supporters of doing what is right, making the Government live up to its promises: CHARLES BASS, HELEN CHENOWETH, BARBARA CUBIN, JAY DICKEY, VAN HILLEARY, MARGE ROUKEMA, MAC THORNBERRY.

PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARIES

HON. LEE H. HAMILTON

OF INDIANA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 13, 1996

Mr. HAMILTON. Mr. Speaker, I would like to insert my Washington Report for Wednesday, March 13, 1996, into the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD.

REFORMING THE PRIMARY PROCESS

One of my interests is to make government work better. I have tried to contribute to that goal in a number of areas, including the reform of Congress and the Federal Reserve, among others. Lately, my attention has been drawn to the way we select presidents.

HOW THE PROCESS WORKS

Presidential nominees are chosen at their respective party's national conventions by delegates who were elected, either directly or indirectly, in the primaries, caucuses, or conventions of each state. The delegate selection process is governed by a combination of state laws and national and state party rules. In general, delegates are committed to certain candidates before they get to the party convention. The primaries now produce the nominee and the convention merely crowns him.

Most states, including Indiana, use the primary system to vote for presidential candidates. Under the primary system, an individual will vote, by secret ballot, for a candidate, who will be represented at the national convention by a certain number of delegates. In some states, the winner of the primary will take all the delegates available in that primary; in other states, including Indiana, delegates are awarded based on the candidates' proportion of the vote. The primary season begins in New Hampshire in late February, and most of the major primaries are held in March.

PROBLEMS WITH THE CURRENT SYSTEM

The primary system, while more open and democratic than the old convention system, has its drawbacks. The early primary states have an extraordinary influence on the outcome and that's one reason states are scrambling to vote earlier each year. It is far from clear that voters in the early primaries are representative of a national party, much less a national electorate. The present system in a sense violates the one-man one-vote principle. If you vote in the New Hampshire primary, your vote is probably worth 10 or 15 times as much in determining the outcome than the people who vote in Indiana. That bothers me. The low turnout in primaries is also worrisome. The average for all primaries is only about 30% of registered voters.

The front loading of the calendar is the most important single change to the American primary system in recent years. Campaigning starts earlier than ever before, costing millions of dollars. The schedule is so compressed that by the first of April almost all the delegates will have been selected. The vital primaries come thick and fast. It is very difficult to pause or regroup between them. If you do badly in one primary, you don't have much time to recover. Voters may not have enough time to consider which candidate is best for the party or the nation.

Candidates essentially nominate themselves for our consideration and they have to be a bit obsessed to go through the present primary selection system. My impression is that the media performs the screening role formerly done by party leaders and professionals. The media can be an important conduit of information about candidates, but they also tend to be more interested in the horse race aspects of a primary rather than fundamental questions, such as whether a candidate can govern or what is the candidate's vision.

REFORM PROPOSALS

There have been several proposals for reforming the current system. One proposal would involve selecting convention delegates on the first Tuesdays of March, April, May and June of each election year. Any state could choose any of those four dates, but the probable result would be a mixture of states from various regions on each of the four dates. The gap between the primary dates would allow voters and the media to examine the candidates with care, and the candidates would get a chance to catch their breath and have time for more thoughtful speeches.

Another suggestion is a national primary in which registered voters of all parties could vote on a single day. Such a primary would require an orgy of nationwide television advertising by all the candidates that would last for months and put more power in the hands of the party bosses, less in the hands of the people.

Still others want to reserve a third of the national convention seats for party professionals in order to postpone until the last moment the decision on who will get the presidential nomination. This approach would enhance the role for professional politicians in judging who has the right stuff to be president. I would not support such a proposal because it is inherently less democratic than the current primary system.

CONCLUSION

No single decision is more important to the United States than choosing a president. Primaries tell us whether or not a candidate can discern the issues that are on the minds of the American people and can frame a message and present it effectively to a variety of constituencies around the country. They also tell us whether he has the physical and emotional capabilities to sustain a campaign under high stress and assemble an effective political team and raise the money to support it.

The great advantage of the primary is that it allows ordinary Americans to pick their candidates for president. In the end the system has worked reasonably well. Nominees are usually picked who are widely known and widely approved. Money matters, but it's not everything.

I am inclined to think it is the kind of system that we can approve but we should not discard. I do have the uneasy feeling that we've separated the presidential nominating process from the governing process. A person can be very good at getting nominated. He may not necessarily be a very good president. I'm not sure primaries give us a candidate's core of political values or tell us if he has a firm sense of the direction in which he wants to lead the nation or whether he is secure with himself and with his own convictions and conscience.

Among our goals in reforming the primary system would be to assure wider participation in the selection process and cut the cost of a primary campaign. I am attracted to the idea of interregional primaries. We could set six dates between March and June for a series of interregional primaries. On each date a group of states of various sizes from different regions of the country would hold primary contests. The order could rotate.

Some say primaries are not efficient. They probably are not as efficient as the smoke filled convention. But they are less corruptible and the result is accepted. That's important in a democracy. It is the very democratic quality of the primary that makes it a little messy and a struggle.

CONGRATULATIONS BETH SHALOM OF WILMINGTON, DELAWARE

HON. MICHAEL N. CASTLE

OF DELAWARE

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 13, 1996

Mr. CASTLE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to commend Congregation Beth Shalom from my home State of Delaware. Two years ago, Congregation Beth Shalom, located in Wilmington, initiated what is known as ''Mitzvah Day'', a day when congregation members of all ages devote their time and energy to assist others in the community who are less fortunate and are in need. Mitzvah is the Hebrew word for commandments, and signifies righteous acts by individuals that are considered to be virtuous, kind, and considerate. In the Jewish faith, individuals are expected to carry out a mitzvah every day. In fact, in the Torah, which is the first of five books of Moses, some 613 mitzvot are listed to which Jews can aspire. Mitzvah Day is Congregation Beth Shalom's way of reminding the faithful of their obligations to their fellow man.

This Sunday, March 17, 1996, will mark the third annual Mitzvah Day, and I am pleased to join the good people of Congregation Beth Shalom for ceremonies signaling the start of another day when people will reach out to their neighbors to say they care and want to make life a bit more enjoyable for all. Those who will participate this Sunday and those who have helped others in previous years are known as mitzvah mavens; people who are concerned about their fellow human beings every day.

Before Mitzvah Day is over, they will have collected and sorted thousands of food items for the Food Bank in Newark; they will have baked bread and cookies for the families at the Ronald McDonald House in Wilmington; they will have cooked and served lunch to the clients at the Sojourners Place in Wilmington, who are overcoming drug and alcohol dependency; they will have visited and played bingo with the assisted living or nursing care residents at the Kutz Home and Parkview Nursing Home in Wilmington; and, they will have conducted numerous visits or had meals with congregation members who are homebound because of sickness or disability.

Mr. Speaker, on Sunday, the mitzvah mavens will have done all of this, and by Sunday evening, when the sun goes down, hundreds of Delawareans will feel just a bit better about themselves, some will have enjoyed one more meal than they thought they might, and Delaware will have had its quality of life improved that much more. All of this because the Congregation Beth Shalom in Wilmington, DE, encourages and supports kindness toward others and actions which can truly improve people's lives.