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## G.O.P. Plans Early-Primary Penalties

By [MARC SANTORA](#)

Correction Appended

The [Republican National Committee](#) plans to penalize at least five states holding early primaries, including New Hampshire and Florida, by refusing to seat at least half of their delegates at the national convention in 2008, a party official said yesterday.

Much of the focus in the primary scheduling fight up to now has been on the [Democratic National Committee](#)'s moves to penalize Florida by not seating its convention delegates because of the state's decision to move up its primary. But the Republican rules are just as stringent, and the national party said yesterday that it would not hesitate to enforce them.

The action by [Republicans](#) and Democrats to move against states holding early contests is a rare instance of the two parties moving in concert, in this case to regain control over a rapidly evolving primary calendar that has thrust the nominating system into deep uncertainty just months before it is to begin.

"The rules are clear," said Tracey Schmitt, a spokeswoman for the Republican National Committee. "Any state that holds their primary outside of the window shall be penalized delegates." States are not allowed to hold primaries before Feb. 5.

In addition to Florida and New Hampshire, Wyoming, Michigan and South Carolina also face sanctions for moving up their primaries. Two other early nominating states — Iowa and Nevada — will escape Republican sanctions because they hold nonbinding caucuses, not primaries.

Republican Party officials in Florida and Michigan said yesterday that they still thought it was unlikely they would face penalties — despite being told exactly the opposite by national party officials — and were drawing up a plan to make their voices heard during the convention.

"I am confident that all 114 delegates from Florida will be seated," said Jim Greer, the chairman of the Florida Republican Party.

Mr. Greer said Florida did not technically select its delegates on the date of the primary, but rather, the leaders in each of its 25 Congressional districts would choose delegates starting Feb. 6, so it was not breaking the rules. The national party views the primary as binding delegates to vote in line with the voters and therefore does not accept that rationale. Party officials said they were not negotiating with states.

“I am confident that the Republican National Committee or any eventual nominee will not allow the voices of Florida voters not to be heard,” Mr. Greer said. “Florida is too important a state as it relates to electing to the next president.”

Banning half a state’s delegation would be an extraordinary move. While state party officials have played down the impact, noting that presidential candidates are often selected before the convention, there is a chance that the parties could have brokered conventions in which each delegate’s vote would be prized.

Michigan officials are similarly arguing the state should not be penalized, saying the decision to set their primary on Jan. 15 rests with the State Legislature, which is likely to vote this week to finalize its primary dates.

“Why would you want to punish those key states when you are trying to win the general election?” said Saul Anuzis, the chairman of the Michigan Republican Party.

Fergus Cullen, the chairman of the New Hampshire Republican Party, said the party would hold to its primary — now set for early January — to maintain its historic role as the first primary state, even if it had to accept penalties.

“If we end up being stripped of delegates, that is the price we are willing to pay,” Mr. Cullen said.

The Democratic National Committee carved out an exception for New Hampshire and South Carolina to vote early, so Democrats in those states will not be penalized.

The Republican National Committee set up strict rules in 2000 when it was already clear that states were jockeying to move up primary dates. The rules were made in an effort to avoid the nominating process turning into a national primary, party officials said. Yet despite the rules, some 20 states are likely to hold primaries on Feb. 5, creating a situation unlike any in modern history.

“If we don’t do something, this is going to become a national primary and there will be federal

legislation that takes it away from the parties,” said a top national Republican Party official who spoke on condition of anonymity because negotiations on the matter were continuing.

One possible situation could allow the states to seat a full delegation even after they are penalized. If there is a clear nominee by the time of the convention, as has been the case since 1976, the presumptive candidate could petition the national party to restore the delegates from the penalized states. Such a move, however, could anger the states that held back from bumping up their primaries, and they could challenge such a move.

If the nomination is not settled by the time of the conventions, the issue of delegates could become crucial. If delegates are not seated, they cannot cast votes. But even if the nomination is largely settled, the battles over seating delegates and accommodating main figures from these states at the convention could hamper the party’s unity going into the general election — something national and state officials said they were hoping to avoid.

“My expectation is that, in the end, all the delegates are going to be seated,” Mr. Anuzis said, “because the party is going to want to be united going into the general election.”

Correction: August 31, 2007

An article on Wednesday about plans by the Republican Party to penalize states for moving up the dates of their primaries misstated the precedent for national political conventions that opened without a clear-cut nominee. It last occurred in 1976, not 50 years ago. (President Gerald R. Ford and Ronald Reagan arrived at the Republican convention that year without the number of votes needed for the nomination. Mr. Ford swayed enough delegates to win narrowly on the first ballot.)

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