

Minnesota primary law aims at increasing clout

By GERALD KOPPLIN
ST. PAUL, Minn. (UPI) — The authors of a presidential primary law said Tuesday the purpose is to create a regional block of states to have primaries in the Midwest on the same date in April.

Gov. Rudy Perpich signed a bill creating an April presidential primary in Minnesota, which coincides with Wisconsin's primary on the first Tuesday in April.

Sen. Bill Luther and Rep. Linda Scheid, both Democrats from suburban Brooklyn Park, said the Minnesota Legislature had authorized a presidential primary last year but could not agree on a date.

Luther supported an earlier primary in March. "When we learned that California was going to do it on the first Tuesday in March, we agreed to change it to April. By having it on the first Tuesday in April, the same as Wisconsin, we're hoping to encourage the states around us to do the same so we have a regional primary."

"There's no question we'll get the candidates here,"

Scheid said.

"If we work toward a regional concept, we'll have some clout. More candidates would spend more time in a region than a state," even though the region would not have as many voters as California or New York, she said.

The Iowa caucuses in February are the first step in the presidential candidate selection system, followed by a primary in New Hampshire.

"To have influence in presidential sweepstakes, most states recognize they have to move it up," Luther said.

The first Minnesota presidential primary would be in 1992. The law requires voters to declare a political party affiliation before getting a ballot to vote in the presidential primary. The presidential primary would be held after the precinct caucuses, which are held in February.

The presidential primary would not change the September primary election for other races in Min-

nesota. In that primary, voters do not declare party affiliation.

Luther said a presidential primary does not do away with the caucus system, which selects delegates to the state conventions and the national party conventions.

"It's a nonbinding primary," Luther said. "But the people who get elected in the various caucuses, they are the strongest supporters of that particular candidate."

"Each candidate will be allocated delegates, based on the popular vote. You are supposed to reflect the wishes of the people who elected you and vote your conscience," he said. The delegates would not be bound for any number of ballots, either.

Luther said the presidential primary, which has not been held in Minnesota since 1956, does not eliminate the caucus system.

"I believe in the caucus system," he said, but acknowledged "one could view it as moving a bit away" from a caucus.

In the 1956 primary, Minnesotans rejected the party nominee, Adlai Stevenson, in favor of Estes Kefauver. In the 1952 primary, Dwight Eisenhower got 108,692 votes in a write-in, disappointing those who were supporting favorite-son Harold Stassen and for some the party favorite, Robert Taft.

In the Minnesota House, a bill to move up the state primary election from September to August passed but the idea was dropped in conference.

"Believe me it will be back next year," said Scheid, who carried the bill.

But Luther said, "It would be difficult to move the primary earlier than August. If we moved it up to June it would be very difficult for the caucus machinery to work," Luther said.

South Dakota's presidential primary is in February. North Dakota does not have a presidential primary. Both Dakotas have June state primaries. Michigan has an August state primary.

Luther

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