

Students make big showing for Iowa caucuses

BY JESSIE GASCH AND JULIE WILLIAMS
Index Staff

DES MOINES and IOWA CITY, Iowa -- Some predicted students in Iowa, New Hampshire, and Michigan wouldn't go the extra mile — or the extra 200 miles — to caucus or to vote for the candidates they support.

They were wrong. More than 260,000 people under the age of 29, many of whom are students, participated in the Iowa caucuses and New Hampshire and Michigan primaries, according to data from CNN and the Student Public Interest Research Groups in those states.

In Iowa, more than 65,000 young people participated in the caucus, almost triple the turnout in 2004, according to a study conducted by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement.

CIRCLE spokesperson David Roscow said the young people predicted the Iowa caucus victories of Sen. Barack Obama, D-Ill., and former Gov. Mike Huckabee. They chose Obama and Huckabee by the largest margins of any age group.

Many out-of-state students, like Drake University sophomore Lori Peymann, drove to campus to caucus, despite the Jan. 3 caucus date.

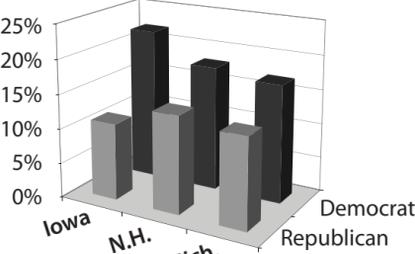
Peymann, a 19-year-old pharmacy student, made the 200-mile trip from her hometown in Minnesota to Drake to participate in the Democratic caucus — despite not knowing who she would choose when the night began.

"[The Iowa Public Interest Research Group] made it pretty easy to sign up, and it's an eventful year," she said. "I just know how important the caucuses are this year, probably more important than they've ever been."

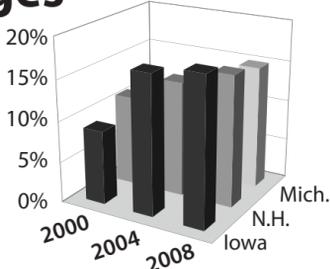
Only 4 percent of eligible young voters, ages 17 to 29, turned out to vote in 2004, compared with 13 percent this year,

Youth turnout surges

Youth turnout in major primary states by party: Youth voters made up a larger percentage of Democratic voters than Republican voters. In Iowa, youth caucus-goers made up a much greater percentage of Democratic voters than Republicans.



Design by Avishek Banskota/Index



Youth turnout over the years: The number of youth primary voters as a percentage of all voters has increased from 2000 to 2008.

Note: "Youth voter" refers to voters aged 17-29.

Source: www.civicyouth.org

according to CIRCLE data.

Dave Redlawsk, University of Iowa professor of political science, has used Iowa's first-in-the-nation status to conduct research on voter behaviors. He said that historically, the best predictor of whether an eligible voter will caucus is if he or she has caucused previously. That's why many predicted turnout would be low when students were at home, Redlawsk said.

"If you're a student in a caucus in your hometown, where your friends aren't there, you might go thinking you will be the only young person," Redlawsk said. "The 60 percent [at the University of Iowa] who are in-state Iowans are of course scattered around their towns. People are at home, that may be true, but it's probably only [helpful] if they come from a family where somebody is used to caucusing."

When Obama actively recruited out-of-state students attending universities in Iowa, disbursing literature reminding students they could register to

vote in the city they live in during the academic year, it caused something of a commotion in Iowa's capital city.

David Yepsen, a Des Moines Register political columnist, wrote a Dec. 11 piece lumping out-of-state college students with campaign staffers and other non-Iowa residents.

Drake sophomore Stacey Wilson, a member of the Iowa Student PIRG, responded to Yepsen's column on the PIRG Web site. Wilson said she was shocked by what she called the disenfranchisement of students.

"I was just surprised," she said. "... Saying that any college student would taint the caucus, when we live here for at least nine months out of the year, is just ludicrous."

But the column apparently did not deter Wilson, a Wisconsin native, and other supporters of both parties from caucusing.

The Republicans had the first word at the door of the Memorial Union on the University of Iowa campus, but the Democrats were the life of the party.

The Iowa Memorial Union on the University of Iowa campus hosted several Republican and Democratic caucuses, and both parties were bolstered by a large number of college students.

Republican caucus-goers were directed up the maze-like interior of the Memorial Union to precinct locations on the second and third floors. While some of those precincts had low voter turnout, with only about 20 or 25 people showing up to cast their ballots, others had as many as twice that number.

Samantha Wilson, a junior at the University of Iowa and previous intern for the Rudy Giuliani campaign, said there were about 40 attendees in her precinct, many of them students. Former Rep. Ron Paul came out on top of that precinct, which left Wilson shaking her head.

"I don't know what to think about that," she said.

As she sat in a common area with an eye on the four plasma TVs in front of her delivering caucus returns, Wilson also talked about how the student vote

fits into the caucuses.

"I don't think the candidates have really catered to the students," Wilson said. "But why would they? Generally they don't get our vote — that's understandable."

Julia Domagalski, University of Iowa alumna and Giuliani intern, voted in a different precinct at the caucus — one that had just 17 attendees — but joined Wilson in monitoring Giuliani's progress on the screens.

"Looking at this up here, it's very disheartening," Domagalski said. "I think it would be worse if we expected him to do well."

Domagalski also noted that the returns coming through on TV didn't necessarily echo the list of candidates who had spent the most money on their campaigns, which she thinks is a good message.

"Romney dumped so much money into Iowa, now to see Huckabee winning," Domagalski said. "... [It] goes to show that there's an interesting twist to the idea that you need a lot of money to run a campaign. ... Maybe you don't, which is good."

