



PHIL McGRANE
IDAHO SECRETARY OF STATE

MEMORANDUM

TO: County Clerks and Election Staff
FROM: Phil McGrane, Secretary of State
DATE: January 3, 2024
Re: County role in presidential caucuses

Our office has received many questions and requests for guidance related to what role the county elections offices play in the upcoming presidential caucuses that will be held by the Idaho Republican and Democratic parties. This memo is an attempt to consolidate those questions and provide some baseline guidance for counties. While it may not be comprehensive, it is aimed at providing some direction for the most common questions.

Overview

During the past two presidential election cycles, Idaho has held a “presidential preference primary” on the second Tuesday in March. Following the passage of H138 & H292 this past legislative session, the state and counties will not be holding a March election, nor will the question of presidential preference be included on the May State Primary ballot. In the absence of a presidential preference primary, it is left to the state political parties to determine the method for selecting presidential nominees at the national conventions. Both the Idaho Republican and Democratic parties have chosen to conduct caucuses. Below are the key dates involved:

	Republican Presidential Caucus	State Primary Election	Democratic Presidential Caucus
Event Date	Saturday, March 2 nd	Tuesday, May 21 st	Thursday, May 23 rd
Deadline to change party affiliation	December 31, 2023	March 15 th	May 23 rd
Deadline for unaffiliated to affiliate	December 31, 2023	May 21 st	May 23 rd
Who may participate	Registered Republicans	Varies by Party	Registered Democrats & Unaffiliated Voters

Who is Responsible?

A key difference between the primary election and the party caucuses is who is responsible for conducting them. Primary elections as we think of them are conducted under state law by the state and county using public resources. In primary elections, the political parties are recognized in many ways under state law and the candidates selected during the state primary move on to the general election as the nominees of their party. However, the cost and responsibility of conducting the primary elections falls upon the counties and state.

In contrast, the caucuses are conducted by the political parties as private organizations. This places the burden of running and paying for the caucuses on the parties. It also means that the parties are not bound by state election laws in terms of how the caucuses are conducted. Each party, without input from the state, determines the processes and methods they deem best, based on their local and national rules.

Because the caucuses are being held by the political parties as private organizations, it also impacts how the state and counties may be involved with the caucuses. Since caucuses are run by each political party separately, the caucuses are inherently partisan, and designed to favor the hosting political party and the presidential candidates of that party. As such, the parties should be aware of the Public Integrity in Elections Act, found in Idaho Code Title 74, Chapter 6, which places certain limitations on public resources being used in political activities. One of the key things to note is that county prosecutors enforce the Public Integrity in Elections Act at the local level. For this reason, it is strongly recommended that you consult with your county prosecutor prior to any involvement.

Idaho's History with Caucuses

Presidential caucuses are not new to Idaho. Prior to 2020, the Idaho Democratic Party held a presidential caucus for many cycles. In 2012, the Idaho Republican Party held a caucus for president. The involvement of the state and counties in these events was generally limited to some public awareness and, in a few instances, voter registration and party affiliation. All of these caucuses took place prior to the passage of the Public Integrity in Election Act.

Public Awareness

It is our office's intention to provide basic information regarding the caucus to the public. This includes contact information for the political parties and key dates. We have consulted with other states where caucuses are held and learned that some do not play any role in their caucuses, including public awareness. Given the shift and confusion surrounding the change from the primary to the caucuses, we feel it is important to help assist voters by providing basic information. When we launch the updated VoteIdaho.gov it will include this basic information and link voters to party resources for more information.

Here are the links for more information by the parties:

Idaho Democratic Caucus: <https://idahodems.org/2024-presidential-nomination-caucus/>

Idaho Republican Caucus: <https://www.idahorepublicancaucus.com/>