



**What is a precinct caucus?**

On Saturday, February 9, 2008, both the Democratic and Republican Parties will hold precinct caucuses. The caucuses are sponsored by the Democratic and Republican Parties. No governmental departments are involved in organizing or tabulating the results of these meetings.

Attending caucuses allows neighbors to bring the selection of national candidates and party platforms to a local level.

Though each precinct will have its own caucus, several precincts may meet at a common site such as a neighborhood school. Voters will select delegates to the county and/or district convention and suggest planks for their party's platform.

Only the two major political parties announced caucuses. Contact the minor parties directly for their activities in the 2008 election.

**What is a Democratic Party precinct caucus?**

At a Democratic Party caucus residents of the precinct sign in, declare themselves Democrats and may commit to a specific candidate when signing in or choose to be uncommitted. Voters will select delegates to the county and/or district convention and suggest planks for their party's platform.

If you are not registered to vote in Washington, you may register or change your address at the caucus and participate in the caucus.

Those supporting a specific candidate may gather in groups and try to persuade others to vote for their choice. Candidates receiving less than 15% of the votes in the precinct will be eliminated after the first round of voting.

Voters supporting a candidate who doesn't meet the 15% threshold may work with the supporters of another unsuccessful candidate to see whether one of the two can gain enough votes to secure a delegate. Alternatively, they can throw their support to a viable candidate.

A voter also may abstain from choosing a candidate and be uncommitted.

Once the voters have a chance to align themselves with a viable candidate, the final vote is taken. If five delegates are being elected, candidates receiving over 15% of the vote will

receive a proportionate number of delegates. Thus, if Candidate A receives 58% of the vote, Candidate B receives 23% of the vote, and Candidate C receives 19% of the vote, Candidate A will be awarded three delegates while Candidates B and C will receive one delegate each. These delegates will attend the district and county Democratic conventions where the same process may narrow the field of candidates and delegates elected to attend a state convention.

Delegates to the national Democratic Convention will mostly be chosen through the caucus system with a few delegate positions reserved for party officials.

The state Democratic Party will not allocate delegates based on the results of the Presidential Primary on February 19, 2008.

### **What is a Republican Party Caucus?**

At the Republican Party precinct caucuses, each delegate elected to go to the next level must win 50% + 1 of the caucus participants' votes. As stated in the Green Papers (see [www.thegreenpapers.com/P08/WA-R.phtml](http://www.thegreenpapers.com/P08/WA-R.phtml)), "There is no formal system applied in the Precinct Caucuses to relate the presidential preference of the Caucus participants to the choice of the precinct's delegates. The participants at each Precinct Caucus alone determine if presidential preference is to be a factor in such choice and, if so, how it is to be applied." Delegates elected at the precinct level are not bound to vote for the candidates they represent.

Currently, the state Republican Party will use the Presidential Primary to apportion 19 of its 40 delegates; caucus results at the state level will determine the allocation of 18 of its delegates.

### **Do I have to be a registered voter in the State of Washington to participate in a caucus?**

To attend a Democratic Party Caucus you must be **eligible** to vote in Washington or will be **eligible** to vote in the General Election in November, 2008. Voter registration will be available at the caucus and newly registered voters can participate in the caucus.

Republicans will use the results of the primary in part - so you must be registered to vote in advance of the caucus in accordance with state guidelines, i.e. January 19 or in person by February 4, 2008

### **Find your precinct.**

Your precinct is on your voter registration card. If you don't have a voter registration card call your county auditor (Link: <http://www.secstate.wa.gov/elections/auditors.aspx>)

If you live in King County and are a registered voter you can find your precinct number using the [voter information tool](http://www.metrokc.gov/elections/). (Link: <http://www.metrokc.gov/elections/>)

### **What if I am a new voter?**

New voters often think they must be invited to a precinct caucus, but that is not the case. The Democrats allow voters to take part as long as they are registered before or at the caucus and sign an oath to declare a party affiliation; 17-year olds may join in if they will be 18 years old by the date of the general election. Those participating in a Republican precinct caucus must be a registered voter by the date of the caucus and must declare their party affiliation. Both parties allow observers.

### **Can I go to a precinct caucus AND vote in the Presidential Primary on February 19, 2008?**

As long as voters participate in the caucus and primary affiliated with the same party, they may take part in both processes. It is up to the parties to decide how they will use the caucuses and the primary to apportion delegates to the national nominating conventions. Currently, the state Republican Party will use the Presidential Primary to apportion 19 of its 40 delegates; caucus results at the state level will determine the allocation of 18 of its delegates. The remaining 3 delegates will be filled by party officials.

