



DELEGATES 101: Frequently Asked Questions About the Presidential Nominating Process Updated: 4/25/08

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Below is a list of Frequently Asked Questions provided by the Democratic National Committee (DNC) and the Democratic National Convention Committee (DNCC) as a resource for reporters covering the presidential nomination process:

What is the overall number of delegates to the 2008 Democratic National Convention?

There are presently a total of 4,048 delegate votes to the 2008 Democratic National Convention that will be cast by 4,069 delegates. The difference is that certain delegates from American Samoa, Guam, the Virgin Islands and Democrats Abroad cast fractional delegate votes.

How many delegates are needed to secure the Democratic nomination?

A candidate needs a majority of the total number of delegate votes in order to secure the Party's nomination. Presently, 2,025 delegate votes are needed to secure the nomination. (Note: This number does not include delegates from Florida and Michigan which have both been penalized for violating the Party's Delegate Selection Rules.)

How does a candidate pick up delegates?

There are two types of delegates to the Convention – pledged and unpledged. Pledged delegates are awarded proportionally to candidates based on the results of a primary or caucus. In all, 3,253 pledged delegates are up for grabs in primaries and caucuses. Pledged delegates are elected at the congressional district level and state-wide. A candidate must earn at least 15% of the vote in a congressional district or state-wide in order to qualify to receive a delegate. There are no winner-take-all states in the Democratic Party's process. Pledged delegates make up approximately 80% of the delegates at the Convention.

Who are "Unpledged" Delegates?

Unfortunately, some commentators have misrepresented who the "superdelegates" are

and what their role is supposed to be. Unpledged delegates are a diverse group of individuals including local grassroots activists, county Party chairs, local elected officials and others. They are not some elite group of “party bosses.” They include all members of the DNC, all Democratic Members of Congress and all Democratic Governors, and a few former party leaders. Democratic Members of Congress and Governors have been elected by the people of their states and districts.

Virtually all members of the DNC have been elected by their state party committees or Conventions, who in turn have been elected by grassroots Democratic voters. Members of the DNC are an extraordinarily diverse group who come from all parts of the country and all walks of life, and who have earned their positions by doing the difficult, unglamorous work of building the Party organization day in and day out, when nobody is paying attention, year after year. Their role is to exercise their best judgment in the interests of the nation and of the Democratic Party.

Unpledged delegates represent about 19 percent of the delegates to the Democratic Convention (795).

What are add-on unpledged delegates?

Each state also has an opportunity to include one or a small number of “Add-on” unpledged delegates within its delegation. These positions are intended to be filled by prominent individuals whom the state’s Democrats want to include as part of the delegation to the National Convention. Again, as unpledged delegates, these individuals serve because of their stature, rather than their presidential preference. States receive one Add-on unpledged delegate position for every four DNC members it elects.

Why does the number of delegates needed secure the nomination change from time to time?

The unpledged delegate number will change slightly all the way up to the convention to account for changes such as a resignation or someone passing away.

When it comes to pledged delegates, what is the difference between district-level, at-Large and pledged Party leaders and elected officials?

There are three types of pledged delegates, and all must be elected:

“District-Level” Delegates. A majority of a state’s delegates are elected from local districts (usually congressional districts). Each district-level delegate must support a presidential candidate (or no specific candidate which is known as “uncommitted”). This is the first category of delegates to be selected in each state.

“At-Large” Delegates. These delegates are elected as state-wide delegates to represent presidential candidates in proportion to the state-wide vote the candidate received in the primary or caucus. These are the final group of delegates to be elected in every state.

“Pledged Party Leader and Elected Official” (PLEO) Delegates. These delegates are

elected as state-wide delegates in proportion to the state-wide vote. These delegate positions are reserved for Democratic Party leaders and elected officials who are supporters of the presidential candidates. Individuals eligible for these delegate positions include: big-city mayors, state-wide elected officials, state legislative leaders, state legislators and other state, county and local Party leaders and elected officials.

