

# Hopes dashed for presidential primary, election overhaul

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**M**innesotans' chances of voting in a presidential primary next year appeared to vanish in the Minnesota Legislature on Thursday along with proposals for overhauling the state's election laws that had

been supported by both political parties. In separate actions, the Minnesota Senate put off any presidential primary until the end of the century and DFLers who control the House decided to drop consideration this year of election law changes of any kind.

The actions came despite support for

the presidential primary from both President Clinton's campaign and from Independent-Republican Gov. Arne Carlson. The so-called "Big Ten" primary — to have been held along with Wisconsin, Illinois, Ohio and Pennsylvania — had been gathering support in recent weeks.

However, a provision added to a spend-

ing bill during a meeting Wednesday night would block a presidential primary until after 1999. The spending bill then approved 40-22 in the Senate Thursday and is expected to pass in House today or Saturday.

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## PRIMARY/Not in this century

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That would mean no presidential primary in this state until the year 2000.

Sen. Doug Johnson, DFL-Cook, a vocal supporter of the "Big Ten" primary proposal blamed DFL and IR activists for the defeat because, he said, they prefer the caucus system to primaries.

"This thing came out of the middle of the night," said Johnson, who said the action "is not fair to the voters of this state."

"I don't think the people elected us to cancel elections," said primary proponent Rep. Ron Abrams, IR-Minnetonka. "Hopefully the governor will exercise his veto."

The governor has made no decision, however, on whether he will veto the bill containing the primary rebuff because the bill contains \$397 million for community devel-

opment, jobs and housing.

There was little explanation Thursday of why the provision delaying the primary was in the unrelated spending bill. Sen. Karl Kroening, DFL-Minneapolis, chairman of the Senate conferees that crafted the bill, said there was concern for the \$3.5 million cost of the primary and that counties "could hold a straw poll" on the presidential contenders if they wished.

Party leaders have said recently they disliked provisions in the primary proposal that would deny public finance to political parties not abiding by the primary outcome. They prefer to continue using precinct caucuses as the basis for delegate selection.

Shortly after noon Thursday, the House DFL caucus decided not to consider other election bills because there was no agreement on them, said House Majority Leader

Phil Carruthers. With the session set to adjourn Monday night, DFLers didn't want to get tied up in a lengthy debate over elections, he said.

The shelved election law changes — recommended by a panel assembled by Secretary of State Joan Grove — would have moved the state primary from its September date to early in June, would have changed ballot access requirements and would have allowed parties to endorse more than one candidate.

"This is greatly disappointing because we had unusual bipartisan harmony on some long overdue reforms," said IR state Chairman Chris Georgacas.

Georgacas and DFL state Chairman Rick Stafford held an unusual joint press conference last week calling for enactment of the election provisions.