



## THE 2012 ELECTION CYCLE: AN EARLY START TO A PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION YEAR

by Bill Zepernick

The 2012 election cycle begins earlier than usual because of the upcoming presidential election. Recent legislative changes, as well as state and federal redistricting following the 2010 census, will also impact the upcoming election calendar. This issue brief discusses key dates and events in the 2012 election cycle, with a focus on the presidential nomination process.

**Recent legislation.** Senate Bill 11-189 makes changes to various election-related dates in order to conform with the federal Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment (MOVE) Act. The MOVE Act requires that states send absentee ballots to military and overseas voters by the 45th day before an election. Among other things, the bill moves up the dates of precinct caucuses, county assemblies, and primary elections. It also shifts the deadlines for candidates to submit signatures to petition on to the ballot and to make recount requests.

**Overview of the caucus and primary election process.** Instead of holding a presidential primary election, the major political parties in Colorado select delegates to the national party convention through a series of caucuses and assemblies. Colorado delegates to each national party convention are pledged to a specific candidate and participate in selecting the party's nominee for president.

Major party candidates for the General Assembly, statewide offices, and Congress are nominated through a primary election. Candidates for these positions may be placed on the primary election ballot through the caucus and assembly process or by petitioning onto the primary election ballot by collecting the required number of signatures.

**Precinct caucuses.** The first event for voters in Colorado during the 2012 election cycle is the precinct caucus. Precinct caucuses are run by the political parties, governed by party rules, and only open to persons living in the precinct who are affiliated with the political party. At precinct caucuses, eligible party members gather and select delegates to county and district assemblies. A nonbinding presidential preference poll is also taken; however, no delegates to the national party convention are pledged to presidential candidates at this stage. Delegates to the national party convention are formally pledged to presidential candidates at the state assembly.

Senate Bill 11-189 moves the date of precinct caucuses from the third Tuesday in March to the first Tuesday in March. Although SB 11-189 changes the precinct caucus date, current law allows state parties to hold precinct caucuses as early as the first Tuesday in February during presidential election years. For 2012, the Republican Party of Colorado has opted for the earlier precinct caucus date — Tuesday, February 7, 2012. The Colorado Democratic Party will hold its precinct caucuses on Tuesday, March 6, 2012.

**County, district, and state assemblies.** Under SB 11-189, county assemblies must be held within 25 days of the regular precinct caucus date or within 50 days of the early precinct caucus date. The state convention must be held no later than 73 days before the primary election. At county assemblies, delegates are selected for district assemblies and the state assembly. District assemblies nominate candidates for the General Assembly, Congress, the State Board of Education, the University of Colorado Board of Regents, as well as for district attorney. The state assembly nominates statewide candidates and elects delegates to the national convention. The state assembly is where delegates to the national convention are formally pledged to one or more presidential candidates. In 2012, the Republican county assemblies must be held by March 28, 2012, and the Democratic county assemblies by March 31, 2012. Both parties' state assemblies must be held by April 14, 2012.

**Primary elections.** SB 11-189 moves the primary election date from the second Tuesday in August to the last Tuesday in June. Thus, the 2012 primary election will be held on Tuesday, June 26, 2012. Candidates nominated by assembly or by petition will appear on the ballot, and winners of the primary election for an office will be the party's nominees in the general election on November 6, 2012.

**State and federal redistricting.** Another factor in the 2012 election cycle is state legislative and congressional redistricting. District boundaries for the Colorado State Senate, Colorado House of Representatives, and the U.S. House of Representatives are redrawn every ten years to reflect shifts in population. U.S. Senate districts are statewide and do not change during redistricting. The new district maps will take effect for the 2012 election cycle.

As of this writing, both state legislative and congressional redistricting are under appeal in the courts. The Colorado Constitution requires state legislative redistricting be completed by December 14, 2011. While there is no similar constitutional deadline for congressional redistricting,

the courts will likely need to rule on a final redistricting plan by mid-December in order for county clerks to have sufficient time to redraw precinct boundaries, which must be completed by January 9, 2012 (no later than 29 days before the first precinct caucus). Once final maps for state legislative and congressional redistricting are available, they will be posted online at: [www.colorado.gov/redistricting/](http://www.colorado.gov/redistricting/)

**Table 1  
Key Dates in 2012 Election Calendar**

<b>Precinct Caucuses</b>	
Last day to affiliate with political party to participate in precinct caucuses	December 7, 2011 (GOP) January 6, 2012 (Dem.)
Last day to register to vote in precinct caucuses	January 9, 2012 (GOP) February 6, 2012 (Dem)
<b>Precinct caucuses</b>	<b>February 7, 2012 (GOP) March 6, 2012 (Dem)</b>
<b>County, District, and State Assemblies</b>	
Deadline for county assemblies	No later than: March 28, 2012 (GOP) March 31, 2012 (Dem)
Deadline for state assemblies	No later than April 14, 2012
<b>Primary Election</b>	
Last day to change or withdraw major party affiliation for primary election	May 25, 2012
Last day to register to vote for primary election	May 29, 2012
<b>Primary election</b>	<b>June 26, 2012</b>
<b>General Election</b>	
Last day to register to vote for general election	October 9, 2012
Early voting begins	October 22, 2012
Early voting ends	November 2, 2012
<b>General election</b>	<b>November 6, 2012</b>

For more information on registering to vote or for a complete election calendar, visit the Colorado Secretary of State website at: [www.sos.state.co.us](http://www.sos.state.co.us).