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**RENDELL ADMINISTRATION SUPPORTS GIVING
PENNSYLVANIANS A VOICE IN PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY**
Change Requires Legislative Action

HARRISBURG – Secretary of the Commonwealth Pedro A. Cortés today told the joint hearing of the Senate Republican and Democratic policy committees the Department of State is willing and able to work with the General Assembly and the counties to implement an advanced timeline for the 2008 Presidential primary election, if the General Assembly decides to do so.

“The commonwealth’s large number of electoral college votes and diverse population make Pennsylvania a key battleground state,” said Cortés. “Pennsylvanians deserve a voice in selecting presidential candidates.”

Cortés chaired the 13-member Pennsylvania Election Reform Task Force, which was convened by Governor Edward G. Rendell in December 2004. The recommendations of the task force included legislative changes to enact an advanced timeline. One suggestion was for the primary to be held on the first Tuesday in March for the next two primary elections, followed by an assessment to determine the effectiveness of the move.

According to current Pennsylvania Election Law, the general primary is to be held on the third Tuesday of May in all even-numbered years. During presidential election years, the primary is statutorily set on the fourth Tuesday of April. Due to this timeline, Pennsylvania has not

played a pivotal role in the selection of a presidential nominee since 1976. Commonwealth residents are thus relegated to voting for nominees who have been selected by other states.

Many states are advancing the dates of their elections and caucuses to February, according to the National Association of Secretaries of State's calendar of 2008 state primaries and caucuses. Because of this, Cortés urged the General Assembly to consider an earlier Pennsylvania election in the context of an evolving national calendar.

Moving the primary election date earlier, however, prompts several issues for consideration:

The first is bifurcating, or splitting, the presidential and state primary elections and its associated concerns. In 2004, the task force estimated the cost of an election to be \$18 million. Today's cost may be higher.

Also, if the primary were moved to an earlier date, candidates would likewise be required to file nomination petitions and papers months earlier. Other deadlines for candidates would also be shifted to earlier dates, as would the absentee ballot process.

Cortés, the chief election official for Pennsylvania, was appointed by Governor Rendell on April 2, 2003. Cortés currently serves as the National Association of Secretaries of State's treasurer and is in line to be NASS president in 2008.

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