

The American Election Process

Part 3 - National Conventions The final step in the primary season

By Jenny Pettersson

At the end of July this year, Boston will be the host of the Democratic National Convention and this will bring thousands of people from all over the U.S. to the city. Over four intensive days, the life in Boston will change and the next democratic presidential candidate will be elected.

Conventions and Delegates

There are several definitions of the word convention. In this context, the best definition will be "a formal meeting of members, representatives, or delegates ...of a political party" (www.dictionary.com).

A convention can be held by many different organizations on a variety of topics. In a political context, a national convention is held in order to nominate the party's next presidential and vice-presidential candidate. The national convention is also the place where decisions are made concerning campaign reform and the party's new platform.

The participants in these conventions are called delegates, and they are there to represent and speak for the party's voters throughout the country. Each party is allotted a number of delegates in proportion to the total number of members it has. During the primary season, these delegates are then divided among the party's candidates according to how many votes each of the candidates get. They are then pledged to that one candidate during the convention.

The delegate's task is to represent the voters at the convention, and they are pledged to the one candidate the voters support. When it comes to nominate the next national leader, they have to vote for the one candidate they are pledged to. The number of delegates pledged to each candidate is according to the percentage of votes they get. In reality, since the number of delegates are fixed, the race to become the party's national leader can be over as early as after Super Tuesday in March. For example, this year the Democratic Party has 4322 delegates to divide among the candidates. If one candidate gets more than 2162 delegates (> 50%), the race is over, at least in theory, since there are only 2160 delegates left to divide. Although, officially the party's national leader will not be nominated until the convention.

All the American parties have their own convention, but the media has a tendency to only cover the two major ones, the Democratic and the Republican conventions. Although these two parties have dominated the political scene for a long, long time, there is a possibility that it will be three or more candidates running for the president post. An independent candidate, who

is not connected to a party, may compete along with the two major party candidates. In this year's election there is one independent candidate, Ralph Nader, running for president, and therefore will there be three candidates in the general election race.

The Democratic National Convention

During July 26 to July 29, the 44th Democratic National Convention is going to be held at the Fleet Center in Boston. The main reason to use the Fleet Center is the fact that there are more than 17,600 hotel rooms within 10 minutes from the center. Normally the center is used in various sports events and it has to be reconstructed in a large way to fit the needs of a convention. The President of the Fleet Center, Richard Krezwick, says they will have to rip out all seats and cut a hole in the concrete to make the center suitable, but he still thinks that they are ready and that this is important for the community.

There will be little less than 5000 delegates representing each of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, American Samoa, Guam, the Virgin Island and Democrats Abroad. There are also estimated to be over 30,000 guests and members of the media. In order to handle this huge amount of people it takes a tremendous amount of planning. The Democratic Party with its Democratic National Convention Committee (DNCC) is essentially responsible for the actual convention inside the Fleet Center. The host committee, Boston 2004, Inc, is in charge of organizing everything around the convention hall, such as transportation, housing, security and more. The convention will also lure hundred of related events to Boston, and these events will also be coordinated by the host committee.

The host committee and the leadership of Boston see this as a historical event and a chance to show off Boston to the world. Therefore, there will be a month-long celebration of the city called Celebrate Boston 2004. The goal of this celebration is to mark Boston as "a city filled with vibrant, diverse, and involved communities, cultural organizations and educational institutions" (www.boston04.com/celebrate_boston.htm) and to kick off the convention with a bang. Each week, beginning July 4, will present a special theme. The first week, July 4 to July 10, is called Citizenship Week and the goal is to show of Boston's unique role in American citizenship. The second week, July 11-17 has the name Diversity Week. During this week Boston's diversity will be celebrated. The last week, from July 18 to July 24, is the Creativity and Innovation Week and features program and activities around science, business, culture and art. This will all end with a gala public opening ceremony on the eve of the convention.