How does someone become a delegate?

Individuals run to be elected as a delegate. These are political positions, and as such getting elected requires a great deal of time and energy. Each state has its own process for selecting delegates. Therefore delegate candidates must be familiar with their state's Delegate Selection Plan and obtain the necessary filing forms to run. While each state's process is unique, several key points apply to all delegate campaigns:

Register to Vote. To run for delegate and vote in a presidential primary or participate in a caucus, an individual must be a registered voter and a Democrat. In addition, anyone who wishes to support a delegate candidate must be a registered voter and wish to participate as a Democrat.

Identify Which Presidential Candidate to Support and Become Involved in His or Her Campaign. Delegates are allocated to presidential candidates in proportion to how well the candidate does in the primary or caucus. Each campaign needs supporters to run for delegate. Delegate candidates should get involved in the presidential campaign early and discuss their interest in running for delegate with presidential campaign organizers.

Meet Filing Deadlines and/or Petition Requirements. All states require delegate candidates to file a "declaration of candidacy" and a signed pledge of support for a presidential candidate. In some cases, the declaration includes a requisite number of signatures of registered Democratic voters from the area. It is critical to know, understand and follow all filing requirements.

When do super delegates cast their votes? Are their votes counted toward the total number needed to secure the nomination?

Governor Dean has publicly encouraged unpledged delegates to make their intentions known before the convention, preferably before July 1.

All delegates – both pledged and unpledged – formally cast their votes at the Convention. The votes of super delegates cast at the Convention do count towards a candidate securing the nomination. In past nominating cycles, individual super delegates have endorsed a specific presidential candidate. Regardless of such endorsement, super delegates are able to cast their vote for any presidential candidate at the Convention. Many news organizations are including super delegate endorsements in the delegate totals for each candidate.

Do the presidential candidates have a say in who becomes their delegate? What is the presidential candidate right of review?

Yes, presidential candidates have an opportunity to review the list of individuals who have filed to run for delegate pledged to them. In accordance with Party rules, during candidate right of review, presidential candidates may approve a specific number of delegate candidates in order to ensure they are bona fide supporters. These approved delegate candidates must still be elected by the states.

Which contests are open to Democrats only? Where can Independents participate?

The Delegate Selection Rules require that participation be open to all voters who identify as Democrats. In states that have party registration (where individuals can register in a political party), states can identify those voters who consider themselves Democrats. However, in states that do not have party registration, implementation of the Party's rules about participation in the process is more challenging.

In primary states, implementation depends on whether the state has party registration. In those states with party registration, participation is generally limited to registered Democrats, though some states may open the process to unaffiliated voters (aka "Independents"). States that do not have party registration must ensure the standard of "declaration and recordation" is met. This principle means that a voter declares he or she wants a Democratic ballot and that choice is recorded. Caucus states generally require individuals who wish to participate to sign a statement that they consider themselves to be Democrats. Most caucus states do not have party registration.

How big is a state's delegation? And how is that determined?

Each state and territory's delegation size is determined by an allocation formula described in detail in the Call for the Convention. In determining each state's delegation and the exact number of district level, at-large, and pledged Party leader and elected official positions, the DNC begins with a base of 3,000 delegate slots. These are allocated to the states using a formula that gives equal weight to the sum of the vote for the Democratic candidate in the last three presidential elections (1996, 2000 & 2004) and to population as expressed by electoral vote. For your state's exact delegate allocation visit www.democrats.org/delegates.

Are Democrats living abroad allowed to participate?

Yes. Democrats Abroad is the Democratic Party organization for more than six million U.S. citizens living overseas, organizing local events in more than 70 countries to encourage participation in the American political process. The primary for Americans abroad ran from February 5-12, 2008. Participants were able to vote by mail, Internet, fax or – in 34 countries – they voted in person.

Are territories awarded delegates? How are they allocated?

