

Iowa Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO



THE IOWA CAUCUS

First in the Nation

Iowa Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO
2000 Walker Street
Suite A
Des Moines, IA 50317
Phone: 515.262.9571
www.iowaafICIO.org

A How To Guide
for Participants of the
Iowa Presidential Caucus



NOTES

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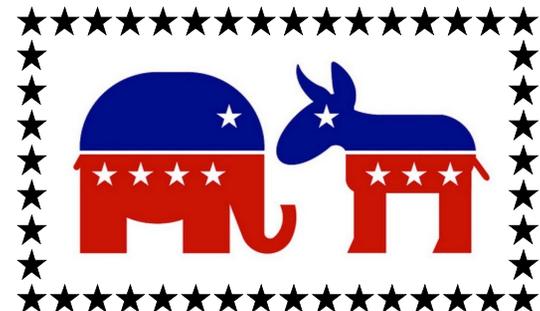
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DEFINITION OF THE WORD CAUCUS

Caucus [kawkuh s]

noun, plural caucuses.

1. *U.S. Politics.*
 - A. a meeting of party leaders to select candidates, elect convention delegates, etc.
 - B. a meeting of party members within a legislative body to select leaders and determine strategy.
 - C. a faction within a legislative body that pursues its interests through the legislative process: *the Women's Caucus; the Black Caucus.*
2. a group or meeting organized to further a special interest or cause.

verb (*used without object*)

3. to hold or meet in a caucus.

verb (*used with object*)

4. to bring up or hold for discussion in a caucus: *The subject was caucused. The group caucused the meeting.*

WHAT IS A PRESIDENTIAL CAUCUS?

- A meeting that allows for community discussion about the candidates and the issues before a vote is taken at a precinct caucus.
- It is a process for each political party to let voters select their party's presidential nominee.
- Instead of voting at the polls, registered Republicans and Democrats meet from each of Iowa's precincts in all 99 counties.
- Meeting locations could include schools, churches, libraries or even in someone's home.
- In both parties, the caucus is where the delegates for county convention are selected. The county convention begins the process of selecting delegates for district, state and eventually national convention.

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- "Why Iowa? How Caucuses and Sequential Elections Improve the Presidential Nominating Process" David Redlawsk, Caroline Tolbert, and Todd Donovan
- What Is A Caucus? How The Iowa Caucus Works The Huffington Post | By Dean Praetorius



CONTACTS



Iowa Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO
 2000 Walker Street
 Suite A
 Des Moines, IA 50317
 Phone: 515.262.9571
www.iowaafclcio.org



Iowa Democratic Party
 5661 Fleur Drive
 Des Moines, IA 50321
 Phone: 515.244.7292
www.iowademocrats.org



Iowa Republican Party
 621 E. 9th Street
 Des Moines, IA 50309
 Phone: 515-282-8105
www.iowagop.org

- In addition to the voting and the presidential preference choices, caucus-goers begin the process of writing their parties' platforms by introducing resolutions.

HISTORY OF THE IOWA CAUCUS

The caucus process first took place in 1796 when the American political parties emerged. Since then not much has changed within the caucus system but most states have moved to a primary. Cary Covington, University of Iowa political science professor, told the Daily News that "It's a historical accident," that the Iowa caucuses became first in the nation.

Iowa has always chosen its presidential candidates using caucuses. However, because of scheduling issues in 1972, the Democratic party moved the Iowa caucus to the beginning of the year before the state of New Hampshire which had been first in the nation with a presidential primary. The attention the Democrats received from moving their caucus was great enough that the Republican Party also made Iowa first in the 1976 election, and since then, Iowa's importance has grown each election cycle.

Since the caucus wasn't considered as important as a primary there wasn't much attention given to moving Iowa before New Hampshire. After Jimmy Carter won the Democratic caucus in Iowa and went on to become the Democratic Presidential nominee the Republican party moved their caucus.

"Cycles after that candidates flocked to Iowa looking for the same thing: an opportunity to get known by the media, and to level the playing field so lesser known candidate might have a shot," said David Redlawsk, Rutgers professor and co-author of: "Why Iowa? How Caucuses and Sequential Elections Improve the Presidential Nominating Process."

Iowa has held its first in the nation status for over 40 years. Every election cycle other states try to move ahead of Iowa with their caucuses and primaries but have not been successful. The two parties rules maintain that Iowa will be first in the nominating process but there is no legal way to enforce this rule. Both parties have imposed a penalty on states that try to

move their primaries before Iowa by reducing the number of delegates that state is entitled to send to the national convention.

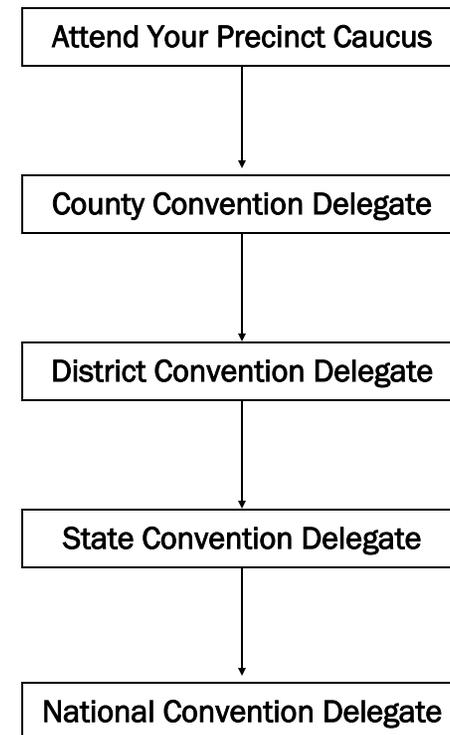
“Unless the parties come up with a completely different approach than they have now, then Iowa’s likely to be first because there’s no agreement someone else should be first,” Redlawsk said.

