weather?
- Would reduced in-person campaigning limit voter engagement, especially in rural communities?

NVRA, NCOA & Legal Compliance

- How will NVRA and NCOA list-maintenance requirements be met within a compressed timeline?
- What statutory changes would be required to align list maintenance, canvass, audits, and COPP deadlines with a March primary?
- What compliance risks exist during the transition period?

Logistical & Operational Feasibility

- How will ballot printing, proofing, equipment programming, and vendor timelines (ES&S) be affected?
- How many transition years are anticipated, and what level of disruption should counties expect?
- What level of SOS technical assistance and voter education would be required?

Facilities & Local Impacts

- How will counties address conflicts with facilities already booked in early March for revenue-generating events?
- Would counties incur additional costs to secure alternative polling locations?

Political Relevance & Return on Investment

- What tangible political benefit is expected from earlier primary timing given Montana's:
 - Four electoral votes
 - Small share of national delegates?
- Is it sound policy to move all federal primaries primarily to affect presidential nomination relevance, which occurs only every four years?

Comparability to Other States

- Are comparisons to larger, more urban, or warmer states appropriate for Montana's geography and population density?
- What lessons are transferable from states that moved their primaries, and which are not?

Alternatives & Additional Information

- Should SAVA consider:
 - Hearing from election administrators in states that have made similar transitions (California, Florida)?
 - Reviewing vendor-specific election calendars?
 - Evaluating party-run caucuses as an alternative to shifting the state-run primary?

Overall Policy Assessment

- Do the anticipated benefits outweigh the documented administrative burden, voter access risks, financial costs, and conflicts with other statutory county responsibilities?
- Is the proposed change in the best interest of Montana voters statewide, particularly in rural and high-weather-risk areas?