Unlike Domagalski and Wilson, Isiah Zoschke was unable to vote for his chosen candidate, Ron Paul, because he is not an Iowa resident. Zoschke, a student, said he still made the trip south from Michigan for caucus week in order to help win support for Paul, which he did by camping out at an entrance to Memorial Hall with fellow supporters and a lot of signs.

"There was nobody here," he said. "We figure this is a comfortable spot, the elevator is right here. It kind of worked out really well."

Zoschke said he thinks most people have made up their minds whether to support Paul or not by the time they hit the caucus building doors, but they still have tried to sway people over to their side.

"When Paul wins Iowa, we'll

be here to tell you, 'I told you so,'" he said early in the night.

The Republican caucuses consisted of a secret-ballot process that took most precincts less than an hour to complete, but Democratic caucuses in the lower levels of Memorial Union raged on for nearly twice that long. Even before caucusing began, the noise of caucus-goers filing through lines to their respective precincts echoed up the stairwells into the sparsely-filled Republican caucus sites.

Sabrina Larocco, a senior at the University of Iowa who caucused for Paul, said she predicted that the Democratic caucuses would draw more of a crowd.

"It seems like what they're doing in there, ... it just gets you involved more," she said.

Larocco also cited another reason for the mismatched numbers. "I just think this is a college campus — everybody is more liberal," Larocco said.

Erik Smith, an organizer activist for the Iowa Student PIRG, said after the caucuses that this year had a great student turnout across the state because of college kids who are on break and out caucusing with their parents, who statistically are more likely to caucus.

"People are really excited, amped to be caucusing," Smith said. "... It's really great to see that this election, young people are engaged, and they are going to come out and caucus."

The Missouri primary is Feb. 5, called Super Tuesday because 24 states will host at least one party's primary or caucus that day. In 2004, less than 15 percent of eligible voters turned out. Pollsters Rasmussen and Survey USA showed Huckabee and Sen. Hillary Clinton, D-N.Y., as the respective Republican and Democratic frontrunners Dec. 18.

The Index will conduct a straw poll of eligible Truman voters the week before Super Tuesday.

Iowa voters exercise democracy in local family's living room

BY ALEX BOLES
Assistant Features Editor

Distance doesn't mean a thing to some voters.

Inhabitants of Rural Precinct 3 in Boone County, Iowa, drove an average of 10 miles or more on dusty gravel roads to fulfill their civic duty and take part in the nation's first round of caucuses on the evening of Jan. 3. The caucus location — the home of Gary and Mary Weaver — provided a unique environment in which to shape the fortunes of America's Democratic presidential candidates.

"Everyone who's here is here because they're supporting the Democratic Party," said Shirley Keenan, who has attended caucuses for 14 years. "They're unhappy with the way things are. Immediately people bond as a result of that, and there's a camaraderie that develops."

Keenan caucused for former U.S. senator John Edwards, but said that if forced to change sides, her second choice would be U.S. senator Barack Obama, D-Ill.

"At this time I am here to support John Edwards, mainly because of his health care plan," she said. "Of the top candidates, he's the one whom I agree with the most in terms of his philosophies."

Caucus host Gary Weaver said fewer than 100 out of 1,700 caucus locations took place in homes throughout the state of Iowa. Intensity surged through the Weavers' living room as the 90 or so cau-

cus-goers divided up into groups based on which candidate they supported.

The turnout was more than double the number of people who showed up at the Weavers' last caucus in 2004, although many of those seated in the hosts' armchairs, couches and brown folding chairs were family, friends and neighbors of the couple, Gary Weaver said. Many also were participating in their first caucus.

"I've never been very political," said Constance Duran, a first-time caucus-goer. "I'm usually lukewarm on the candidates, and I found somebody that I felt was truly honest and ethical."

Duran said she came to support Obama because she said she thinks he is refreshing and that she is impressed by his persona. Duran said the Iowa Caucus is important because it catalyzes national interest in the presidential election process.

Paul Friemel, who supports Sen. Hillary Clinton, D-N.Y., also was a first-time caucus-goer. He said he thinks former president Bill Clinton will be able to help Hillary tremendously and support her ideas. Although he had never been to a caucus before, Friemel said he agrees that it is an important process in deciding where the presidential candidates stand.

"It'll help designate a president one way or another, whether we got enough votes for Hillary or Obama, we got to find out now," Friemel said.

Keenan, the caucus veteran, echoed

these sentiments and said she likes the idea of the candidates being forced to come out into the public. She also said she thinks Iowa is a testing ground for the candidates, even though many people ask why her home state should be the first in the nation to caucus.

"My knee-jerk response is, 'Why not?'" Keenan said. "I've been presented this question before. I mean, somebody has to be first. Iowans in general, I think, are pretty well educated, knowledgeable, and they care about what's going on in this country. They take it seriously, that's the bottom line."

Keenan said she has three teenage children. Two are not old enough to caucus, and the other lives in Chicago, but she said she always took them along to hear the candidates speak when they were younger. Keenan said the candidates didn't seem to mind the presence of children at their speeches.

After much debate and multiple recounts, Obama came out on top in Rural Precinct 3, followed by Edwards and Clinton, which reflected the results state-wide.

Gary Weaver read the final rules, and then the 90 friends, family and neighbors who were gathered in the living room lined up at the door to retrieve their coats. Cars pulled out of the makeshift parking lot in front of the house and headed back down the 10 miles of gravel road to await another election year and another trip to Gary and Mary's house.

Additional reporting by Chris Boning



Nathan Becker/Index
About 90 caucus-goers packed the living room of Gary and Mary Weaver to support their candidates at the Democratic caucus in Rippey, Iowa.

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