In addition to the 50 states and the District of Columbia, the Party recognizes five other jurisdictions to send delegates to the Convention. These five territories are: American Samoa, Guam, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands and Democrats Abroad. Because the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and the territories do not vote in presidential elections, they do not have electoral votes and cannot be allocated delegates based on normal allocation formula. The Democratic Party has predetermined the allocation base for these jurisdictions as follows: Puerto Rico receives 55 pledged delegates; American Samoa, Guam and the Virgin Islands each receive three at-large delegate votes (cast by six delegates); and Democrats Abroad receives six at-large and one Party and elected official delegate votes (cast by 14 delegates). Each territory will hold a contest to determine the allocation of delegate positions among presidential candidates.

When is Puerto Rico's primary? Why was it changed?

Puerto Rico's contest is on June 1. The original plan was submitted with an incorrect date and Puerto Rico requested that the Rules and Bylaws Committee approve the date change and the switch from a caucus to a primary, which it did in March.

Are delegates bound? Can a pledged delegate change his or her presidential preference?

This is the one of the biggest myths of the delegate selection process. Delegates are not bound to vote for the candidate they are pledged to at the Convention or on the first ballot. A delegate goes to the Convention with a signed pledge of support for a particular presidential candidate. At the Convention, while it is assumed that the delegate will cast their vote for the candidate they are publicly pledged to, it is not required. Under the Delegate Selection Rules, a delegate is asked to "in good conscience reflect the sentiments of those who elected them." This provision is designed in part to make the Convention a deliberative body.

What about candidates who decide to leave the race? What happens to their delegates?

When a candidate decides to leave the presidential race, they are entitled to keep any district-level delegates that were awarded to them and any district-level delegates that might be awarded to them in future contests. If pledged PLEO delegates and at-large delegates have been selected prior to the candidate withdrawing from the race, they are also allowed to keep those delegates. However, if a candidate leaves the race prior to the selection of pledged PLEO and at-large delegates, those delegate positions are reallocated to the candidates still in the race.

Delegates are not "bound" to vote for the candidate they were elected to represent. They can, and have in the past, cast a vote for another presidential candidate at the Convention. As a sign of good faith, most former candidates will "release" their delegates from voting for them; however, this is not required, and only has a symbolic meaning to it. Delegates can vote for another presidential candidate without being "released."

What happens if no candidate wins the 2,025 delegates needed to secure the nomination before the convention?

If neither candidate reaches 2,025 delegates before the convention, the nomination and the race for delegates becomes competitive.

The last time the presidential nomination required more than one ballot was at the 1952 Democratic Convention in Chicago. At the 1952 Convention, 11 names were placed in nomination in a heated contest between Adlai Stevenson, Estes Kefauver, Richard Russell, Averell Harriman and Paul Dever. Adlai Stevenson became the nominee on the third ballot.

Following the 1968 Convention in Chicago the Party instituted a series of reforms to its nominating process to ensure full participation by the Party's main constituencies and a fair reflection of presidential preferences by those who participate.

Q. In the absence of a nominee at the convention, who presides over the full convention? Who sets speaking order, takes motions, etc...?

The Permanent Convention Chair -- Speaker Nancy Pelosi -- is responsible for conducting the business of the Convention in a smooth and efficient manner, including debate on committee reports, votes, etc. In the case where one candidate is not the presumptive nominee before the convention, the speaking order for presidential candidates is determined by the DNC Chairman, the Permanent Convention Chair and a representative of each presidential candidate.

Do delegates get paid?

No, delegates and alternates do not get paid for their official duties. The Delegate Selection Rules require state parties to include outreach provisions that serve to encourage the participation and representation of persons of low and moderate income. In addition, state parties must design a plan to help defray expenses of those delegates who otherwise would be unable to participate and attend.

How long is a delegate's term?

A delegate's term is from gavel to gavel. That is to say, they serve for the length of the Convention, normally four sessions. The Convention generally runs from Monday through Thursday and closes with the acceptance speech of the Party's presidential nominee.

What are alternates?

