

Undecided becomes delegate

INTERVIEW BY
LAURA PRATHER
Staff Reporter

William Cummins is a self-employed resident of Oxford, Iowa. He took part in the Democratic caucus Jan. 3, and at the end of the night, the county's four delegates were distributed evenly between Hillary Rodham Clinton, Barack Obama, John Edwards and the undecided, or uncommitted, group. Cummins was chosen as the delegate for the undecided group.

Laura Prather: Is this your first time caucusing?

William Cummins: No, it's not. I did it once before in the last presidential election.

LP: What made you decide to caucus the first time?

WC: I had just moved to Iowa and had never been in a caucus before, and I had always voted in the general elections, and usually the primaries as well, in the other states that I've lived in. I thought it would be interesting, and it was, so I decided to do it again tonight.

LP: How is a caucus different than other elections?

WC: Oh, it's completely different. You stand up in front of your fellow citizens, and you decide who you are going to select. ... And then you walk around and people try to convince you to change your mind if possible. It's an interesting process. It's much more time consuming than obviously just clicking off a few checkmarks on a ballot or an election machine.

LP: So tell me about tonight. Did you come here knowing who you were going to support?

WC: Yes, I came here generally with the idea that I was going to support Joe Biden for president, and it became apparent that he wasn't going to be viable and get enough votes to continue on in the process. So we formed an uncommitted group of caucus-goers and retained one delegate that would have normally gone to the highest group's [candidate] had that not occurred.

LP: What was viability?

WC: You needed 22 caucus-goers to be viable in your group this evening.

LP: The way I understand it, then, is because the uncommitted group had 26 people, you kept the

group with the largest amount of people, which was Clinton's group, from having an extra delegate.

WC: Yes, that is correct. Because she had the highest number of caucus-goers, she would have — if we had not formed a group — been entitled to two delegates instead of the one that she now has.

LP: OK, and since the uncommitted group did have one delegate, they nominated you. Have you ever done that before?

WC: No, I have never done that before.

LP: What made you decide to do that this year?

WC: It just sounded like it might be an interesting thing to do, so I decided to volunteer.

LP: What are your responsibilities as a delegate?

WC: I'm supposed to go to the county convention and then vote for the delegate at the appropriate time. We'll see who is going to still be in the race at that time. It's going to be on March 15, I believe, and there may or may not be the candidates that were there originally. They may have dropped out. It's hard to say. But we'll see on that date who is still going and who we

can vote for.

LP: Is that the type of thing where you will decide [who you'll represent and vote for] beforehand, or will you go uncommitted and decide once you get there?

WC: Well, I'll look into who's still in the race and find out what's going on and find out whether the candidates are still moving and going forward. It may be decided by that point and time. It really depends on what happens in the other states — their primaries and other races. It may be dwindled down to the point where there are only one or two candidates, so that will definitely affect my choice because I may not be able to choose who I would have originally liked to pick.

LP: And lastly, why do you think the Iowa caucus is so important in the whole scheme of the election?

WC: I think it's important because it's a small state, and it allows voters to get out and actually meet the candidates and interact with them on a personal scale that wouldn't be available in a larger state with more people.



Mark Hardy/Index

John Edwards was one of the winning candidates who received delegates in William Cummins' precinct.

Caucusers show conviction for choice candidates

BY HEATHER TURNER
Staff Reporter

Many people wonder about Iowa's significance as the first state in a long process of caucuses and primaries.

At first glance, the caucuses are all about Iowans and the issues that most concern them. On the national level, laypeople and pundits asked just how representative Iowa is of America.

Were all issues being heard in the coveted first position state?

A second look at the volunteers and enthusiastic supporters present during the lead-up to the caucus revealed something quite interesting: Some campaign offices and headquarters were surprisingly void of native Iowans.

Walking into the various campaign locations were unpaid volunteers from all over the nation, all with their own reasons for taking time out of their lives to convince Iowans to show up on caucus night to support their candidate.

Among the groups represented within different campaigns were politically-minded student volunteers. Students forfeited their winter breaks to work in Iowa, some driving in for the event from as far away as Texas.

Alex Strobehn, a student from Michigan working out of the John McCain Iowa headquarters, said he came for a more personal reason.

"I really believe in John McCain," Strobehn said. "I am going to serve in the military, and I don't want to serve under anyone else."

Strobehn moved on to his home state after the caucus to continue his efforts for the campaign and said he has since traveled throughout Michigan, logging an additional 2,000 miles on his odometer attending events for McCain.

The Ron Paul campaign set up a network of about 250 students from the United States, as well as students from four countries, in traveling camps. The students were given free lodging and received \$15 per day for food. The seven camps of students traveled

throughout the state in "Constitution Coaches," going door to door to encourage caucus-goers to support Paul.

