

## Attend your Precinct Caucus Meeting

Political parties organize precinct caucuses. You can attend only one party's caucus. This is the first step in selecting candidates for public office. It provides a chance for grassroots involvement, and is the basic opportunity for you to participate in the system. It is a neighborhood or precinct political meeting. You may meet your neighbors there, and/or you can encourage neighbors to go with you.

The primary objectives of the caucus are:

1. To vote for the presidential candidate of your party, and
2. To begin the process of selecting delegates who will represent your precinct at the county unit convention and eventually leading to the state and national convention.
3. To volunteer to work for the party of your choice by serving as a caucus chair or precinct party officer who will be responsible for organizing and helping to run the party at the local level for the next two years.
4. To introduce resolutions, debate issues, and formulate position(s) that may become part of the party platform. You will have a chance to voice your opinion.

Above all, caucus is a great exercise in grassroots democracy. It's a gathering unlike any other, one which will provide you with the opportunity to have a direct impact on the direction of-and indeed, to take back-your neighborhood, your state, your party and your country.

### ***Why should I go to my precinct caucus?***

Voting at your precinct caucus is your chance to cast your vote for your preferred candidate during the presidential primary season. It is also a chance to have your voice heard in the political process. In addition to casting your vote for your preferred candidate, participating in your precinct caucus will give you the opportunity to select your preferred candidate's supporters as county unit convention delegates, to run for county unit convention delegate yourself, and to help shape the party platform.

### ***Who can attend a caucus?***

Any eligible voter who agrees with the principles of the party as stated in its constitution or who voted with the party in the last election or intends to in the next election can attend a caucus. You cannot participate in more than one party's caucus in any one year and you cannot be an officer of a different political party. Anyone can attend a precinct caucus to observe.

To be an eligible voter, you must:

- be at least 18 years of age on Election Day
- be a U. S. citizen, and
- have lived in Minnesota for at least 20 days.

### ***What does the caucus do?***

It is the first step leading to the designation of party nominees for public office. The political parties control the actual business of the caucus and determine the goals. At the caucus, you will discuss issues to be considered for the party platform. You will elect delegates to subsequent party conventions. You will elect local party leaders. The screening of candidates interested in being endorsed by the party will begin. You can volunteer to help with campaign activities or to serve as an election judge.

### ***How does a caucus operate?***

State law determines some procedures. A convener will be elected and will explain the process as you go along. The caucus operates under Robert's Rules of Order. All voting is by secret ballot. The timing allowed for election of officers and delegates is set by law, and the caucus cannot end sooner than one hour after it begins. The election of permanent officers must remain open for the first 15 minutes. The election of delegates must begin no sooner than one-half hour and no later than one hour after the start of the caucus. Some procedures vary according to political party. For example, a sub caucus is allowed at the DFL party's meetings.

### ***How will I know where and when my caucus meets?***

State law sets the 1st Tuesday in March at 7 p.m. as the time for all caucuses. The parties arrange for the meeting place, which is usually a school, library, or other public building in or near your neighborhood. This is NOT necessarily the same place where you vote in a general election. The evening has two main parts:

- The presidential preference balloting which is held from 7:00 pm to 8:00 pm.
- The selection of delegates who will progress from the precinct caucus to the next level of convention (the county unit) will occur after 7:30 pm.

You may arrive as early as 6:30 pm in order to register. The Republican and DFL parties usually have a caucus in each precinct. The Reform and Constitution parties may have only one caucus in each legislative district.

Watch the newspapers the last week in February or call:

- the party
- the county auditor
- the city clerk where you live.

You can check the website <http://pollfinder.sos.state.mn.us/> to find your local precinct number.

***What if I have to work?***

You can ask to be excused to attend the caucus. State law says that if you give your employer at least 10 days written notice, you may be absent from work, without penalty, except for deduction of wages for the time you are actually away.

***Are the caucus meetings ever postponed?***

In the case of severe weather, a major party may request that the Secretary of State postpone the caucus for one week in counties where travel is especially dangerous. The news media will be notified by 6 p.m. on the scheduled day.

***What if I am disabled?***

Most caucuses are held in buildings that are accessible to disabled persons. If you are vision impaired, you may receive materials in large print or Braille, or you may receive materials beforehand so that you may have it converted. Notify the party ahead of time. If you are hearing impaired, you may request a sign language interpreter from the party 30 days before the date of the caucus. The same services are available for conventions.

***Who is responsible for running the caucuses?***

Two people primarily administer caucuses: the Caucus Convener and the Precinct Chair. The Caucus Convener begins the caucus proceedings and calls for the election of the Precinct Chair. Sometimes the Caucus Convener will become the Precinct Chair if this person is unchallenged when the election of the chair is called. The Precinct Chair then runs the remainder of the caucus, including the delegate election.