The state Democratic Party will not allocate delegates based on the results of the Presidential Primary. Delegates will mostly be chosen through the caucus system with a few delegate positions reserved for party officials.

### **Do I have to join a political party?**

In Washington State voters do not declare their political party preference when they register to vote. Voter registration is not by party.

Voters who choose to vote in the Presidential Primary may vote for only one party. They must sign an oath provided by the political parties affirming that they have not taken part in a competing party's caucus. The names of those voters who support a given party in the primary will be forwarded to that party.

The names of voters participating in a party's caucus will be the property of the party sponsoring the caucus.

### **What is the difference between a caucus and a primary?**

There is no secret ballot in a caucus. Participants arrive at their precinct caucus prepared to declare the candidate of their choice. Any candidate must reach a level of support of 15% of

the participants in the precinct caucus. If their candidate does not meet the 15% support level, they negotiate with other support groups to try and gain support from them for their preferred candidate, or they may join a group supporting their second choice. Any candidate with 15% support or better will have delegates to the regional and state Conventions allocated to him or her. The results of a caucus are limited to the number of people who show up and participate.

A primary is carried out by secret ballot. Voting is carried out at the polls or by mail - in ballot. The candidate who gets the most votes gets all the delegates to the national Convention.

### **What are the advantages of caucuses?**

Delegate commitments are defined by the parties and the rules are set by the parties not by a popular vote or a presidential primary. The parties chose the method of selection for conventions.

Attending caucuses allows neighbors to bring the selection of national candidates and party platforms to a local level. The positives and negatives of national candidates may be discussed and debated as well as the issues to be included in a party platform.

### **What do the caucus critics say?**

Caucuses are criticized for several reasons.

1. Low turnout can result in skewed results. Typically only 2-4% of registered voters attend caucuses.
2. There is no popular vote.
3. The length of a caucus (often at least two hours) prevents some voters from attending.
4. Absentee voting is prohibited. Those unable to attend the caucus have no say in choosing the candidate or delegates.
5. There is no voting by secret ballot.

### **Why is there a WA State Presidential Primary on February 19, 2008?**

Responding to concerns about the accessibility of caucuses, a law (RCW 29A.56.010) requiring a Presidential Primary was adopted in 1989.

As noted in the law, the primary was designed to make it easier for “the elderly, the infirm, women, the disabled, evening workers, and others who are unable to attend caucuses and therefore unable to fully participate in this most important quadrennial event that occurs in our democratic system of government” to take part in choosing a candidate for President.

Washington State voters can participate in the Presidential Primary that will be held on Tuesday, February 19, 2008.

To appear on the Presidential Primary ballot, candidates must belong to a major political party, defined under state law (RCW 29A.04.086) as “a political party of which at least one nominee for president, vice president, United States senator, or a statewide office received at least five percent of the total vote cast at the last preceding state general election in an even-numbered year.” The Washington Secretary of State must determine that a candidate is generally supported or acknowledged in the national media and specify that s/he appear on the ballot. Also, if at least 1,000 political party members sign a petition in favor of a candidate and file it at least 60 days before the primary, that candidate will be placed on the ballot.

Voters who choose to vote in the Presidential Primary may vote only for one party. They must sign an oath provided by the political parties affirming that they have not taken part in a competing party's caucus. The names of those voters who support a given party in the primary will be forwarded to that party.

For Democratic Party caucus information, follow the link at

<http://www.wa-democrats.org/index.php?page=display&id=253> or call the caucus hotline at (206) 583-4345.

For Republican Party caucus information, follow the link at

[http://www.kcgp.org/caucus\\_locator.html](http://www.kcgp.org/caucus_locator.html) or call (425) 990-0404 for more information.

### **What is the difference between the Presidential Primary held February 19 and the Washington State Primary held in August, 2008?**

The Presidential Primary (and caucuses) selects delegates to the National Conventions of the political parties for the purpose of nominating the candidates for President of the United States.

The Washington State Primary, held the third Tuesday in August, selects candidates from each political party to run in the general election in November for local, state and other federal offices, i.e. Congress of the United States, U.S. Senate, Governor of the state of Washington, state legislators. The state judiciary is also elected in the August Primary. Voters in the WA State Primary Election in August cast a secret ballot, but can vote in only one party's primary and the voter declares their party on the ballot. Each paper ballot contains the names of candidates from all parties. Ballots containing votes not confined to one party will not be counted.

### **What are the choices on the Washington Presidential Primary Ballot?**

Link to <http://vote.wa.gov/votersguide.aspx>