

Georgia Primaries Postponed Again Due to the Coronavirus

Georgia postponed primary elections for the second time this year because of the coronavirus, pushing back primaries scheduled for May to June.

The move came a day after New Jersey and Virginia joined at least 15 other states in delaying their primaries amid the coronavirus pandemic so election officials can make preparations to address public health concerns and deal with a poll worker shortage brought on by the outbreak.

On Tuesday, Wisconsin went ahead with its elections, forcing thousands of voters to brave hours-long lines and overcrowded polling places amid the pandemic.

“This decision allows our office and county election officials to continue to put in place contingency plans to ensure that voting can be safe and secure when in-person voting begins and prioritizes the health and safety of voters, county election officials, and poll workers,” Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger said in a statement.

The first-term Republican secretary had already opted to postpone Georgia's presidential primaries, initially scheduled for March 24, to May 19 to coincide with the state's other 2020 primary elections. Georgians were scheduled then to choose party nominees for a U.S. Senate seat, U.S. House members and members of the state House and Senate. Elections for judges and district attorneys were also set for May 19.

Raffensperger's decision moves election day for those races to June 9. Runoffs, required by state law if no candidate receives a majority of votes, are set for Aug. 11.

Such delays in the presidential primary calendar could prevent former Vice President Joe Biden from formally clinching the Democratic nomination until later in the summer. But with Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders withdrawing from the race Wednesday, Biden is now the presumptive nominee. The Democratic National Convention has been postponed from mid-July to Aug. 17.

After moving the March election, Raffensperger's office announced a program to mail absentee ballot applications to 6.9 million active registered voters in the state. Those applications can still be used by voters to request an absentee ballot for the June 9 election. A federal lawsuit filed by the American Civil Liberties Union on Wednesday argues that asking voters to provide their own stamps is an unconstitutional barrier to the right to vote and asks a judge to order that prepaid postage be provided.

“Delaying Georgia's election does not ensure either public safety or Georgians' right to vote without the Secretary of State taking further action to make vote by mail truly accessible for all

Georgians,” Saira Draper, the voter protection director for the Democratic Party of Georgia, said in a statement.

Raffensperger had previously argued that he did not have the legal authority to move the presidential primaries any further. But he said he now has that power after Gov. Brian Kemp extended Georgia’s state of emergency another month through May 13, a period that overlaps with early voting for a May 19 election.

State House Speaker David Ralston, along with Georgia’s two U.S. senators and their nine fellow Republican U.S. House members, had pushed for the election to be postponed.

One main concern among election officials has been the health — and availability — of poll workers. Some counties in Georgia have reported losing poll workers, who are often older, at a rapid pace as the virus has spread because many are fearful for their health.