

Why I am a Democrat, among other things by John Smola

I have not always been a Democrat. Most of my voting years, I have told myself "I'm an independent." The two-party system notwithstanding, whenever I believed in an independent candidate for president, there were never enough of us to get him elected. Many years my vote went for naught.

There are several reasons why I am now a registered Democrat. I can only explain a few and I will try to keep it short and to the point.

I was born four months prior to the 'Great Crash of 1929'. As I grew to the informative years in that depression, my father shared the backend of a shop with my blacksmithing grandfather as a self-employed cabinetmaker. I remember the *New Deal* and *Public Works Administration* posters on the shop walls stained by many years of coal smoke from Grandpa's forge. But, the odd thing was that I grew up knowing my dad, and probably Grandpa, hated FDR. He hated the *WPA*, the *CCC*, and any one that "took a hand out." We would never take a hand out! I remember many times we didn't have a penny available to buy a stamp. We would not have made it without a large garden of our own and my maternal grandparents living on a farm only four miles away. To this day I don't know why such hatred. The only thing I can put it down to, is stubborn Bohemian pride.

In 1936, one of my prize possessions was an *Alf Landon* button. Alf Landon was the Republican Governor of Kansas who challenged FDR and the New Deal for the presidency. The button was small, as I remember, and was made to look like a sunflower, since Kansas was the sunflower state. I remember pinning the button to my bib-overalls to go to school.

One of the families in our little town of 800 had nine children of whom the four boys, two about my age, were as big as trees. The father was a day laborer and they were

poorer than most people in town. They, of course, were on welfare as was then a requirement for their survival. Their father's initials were W and P. As kids will do, some kids soon took up a tease phrase that was "Wor_Pol_Association" stood for the WPA. WP and his family obviously talked politics in their house because they certainly knew what Alf Landon stood for. All I can remember is rolling around on the ground accosted by at least two of the boys. I can also remember being severely disciplined by mother for coming home with "...a perfectly good pair of overalls all torn like that..."

I loved my father and learned many things from him. Nevertheless, today, I wonder how my father reconciled within himself the fact that he was able to collect social security from 1962 until his death in 1972. Mother not only collected social security but also was supported in a nursing home for ten years from 1989 until her death in 1999. All of these benefits were paid without the folks having paid one cent into the program. Have we ever considered what it would be like if the New Deal had not been allowed to develop under the Democrats? Alf could have killed it!



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Double Your Voice—Bring a Friend to the Caucuses BY

Karen Pratte

About 305 or 17% of registered Democrats in Allamakee County caucused in 2004. Caucusing is an opportunity to be an influential and important voice in the nomination of our presidential candidate. As all eyes are on Iowa in January, the Iowa caucuses can elevate a candidate from obscurity and can end the campaigns of others who finish lower than expected. The caucuses give candidates with little money the same opportunity as well financed candidates.

In 2008, rally your friends and family to join you at the caucuses. Bring your children or grandchildren. If they will be 18 by November 4, 2008, which is Election Day, these 17 year olds can caucus. Getting involved and speaking up at a young age increases participation in democracy throughout adulthood.

Raise your voice, and double your impact. Bring others to the caucuses on January 14!

Answers to Quotes Quiz on Page 8

1. A, 2. A, 3. B, 4. B, 5. C, 6. C, 7. D, 8. D, 9. E, 10. E, 11. F, 12. F, 13. F, 14. F

A Short Course On the Iowa Caucus - Courtesy of the Allamakee County Central Committee

What is a caucus?

The word "caucus" is believed to be an American Indian term that means "a meeting of tribal leaders". Who is a tribal leader? You can be.

A caucus is a gathering of neighbors. At a caucus, party activists go to a meeting where they start the process of nominating presidential candidates by expressing an initial preference for a candidate. Any registered Democrat or Republican can be a party activist and attend a caucus. In Iowa, caucus-goers elect delegates to county conventions, who, in turn, elect delegates to district and state conventions where national convention delegates are selected. That makes these meetings of local party leaders and activists an important first step in picking presidents.

What happens at a caucus?

Neighbors gather to talk about local politics, discuss what they want to see in the party platform and elect people to the party's county central committee, which governs local party affairs. They also elect delegates to the county conventions in the spring.

In a presidential year, caucus participants also express a preference for presidential nominees. Those preferences are the first in the nation and are much watched by national observers and political leaders for how well or poorly candidates are doing with grassroots Americans.

Where are they held?

The meetings are generally held in a school, library, community center, church basement or some other public building. Years ago, they were held at people's homes, but they've grown so big that both parties try to find sites that are larger and more accessible.

To find where your caucus is, call the county auditor's office at the county courthouse in the days before the caucuses. It will have a list of all the sites in your county.

What time do the caucuses start?

The caucuses are scheduled for Monday, Jan. 14, 2008. That could change if Iowa political leaders feel they must move them to an earlier date because other states are crowding their

events too close to Iowa's. The Democratic caucuses will begin at 6:30 p.m.

Does it cost anything to participate?

No. Both parties may pass the hat, but you don't have to pay to vote.

Who can participate?

Anyone who will be 18 years old by the date of the presidential election (Nov., 2008). If you are eligible to vote for president, you are eligible to participate in a caucus.

You must also be a registered Democrat to attend and vote at a Democratic caucus and be registered in the county where you wish to caucus. Both parties allow you to register or change your registration at the caucus site. Therefore, for example, a no-party voter could show up, register, and participate.

How is the voting done?

Democrats vote for delegates for each candidate. At 7 p.m., Democrats will break into what are called "preference groups", where participants' preferences for a candidate become public. If a candidate does not have 15 percent of the total, his or her supporters must realign with another group. Once everyone is in a group with at least 15 percent, delegates to the county convention are apportioned based on the size of the preference group.

Why are the caucuses so important?

Since 1972, the eventual nominee of each party has been among the top three finishers in Iowa. Sometimes, a good caucus showing can elevate a candidate from obscurity as it did with Jimmy Carter or John Kerry. Often, it ends the campaigns of some candidates who finish lower than expected, because they find it difficult to raise the money needed to continue.

Critics say too much attention is paid to the results. They argue Iowa is not typical of all states. Supporters say no state is typical. Starting in a bigger state would mean only big-money candidates could compete. They say it's a legitimate test of how well candidates are doing with real people in the nation's heartland who have a chance to take their measure up close.

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