There are certain occasions when a delegate may not be able to fulfill his or her responsibilities. In those cases, an alternate is chosen to replace the delegate. While most

people want to attend the Convention as a delegate, each state also selects a small number of alternates. In most states, the process of becoming an alternate is the same as for becoming a delegate. An alternate's term is dependent on whether he or she is a permanent or temporary replacement. A permanent replacement occurs when a delegate resigns or dies before the Convention and the alternate replaces the delegate for the entirety of the Convention. A temporary replacement occurs when a delegate is to be absent for a limited period of time during the Convention and an alternate acts in the delegate's place. In both cases, the alternate chosen must be of the same presidential preference, and in the case of a permanent replacement, of the same sex.

Is there a process for Florida and Michigan to get their delegates to the Convention back?

According to the rules, both state parties have two courses of action.

- 1) Appeal to the DNC's Rules and Bylaws Committee or the Convention Credentials Committee. The Convention Credentials Committee determines and resolves any outstanding questions concerning the seating of delegates and alternates to the Convention. The Credentials Committee is expected to meet sometime in July or August prior to the Convention, when it could take up the matters of Florida and/or Michigan.
- 2) Michigan and Florida could still choose to run a party process, as Delaware did in 1996, to select delegates to the convention. This process must be held between now and the second Tuesday in June, in accordance with DNC rules.

How will delegates, including unpledged delegates, cast their vote at the convention? Will their votes be made public?

Historically, the roll call vote for President is typically conducted on Wednesday night. Each state publicly announces the number of votes for the candidate/s. Each delegate's vote, including superdelegates, will be recorded on a tally sheet that will be submitted to the Secretary's Office.

What is the current situation with Florida and Michigan?

DNC Chairman Governor Howard Dean, members of the Florida congressional delegation and Florida State Chair Karen Thurman met on April 2, and issued this joint statement:

"We are all committed to doing everything we can to ensure that a Florida delegation is seated in Denver. We all agree that whatever the solution, it must have the support of both campaigns. While there may be differences of opinion in how we get there, we are all committed to ensuring that Florida's delegation is seated in Denver. We're committed to working with both campaigns to reach a solution as soon as realistically possible. We

are also laying the groundwork to ensure we win in Florida in November and spent time here today talking about how to do just that. We will continue to work towards a solution to ensure delegates are seated and logistics are in place for a Florida delegation in Denver."

DNC Chairman Dean and members of the Michigan “Working Group” issued this statement April 4:

"We are united in our commitment to doing everything we can to ensure that a Michigan delegation is seated in Denver this summer. We also know that any solution needs to be acceptable to both Democratic presidential campaigns. While there may be differences of opinion in how we get there, we will continue to work together to ensure that a Michigan delegation is seated and that the logistics are in place for a Michigan delegation in Denver. We have every expectation that we will succeed in that endeavor, and then go on to win in November."

How many delegates does Florida and Michigan have?

Florida has 211 delegates, including 26 unpledged delegates and Michigan has 155 delegates, including 27 unpledged.

What is a Convention Standing Committee, how many committees are there, and what do they do?

The Convention has three standing committees that are responsible for reviewing Convention business and formulating recommendations for consideration by the Convention delegates.

The Credentials Committee determines and resolves disputes concerning the recognition and seating of delegates and alternates to the Convention. (It does not determine the distribution of passes for admission.) Its recommendations are presented in a report voted on by the delegates as the first item of business at the Convention.

The Rules Committee recommends the procedural rules of the Convention, the agenda, the officers of the Convention and other matters not covered by the other committees. Its recommendations are presented in a report voted on during the first session of the Convention.

The Platform Committee prepares a document delineating the Party’s position on a variety of issues. This document is the Party’s proposed “Platform” and is presented in a report voted on by the Convention.

How many members serve on a standing committees? How are members of the standing committees allocated?