WHO CAN PARTICIPATE?

- Only registered Republicans and Democrats can participate in the caucus.
- Voters registered as Independents/No Party **CANNOT** participate in the caucuses.
- To qualify to register to vote in Iowa you must be:
 - ▶ A U.S. Citizen
 - ▶ An Iowa resident
 - ▶ At least 18 years old by the general election on November 8, 2016
- To qualify to register to vote in Iowa you cannot:
 - ▶ Be a convicted felon (unless your voting rights have been restored)
 - ▶ Be judged mentally incompetent to vote by a court
 - ▶ Claim the right to vote in any other place
- You can register to vote or change your party affiliation the night of the caucuses.
- Only registered Republicans can participate in the Republican caucus.
- Only registered Democrats can participate in the Democratic caucus.
- There is not a fee charged to attend the caucus.
- Observers are allowed to attend as long as they do not become involved in the discussion or voting (*observers could include: youth who will not be eligible to vote by the general election, press, campaign staff, volunteers and individuals not registered to vote*).

DELEGATE CHART

Serving as a delegate for your party at one or more of the conventions is truly a unique and interesting experience. Becoming a delegate is available to all Precinct Caucus attendees. During a Presidential year in the Democratic and Republican Parties you can be elected to serve as a delegate at the levels in the flow chart below.



DEMOCRATIC CAUCUS PROCESS (Continued)

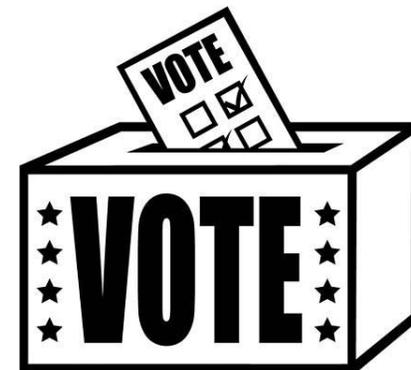
- The delegates chosen by the precinct then go to their county convention, to choose delegates to the district convention and state convention. Most of the delegates to the Democratic National Convention are selected at the district convention, with the remaining ones selected at the state convention.
- Delegates selected at caucuses to go to county convention are initially bound to support their chosen candidate. However, they may later switch in a process very similar to what was used at the precinct caucuses. While major shifts in delegate support are rare, the media declares the candidate with the most delegates on the precinct caucus night the winner.



During the Democratic Caucus participants physically move into groups to show support for their candidate.

REPUBLICAN CAUCUS PROCESS

- There is a different caucus process for Republicans and Democrats.
- The Republicans caucus typically uses a secret ballot voting system.
- There may be some voters that make brief speeches in favor of their candidate, then everyone votes.
- After voting, the caucus elects delegates to go to the county convention.
- Delegates selected at the precinct caucuses go on to the county conventions, which choose delegates to the district conventions, which in turn selects delegates to the Iowa State Convention.
- It is the Republican Iowa State Convention, not the precinct caucuses, which selects the ultimate delegates from Iowa to the Republican National Convention.
- All delegates are officially unbound from the results of the precinct caucus.



During the Republican Caucus participants vote by a secret ballot to show support for their candidate.

DEMOCRATIC CAUCUS PROCESS

- There is a different caucus process for Democrats and Republicans.
- First order of business at a Democratic Caucus is to count off so that it can be determined how many individuals are participating in your precinct caucus.
- In Democratic caucuses, participants physically move into a designated area of the room to show which candidate they support (forming a preference group).
- An area may also be designated for undecided participants.
- Then the negotiating begins—members of the non-viable groups can try to attract more people, or join other groups.
- Then, for approximately 30 minutes, participants try to convince their neighbors to support their candidates.
- Each preference group might ask a few members to recruit supporters from the other groups especially people in the undecided group.
- Undecided participants might visit each preference group to ask its members about their candidate.
- After the 30 minutes has passed the groups stop recruiting members and the size of each group is counted.
- Normally the viability threshold (number of individuals you need in your group) is usually 15% of attendees.
- Candidates who don't have enough support are deemed non-viable.

DEMOCRATIC CAUCUS PROCESS (Continued)

- Members of non-viable groups can try to attract more people or may abandon their group join another preference group.
- An uncommitted preference group if viable can stay together and eventually be part of the delegate selection process for their group.
- Once viability is determined, participants have roughly another 30 minutes to realign: the supporters of non-viable candidates may find a viable candidate to support, join together with supporters of another non-viable candidate to secure a delegate for one of the two, or choose to abstain.
- This realignment is a crucial distinction of caucuses in that (unlike a primary) being a voter's second candidate of choice can help a candidate.
- The number of votes (individuals in a preference group) each candidate gets determines what percentage of that precinct's delegates will represent that person at the county convention.
- After 30 minutes the realignment is closed, a final head count is conducted, and each precinct apportions delegates to the county convention
- After the numbers are reported to the state party the attendees will finish the business of the caucus: each preference group elects its delegates, and then the groups reconvene to elect local party officers and discuss resolutions for the party platform.