***How do I vote and what does that mean?***

Voting in the caucus is simple! You can arrive at your local caucus meeting between 6:30 p.m. and 8:00 p.m. on March 2, 2004. Once you sign the precinct roll, you are given your presidential preference ballot. This ballot lists the names of the presidential candidates that have met the qualifications of the party. You simply select your candidate and hand in your ballot. Voting concludes promptly at 8:00 p.m.; you may not vote after that time.

***Is the presidential preference balloting binding?***

The proportion of delegates to the national convention allocated to each presidential candidate must reflect the statewide results of the presidential preference balloting accomplished at each precinct caucus. For example, in 2004, Minnesota will send 87 delegates and 12 alternates to the Democratic National Convention. Of the 87 delegates, seventy-two must be allocated in proportion to the statewide results of precinct-caucus presidential preference balloting. (The remaining 15 are considered "super delegates" who are unpledged party leaders and elected officials. These 15 super delegates may vote independently of the results of Minnesota's presidential preference balloting). Thus if your preferred candidate receives 67% percent of the statewide total of presidential preference ballots cast on March 2, a minimum of 48 of the 72 delegates must be pledged to vote for your preferred candidate on the first nominating ballot at the Democratic National Convention.

***Is there absentee voting?***

No, there is no absentee voting for the presidential preference ballot. You must go to the precinct in which you reside between 7:00 and 8:00 p.m. on March 2, 2004 to cast your presidential preference ballot.

***How do I become a County Unit Convention delegate?***

When it is time to start the delegate selection process, the elected precinct chair will determine if an election is necessary. For example, if a precinct caucus has 50 people in attendance, and the precinct is allowed 50 delegates to the County Unit Convention (as determined by the party, based on the number of party votes in the precinct during the last two general elections), no election is necessary because everyone can become a delegate. However, if more than 50 people volunteer to become County Unit Convention delegates, an election must be held.

***But if I know that my preferred candidate has won the presidential preference ballot statewide, why do I need to stick around to select County Unit Convention delegates?***

It is preferable for the supporters of your preferred candidate to have at least as many committed delegates to the National Convention as the proportion your preferred candidate wins at the precinct caucus level. Moreover, for supporters of your preferred candidate to have an influence on party policies and practices, it will require sufficient numbers of supporters to vote for precinct officers and to pass platform resolutions for consideration at the County Unit Convention level.

***Can I become a county unit convention delegate if I am unable to attend caucus?***

Yes, you can become a delegate even if you are unable to attend caucus. If you cannot be present at the caucus, you may instead indicate your desire to become a delegate in writing. The precinct caucus chair will ensure that the names of all such absent individuals are placed into nomination at caucus. Contact your chosen political party for further instructions on this topic.

***What happens after Minnesota's Caucus?***

Campaign members begin organizing and fund-raising efforts. The caucus system is the grassroots process by which the party is organized. It consists of layers of conventions. The County Unit Convention delegates are elected at precinct caucuses and attend County Unit Conventions. At the County Unit Conventions, delegates are elected to the Congressional District and State Conventions. Delegates to the National Convention are elected from both the Congressional District and State Conventions. The following outlines what happens at each level:

- **County Unit Conventions**

County Unit, or Senate District, Conventions are held among groups of precincts. County Unit Conventions are held in every county. In the seven-county metro area, the county units are equal to state senate districts.

After County Unit Convention delegates are elected on caucus night, County Unit Conventions begin the convention process that elects the 87 delegates and 12 alternates to the National Convention.

These conventions are held to conduct countywide party business, endorse candidates for the Minnesota State Legislature, hear resolutions to the party platform and action agenda, and elect delegates to the Congressional District and State Conventions. In many County Unit Conventions, one set of delegates is elected to represent the County Unit at both the Congressional District and State Conventions.

- **Congressional District Conventions**

A Congressional District Convention is held in each of Minnesota's eight Congressional Districts. Delegates to these conventions are elected at the County Unit Conventions held within each Congressional District.

Congressional District Conventions are held to conduct district-wide party business, endorse candidates for Congress, to consider resolutions to the party platform and action agenda, and to elect 47 delegates and 8 alternates to the Democratic National Convention in proportion to the results of the presidential preference balloting.

- **The State Convention**

The State Convention is held to conduct statewide party business, consider for final approval resolutions to the party platform and action agenda, endorse candidates for statewide office, and to elect 40 national delegates and 4 national alternates. Twenty-five of these delegates are elected in proportion to the results of the presidential preference balloting. The remaining 15 are "super delegates", or unpledged party leaders and elected officials.