

# Guide to the Iowa Caucuses

There are 80,000 elections held each year in the United States. The biggest and best known election is the national election for president, held every four years. The election process can be a confusing one, so here is what you need to know.

## WHAT IS A CAUCUS?

Both the Democrats and the Republicans pick a candidate to represent their party in the presidential election. There are two basic ways that they do this: caucuses and primary elections. Caucuses and primaries are both ways for voters to take part in nominating presidential candidates, but they are different from each other. A primary is more like a regular election where voters go to the polls to cast their votes for a presidential candidate. At a caucus, a voter who is registered with a party goes to a neighborhood meeting with other members of that party to nominate a candidate for president. A caucus is a lively event. People attend the caucus to talk about issues and to choose a candidate for president.

Iowa uses a caucus system to choose its party nominees for president. Of all the country's primaries or caucuses, the first is held in Iowa. This is the first real test for the presidential candidates, and the whole country is watching because of the influence the Iowa caucuses have on the outcome of future races.

*"Iowans truly set the tone of the presidential debate and the issues that candidates talk about. Iowans have a lot of power. This is a unique opportunity for Iowans with disabilities to let their voices be heard." - Rik Shannon*

## HOW DO I VOTE IN THE CAUCUS?

On **Monday, February 1, 2016** (date is subject to change), Iowans will gather as Democrats or Republicans in precincts (small local areas) to select a presidential candidate and elect delegates to the 99 county conventions. You must be a registered voter to participate in the caucuses. If you are registered as a Republican, you will attend the Republican caucus. If you are a registered Democrat, you will attend the Democratic caucus. You may register or change your party registration at the caucus.

The Republican and Democratic processes are very different. The Republican caucuses are a lot like a traditional election with a simple vote for the candidate you support. This vote is sometimes done by a show of hands or by voting on a paper ballot.

The Democratic caucuses are more involved, with people splitting into groups with others who support the same candidate. These groups are called "preference groups." A candidate must receive at least 15 percent of the votes in that precinct to move on to the county convention. For example, if there are 100 voters attending the precinct caucus, a candidate must have at least 15 votes to be "viable." If a candidate has less than 15 percent of the votes, they are not considered "viable," and the supporters in that group have the choice to:

- Join a viable candidate group (one that has more than 15% of the votes)
- Join another nonviable candidate group to make it viable
- Join other groups to form an uncommitted group, or
- Stay where they are and not be counted.

While this might seem a little confusing, it's really pretty simple. It is an exciting process where people fight for their candidates and try to talk others into joining them. Each of the caucuses is led by trained volunteers who can help you with any questions you have. You can contact the party chair in your county for more information, including where you go to caucus.

## WHAT ELSE HAPPENS AT THE CAUCUS?

The caucuses are not just about picking a candidate for president; they are also a time when you get together with others in your party to talk about the issues that will make up the party's platform.

The party platform is produced by a political party to outline the party's beliefs and values and its positions on important issues. The party platforms start in the precinct caucuses.

Anyone attending a caucus can offer a resolution that asks the party to take a position on an issue that they care about. For instance, if you believe that more money should be spent to reduce Medicaid Waiver waiting lists, you may offer a resolution that says that the Iowa (Democratic or Republican) party supports using more public money to pay for services for people who are on the waiting lists.

Whatever your issue, you can influence your party's stand on that issue by writing and submitting a resolution for consideration at your caucus. It's not difficult, and it is one more chance to get your issues noticed and to make a difference.

You can contact the party chair in your county for more information, including where you go to caucus. Visit [www.idaction.org](http://www.idaction.org) or [www.driowa.org](http://www.driowa.org) to locate your Democratic and Republican county chair.

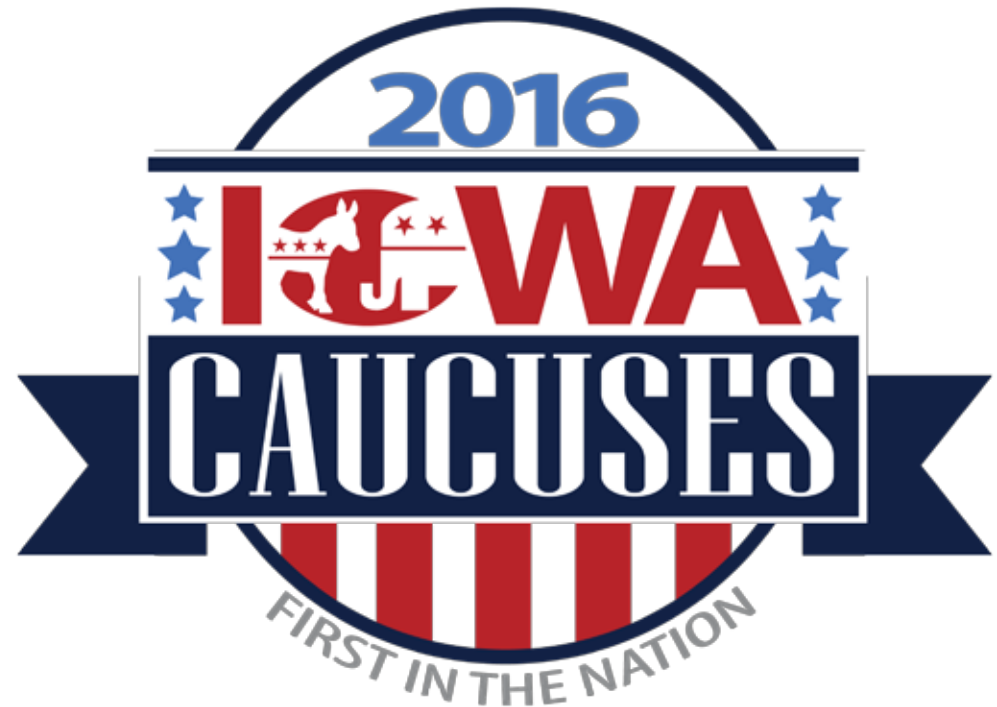


[www.idaction.org](http://www.idaction.org) • 866-432-2846 • [contactus@idaction.org](mailto:contactus@idaction.org)

## WHAT'S NEXT?

The 2016 General Election: Tuesday, November 8, 2016

After all of the state caucuses and primary elections are over and the national party conventions nominate their candidates, the campaign to win the general election begins. It's heated, it's expensive and it's exciting. On the Tuesday following the first Monday of November, millions of U.S. citizens go to local polls to elect, among other officials, the next president and vice president of the United States of America. Their votes will be recorded and counted, and winners will be declared.



*Image courtesy of the Iowa Caucus Consortium*

This guide was prepared by the Iowa Developmental Disabilities Council and Disability Rights Iowa who encourage all Democratic and Republican precinct caucus sites to be accessible to individuals with disabilities.



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