Each committee has a total of 186 members casting 183 votes (four members

are allocated to represent American Samoa, Guam, the Virgin Islands, and Democrats Abroad, with each member casting ¼ vote. The District of Columbia and Puerto Rico are treated as states.) Included in the 186 members are 25 PLEO members nominated by DNC Chairman Governor Howard Dean and elected by the DNC Executive Committee in January 2008.

A total of 161 members, casting 158 votes, are allocated to the states and territories using the same formula used to allocate delegates. The formula gives equal weight to population and Democratic voting strength.

Standing committee member positions in a state are allocated to presidential candidates proportionally based on the state-wide primary/caucus results. For example, if a state has a total of 12 standing committee members (4 per committee), and Candidate X gets 50% of the vote and Candidate Y gets 50% of the vote then each candidate would receive 6 members a piece (two to serve on each committee).

What role to the presidential campaigns play in nominating delegates to the standing committees?

A presidential campaign returns a list of the individuals it wants to serve on the standing committees. The rules allow a candidate to return 1 name for every position to which he / she is entitled. Example, Candidate X is entitled to 7 members, Candidate X's campaign returns to the State Party a total of 7 names.

Do Florida and Michigan have seats on the standing committees?

As of right now, Florida and Michigan have seats on the standing committees for a total of 186 members on each committee. RBC Co-Chair Jim Roosevelt has made the following statement: "In accordance with DNC's Delegate Selection Rule 20.C.6; the Rules and Bylaws committee did not exercise its authority to deny Michigan and Florida their seats on the Standing Committees. Therefore at this time the number of members of the Standing committees including Credentials remains at 186. If any action is necessary, the Rules and Bylaws Committee will take action when they meet to adopt its final report to the Credentials and Rules committees prior to June 29th."

How can someone serve on the standing committees? How are they appointed?

Standing Committee members do not have to be Convention delegates. Committee members selected within the state and territories are allocated to presidential candidates based on the results of the primary or caucus. Presidential candidates who have qualified to receive committee positions nominate the individuals for these positions and they are selected by each state's National Convention delegation.

What is the process for Michigan and/or Florida to appeal to the Credentials Committee to have their delegates seated? When and where would the Credentials Committee, meeting take place?

A challenge would be filed with the Convention Credentials Committee requesting that a state's delegation be seated. The Convention Credentials Committee would meet sometime before the convention --likely in July or August --to consider the challenge. The Committee will vote and the outcome will be included in the Convention Credentials Committee report which will be submitted to the full convention (this will be considered the "majority report"). If 20 percent of the Committee disagrees with the majority report, they can vote to file a "minority report".

The other standing committees will also likely meet in July or August.

What happens with "minority" reports?

If a minority report is filed, it will be voted on by the entire convention on the first day. If the minority report does not pass with by a majority of Convention delegates the Committee report (the "majority report") will be voted on and enacted if it passes with a majority vote.

What is the Democratic Party's national platform and how is it determined?

The national platform is an official statement of the Party's position on a wide variety of issues. Each issue category included in the platform is a "plank." A new platform is adopted every four years at the Democratic National Convention.

Who chairs the Platform Committee? When and where will the public hearings be held?

The Platform Committee is responsible for drafting and recommending a proposed National Platform for approval at the Convention. Its recommendation is presented as a Committee report voted on by the delegates to the Convention.

On January 11, 2008, DNC Chairman Governor Howard Dean announced the selection of former New Mexico Attorney General Patricia Madrid, former Discovery Communications CEO Judith McHale and Governor Deval Patrick of Massachusetts to serve as the Chairs of the 2008 Platform Committee. They were nominated by Governor Dean and elected by the DNC Executive Committee.

Decisions concerning the number and locations of Platform hearings and meetings will be made later in the spring. Under the Democratic Party's rules, any person may submit a written statement concerning the platform to the Platform Committee at any time prior to the Committee's meeting. In addition, any person may request permission to testify at a public hearing and/or forum.

For more information, please contact the DNC press office at 202-863-8148 or the DNCC press office at 720-362-2006.