

State to have 'closed' presidential primary

In 1992 Michigan voters again will get to vote in a presidential primary under a bill headed to Gov. James Blanchard's desk.

The state House voted 98-0 Wednesday to give final legislative approval to a Senate-passed bill calling for a primary to be held on the third Tuesday beginning in March 1992.

"Better? Absolutely," said Rep. Maxine Berman, D-Southfield, who chairs the House Elections Committee. "The other system is not popular at all. This will enhance voter turnout."

The bill started in the Senate,

which passed it months ago on a 32-5 vote. "I was part of the negotiations with the Senate," Berman said. "In the House, I just ran around assuring everybody there were no problems."

THE MEASURE has the support of Republican and Democratic party leaders in the state and is expected to gain Blanchard's signature.

"The specific legislation will need to be reviewed, but the governor has been supportive of returning to the primary system because it provides a great opportunity to a Great Lakes regional primary," said Tom Scott, the governor's press secretary.

All area lawmakers voted yes except two who missed the vote: James Kosteva, D-Canton, and Gerald Law, R-Plymouth.

UNLIKE THE last presidential primary in Michigan which was open, future primaries will require voters to state 30 days in advance whether they want to vote in the Republican or Democratic primary. Independents who refuse to state their preference won't be allowed to vote.

"I'm delighted. It will mean that more Democrats — and, for that matter more Republicans — will have a chance to participate in their

party's nominating process in 1992," said Richard Wiener, chairman of the Michigan Democratic Party.

"We support an open primary. That would have been our No. 1 choice," said Rusty Hills, a spokesman for Republican Party chairman Spencer Abraham.

"We were willing to accept a compromise . . . because we wanted a primary and if this is the only primary we can get we can live with it," Hills said.

Michigan's 1976 primary marked the last time both major parties participated in an open primary. Republicans used a primary in 1980, but

the Legislature voted to eliminate it in 1983.

SINCE 1980, Democrats have held caucuses every four years to divvy up their national presidential convention delegates. Republicans have used a multi-tiered convention system since 1984.

Wiener said Democrats have been seeking a "closed" primary because in 1972 Republicans crossed over to give George Wallace a surprise victory in the Democratic presidential primary. But Wiener said that until recently the GOP rejected the idea. Internal squabbles allowed a con-

servative faction to take over the state GOP last year and led to rump county and state conventions in January. That convinced Republicans to go along with a closed primary.

SEN. DICK Posthumus, R-Alto, said he introduced the primary bill to give more voters a chance to participate in the presidential selection process.

"The caucus system effectively eliminated many people from the election process. This will encourage a great more people to express their preference in 1992," Posthumus said.

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