

Iowa Presidential Primary: A Missed Opportunity?

Editorial Staff

Editor's note: This will be the first in a series of political articles on the 2008 election season.

Even if you aren't a political junkie, you must have had some interest in the results of the Iowa Presidential Primary that occurred in early January. Every four years, one of the smaller states with only a few electoral votes gets all the attention of the nation's (and world's) media as the challengers for the presidency compete against each other at the first presidential primary of the year. This year's first primary had even more significance, as it ushered in what many political historians are claiming is the most important election in a generation.

Iowa also is the state where this profession has combined the resources of the national and state chiropractic organizations to achieve great success by electing U.S. Senators Chuck Grassley and Tom Harkin. These individuals have been responsible for some of the profession's greatest victories in Congress. Unfortunately, this year's Iowa Presidential Primary was an event where the profession seemed to be standing on the sidelines. That's very unfortunate, as our grassroots strength would have been particularly significant in impacting the unusual primary system in Iowa.

Iowa has a peculiar election process where the winner is determined by caucuses, rather than the normal direct vote that occurs in other states. It is a real Byzantine method; people gather around 6 p.m. in one of the 1,600 or so caucus locations in the state, where Republicans can vote in the Democratic caucus and there is trading of votes.

It's a race where the media can make or destroy your presidential ambitions by how well you do in Iowa. Senator Obama won the Iowa primary convincingly, with Senators Edwards and Clinton coming in second and third. On the Republican side, Governor Huckabee won, Governor Romney came in second and Senator McCain came in third. There is substantial evidence that winning the Iowa primary doesn't necessarily mean that the candidate will get the nomination, but they get a substantial boost in publicity and fundraising.

The successful candidate in Iowa must rely on volunteers even more than financial contributions. They must appoint precinct captains at each of the 1,600 caucus locations and organize an army of carpoolers, telemarketers and babysitters (even snow-shovelers) who are the essential ingredients for a successful campaign.

It's no wonder that various interest groups become so significant. They not only provide the vote, but also the volunteers. Over the past few months, the media identified Mormons, veteran groups, unions, Fair Tax advocates, Chuck Norris groupies, charter-school advocates, evangelicals, Amway volunteers and the over-60 crowd as important interest groups whose support and influence was being felt by the candidates. Each interest group was identified with a particular candidate and each interest group was considered a player in the Iowa political arena.

Unfortunately, in this atmosphere when the whole world was watching, the one group not mentioned was the chiropractic profession. Frankly, Iowa provides the best opportunity for our

doctors to have an impact on this race.

Iowa is known for having perhaps the highest proportion of chiropractic doctors to the population in the country with offices in every area (caucus district) in the state. Iowa boasts a politically active chiropractic state association, a major chiropractic college with deep roots in the society and more than 1,000 chiropractic students. This race gave us a great opportunity to organize an effective campaign for the candidate that best meets the needs of the chiropractic profession. Politicians from state capitals to the halls of Congress pay particular attention to active interest groups.

Maybe this year didn't provide the presidential candidate that the profession could rally behind or actively oppose. Certainly, if former U.S. Senator Bill Frist had run, with his clearly anti-chiropractic attitude, it would have been a lot easier to organize the profession. We know that four years ago, Howard Dean, MD, interrupted his presidential campaign to meet with chiropractic representatives because of the fear we would organize against him.

It will be another four years from now before the spotlight shines again on Iowa's Presidential Primary. When it does, let's hope the leadership in this profession will take a close look at the opportunity and make our voice heard.

We need to appreciate our political clout and start gearing up for the other races developing in this special year. Health reform is on the horizon. Regardless of the outcome in 2008, significant legislation will be introduced in both Congress and state legislatures. When you consider what has happened in a number of states like Massachusetts and California, where republican governors and democratically controlled legislatures are working together on health reform, major changes could occur next year.

Over the next couple of months, we will be providing you with an update on the presidential race and begin to identify races in the House and in the Senate that might be of interest to the profession. Let us know if you have any races you wish us to consider. Let's pick races that are winnable. The articles also will suggest some dos and don'ts to maximize your resources. This profession has great political muscle, but it needs to flex it to make things happen. This is the year to do it.

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