The Iowa Caucuses: Understanding the Process

When Iowans gather for the presidential caucuses, each of Iowa’s 1,993 precincts elects delegates who will attend the county caucuses. The precinct process has three steps:

1. Viability
   A certain number of a candidate’s supporters must attend a caucus to be elected to delegate to represent their precinct at a state convention. For instance, at a caucus that elects four delegates, a candidate must receive initial support from at least 15 percent of the caucus attendance if he or she is to be elected a delegate.

2. Caucusing
   Next, caucus attendees join their preference groups. Supports for particular candidates gather together in one area. Undecided caucus-goers or candidates who initially supported a nonviable candidate can join any group and decided candidates may try to persuade them to vote for him or her.

3. Decisions
   Once caucus members have formed their preferred groups, precinct leaders award the delegates based upon a mathematical formula. The leaders then phone in the results to the automated system.

Standing room only at many precincts

Voters, observers, media pack political locations to practice caucus process

Ann Mary MacFarlane

A show of hands was all it took for people to choose the Democratic presidential candidate in Iowa. Senators, media and observers attended the 1,993 precinct caucuses held across Iowa on Jan. 19, 2004. Caucuses

Not all Iowaans attend or are precincts as rotational voters, but for the time the caucuses took place these 1,993 were all either registered Democrats or declared independents.

"The Iowa caucus system began in 1972 to increase participation at the grassroots level of parties," said Burt Bier, assistant to the Iowa Senate minority leader Mike Gronstal. Iowa’s 495 precincts exemplified the process.

Surrounding the campus of Drake University (Des Moines, Iowa), located within residential neighborhoods, this process provided an environment allowing interested students to either vote or observe the election procedure.

Observers included a group of 50 high school students from a government class at Roosevelt High School (Kanawha, 1 Iowa). Many of these students were committed to a political career.

The participants at this caucus had two objectives to choose from: a presidential candidate for the county convention and to propose resolutions for the party’s platform.

Prior to the opening of the caucuses, political activities took place. The counting of the ballots was completed prior to the opening of the meetings.

The next order of business was to decide a presidential candidate. With three delegates to be elected, the total number of caucus attendees was divided by three. If more than one attendee wished to attend, the adjacent precincts continued the process.

The vote was taken by a show of hands for each presidential candidate. If a candidate received 21 or more votes, that candidate received 65 votes. Seventeen precincts were designated as ‘safe’ and received 65 votes. phenomenal seating capacity of 238.

The Iowa city auditorium in Des Moines precinct had its caucus in an auditorium on campus that has a maximum seating capacity of 238. People streamed into the auditorium beginning at 6 p.m. Monday, reaching an

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