Working class individuals also trekked across the nation to participate in campaigns.

Chuck Rocha, national political director for the United Steelworkers, said more than 200 active members were in Iowa to rally support for John Edwards.

Many of the steelworkers used vacation time to come to Iowa. Rocha said he drove 14 hours in from Pittsburgh, Pa., to volunteer. He said the issue for union members and the working class is job security.

"Our members have felt the brunt of the downturn of the economy," Rocha said. "We feel that John Edwards is the best chance to keep manufacturing jobs in North America, to make sure people have a pension and to make sure people have health care."

The steelworkers' sentiments are echoed by supporters in different campaigns, even as the focus of the race to the White House shifts to other upcoming state primaries and caucuses. Campaign supporters say the country is headed in the wrong direction and candidates have capitalized upon this.

"Change" is the new campaign slogan, in addition to the mantra "hope."

For many, the seriousness of the race comes down to the future of the country.

The Iowa caucus offers supporters from all over the U.S. as well as the citizens of the state a chance to have their voices heard by the candidates. Retail politics is the primary campaign method presidential hopefuls employ every four years. Citizens are presented with opportunities to get direct access to the candidates with handshakes, one-on-one conversations and baby-kissing.

The chances of such personal interactions with presidential hopefuls decreases as campaign tactics lean more heavily on advertisements and events designed to turn out mass numbers of interested parties and loyal supporters.

"I really believe in John McCain. I am going to serve in the military, and I don't want to serve under anyone else."

Alex Strobehn
John McCain Campaign
Worker



Mark Hardy/Index

Barack Obama makes a special guest appearance in a Des Moines mall on the day of the Iowa Caucus, which he later went on to win.

Bursch represents Truman in Obama campaign efforts

BY JULIE WILLIAMS
News Editor

Hanne Bursch knows how to be persuasive.

Bursch, a junior, wasted no time going to work to help campaign for Sen. Barack Obama, D-Ill., before the Iowa Caucuses, visiting Obama's campaign office the night she arrived home in Iowa City for Winter Break. She said her job consisted of making phone calls to residents in her voting precinct and also canvassing that area, which consisted of about eight or nine city blocks.

"I worked directly with these [Iowa City 25th Precinct] residents for the 2 1/2 weeks I was there, and they got to know me because I called them a lot, and I stopped by their house to talk to them about Obama," Bursch said.

Although Bursch said her precinct was part of a residential area and that not many college students showed up to the caucus, she said there was a large influx of students who came to other areas of Iowa City — home of the University of Iowa — and that there were other people her age working with her on Obama's campaign.

"It was cool just to see how many students were excited about just this outdated process that everyone is wondering about and excited to make phone

calls and do everything," she said.

Bursch said she took the position campaigning for Obama after getting a lot of e-mails from the campaign office when she gave out her contact information at an Obama speech last spring. She said she viewed it as a good opportunity and that calling voters and going door-to-door was the most politically outgoing thing she has ever done.

Bursch's involvement didn't stop when caucus-goers hit their respective floors on the night of Jan. 3. At the Iowa City 25th Precinct caucus, Bursch was chosen as a delegate to represent Obama's platform at the statewide Democratic Convention. She said this will consist of her going to a second caucus event to try to convince other delegates that Obama's ideas should be included in the Democratic Party platform and also that Obama should be the Democratic candidate in November. That process will end with the National Democratic Convention in Denver, Colo., during the summer.

"I don't know if I'll make it that far because it really depends on how Obama does and whether or not I'm elected again to continue this process," Bursch said.

In her precinct, Bursch was one of five delegates selected to represent Obama and one of 10 total delegates.

She said she was the only student delegate, which she chalks up to the relationship she had formed with other caucus-goers through all of the phone calls and door-to-door visits she made.

"I think they wanted me because as a student I was showing the conviction, the future and just ... how important he was for me to take time off, and that can make a big impression on people," Bursch said.

She said the caucuses sometimes can be seen as a dry concept and that it is not always easy to convince people to show up.

"You have to make the effort to come up with a political stance and a conviction and understand why you are there," she said. "so that takes mental effort, and then you have to stand there in a corner, so you have to be bold enough and brave enough and committed enough to stand for this candidate. ... It's sort of a really weird, unique Iowa process."

For Bursch, one of the most rewarding parts of the entire experience was seeing so many people show up to participate in the caucuses.

"We got the independents, the undecideds, the first-time caucusers because those were the demographic range that Obama really speaks to," she said. "... When these people showed up, it was just so rewarding for all those nagging phone calls that we made."

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