Suggested reading:

<http://www.thebostonchannel.com/democraticconvention/1783585/detail.html> (Fleet)
<http://www.dems2004.org/> (DNC)
<http://www.boston04.com/> (Boston 2004 Inc)

The Republican National Convention

The Republican National Convention will be held in New York City from August 30 to September 2. The location for the event is Madison Square Garden and almost 5000 delegates and around 50 000 guests are expected. This is the first time in history that NYC will be the host of a Republican National Convention, but it was no sure thing. NYC mayor Michael R. Bloomberg needed to ensure that work conditions would not be affected, and that more than 22,000 hotel rooms would be available. One good reason for these promises is the approximately \$150 million in economic activities that the convention is expected to bring to the city.

The opposition against holding the Republican National Convention in NYC is enormous among NYC citizens. Although the decision is already made, several organizations continue to work against the convention plans. The most argued objection is the fact that NYC is a Democratic stronghold, and therefore it would be wrong to arrange a Republican convention. Another argument is the threat of a new terror attack. Bringing that amount of people, who also are strongly connected to the Bush administration, might be a target and the issue of security is much debated. The third most common argument is that an event of this size will affect daily life and make it harder for New Yorkers.

Nevertheless, there are people who welcome the RNC to NYC. In the same spirit as Boston NYC will be organizing different events and activities before and during the convention. Which events that will occur are not yet decided, but will be posted on the Republican National Convention websites, www.2004nycgop.org/, later on.

Suggested reading:

<http://www.nycvisit.com/content/index.cfm?pagePkey=872>
(NYC)

<http://www.2004nycgop.org/> (GOP)

Glossary

Capitalism: This is an economic system with minimal governmental regulation. The individual can produce, exchange, and own goods, garments, or services. Another definition could be that the basic premise of capitalism is that markets are efficient and should function without interference from the government.

Caucus: A caucus is a group of people with common goals or characteristics. In a political sense, a caucus is a meeting where voters come together to choose nominees to represent their political party in a general election.

Congress: The congress is made up of U.S. Senate and the

House of Representatives. The Congress has, among other issues, has the power to make Federal laws but the president has to sign them. In very rare cases, the President can veto these laws and the congress, with a super-majority, can override him.

Conservatism: This is a political philosophy where the national government does not interfere in the economy and regulate social life. In this philosophy, the state and local governments have the power to make decisions. Another definition could be that conservatism is a political philosophy or attitude emphasizing respect for traditional institutions, distrust of government activism, and opposition to sudden change in the established order.

Constitution: This is the structure and fundamental principles of a government. It is usually in written form, and in the USA, all other laws, regulations, and executive actions must be consistent with it.

Democracy: Democracy is a form of government where people votes on different issues and the majority decide the outcome.

Electoral College: Each state has a number of electoral votes equal to the number of members each state sends to the U.S. Senate and the House of Representatives. Together these electoral votes constitute the Electoral College.

Federalism: In this political system, powers are divided and shared between national, state, and local levels.

Liberalism: Liberalism is a political view that emphasizes individuals' freedom of actions. Modern day liberalism rests on the positive use of government to promote individual rights and equality.

Majority party: This party has the majority of seats in the House of Representatives or the Senate.

Minority party: This party has the minority of seats in the House of Representatives or the Senate.

Mission: A mission is the series of steps you will take to achieve your vision.

National convention: A national convention is a meeting of party delegates that is held every four years. The delegates are elected in state primaries and caucuses, and the conventions' primary purpose is to nominate the presidential and vice-presidential candidates.

Primary: In a primary election, party members choose their delegates through election. They go to the poll and indicate their top choice for nominee.

Privatizing: Privatizing implies reducing the governments' influence by selling different government owned infrastructure such as telephone, energy, or roadways, to the private sector.

Republic: This is a form of democracy in which representatives who are chosen by the people make decisions.

Socialism: This is a philosophy where the governmental authority should be used to make equal socioeconomic outcomes in terms of education, welfare, and health.

Vision: In a political context, a vision is the mental image of where, in terms of leadership, a political party and their politicians want the country to be. A vision is a dynamic dream that in reality is impossible to fulfill. It shows the place you are aiming for and is meant to encourage you to try harder.