

## **CHAPTER 1**

### ***THE JANUARY JUMP: FRONT-LOADING, EARLY CLOSURE, COMPRESSION, AND MEGA-TUESDAYS***

The United States has developed a totally unique system for nominating major party candidates for president of the United States. Special elections, called presidential primaries, have all the candidates in one political party run against each other in a specific state for that state's nomination support. The presidential primary commits that state's delegation to the party's national convention, usually held the summer prior to the general election, to cast a majority or all of its votes for the candidate who won the state's presidential primary.

A variant of the presidential primary is for a state to hold presidential caucuses. Instead of voting at a polling place, party members gather at a neighborhood meeting called a caucus. The meeting is called to order, speeches are given on behalf of the various political party candidates for president, and then a vote is taken of the party members attending the caucus. The voting results from each caucus are then gathered for the entire state, which is then said to have held "caucuses." The state's delegates to the party national convention are, as with presidential primaries, required to cast a majority or all of their votes for the candidate who won the state's presidential caucuses.

Throughout the latter half of the 20th Century, the presidential nominating process in the United States was a leisurely process. The presidential primaries began in February or March in New Hampshire. The nominating calendar then coasted through April with just a few states, such as Wisconsin, participating. The schedule wound up in May and June with Oregon and California having the final say.

In the 1990s, however, the *Four Horsemen of the Presidential Primary Apocalypse* began their devastating work. These four trends changed running for president of the United States from a meandering walk spread over five months to a breathless sprint lasting just five or six weeks. At least that was how it was up until the Democratic Party presidential caucuses and primaries of 2008.

Horseman #1: *Front-Loading*. By the early 1990s, individual states started to figure out that selecting an early caucuses or primary date made

that particular state much more important in the presidential nominating process. Presidential candidates who won early contests, such as the Iowa caucuses or the New Hampshire primary, quickly built *momentum*, or the *Big Mo*. The news media played up the importance of those candidates who won early caucuses and primaries. At the same time, the news media tended to dismiss the candidates who lost those early contests as hopeless losers. If a state really wanted to play a big role in choosing the presidential nominee, selecting an early caucuses or primary date was imperative.

Thus, by the early 2000s, a sizeable number of states had moved their presidential primaries and caucuses up to January, February, and early March. This piling up of early-scheduled nominating events became known in the press as *front-loading*.

Horseman #2: *Early Closure*. Once a significant number of states were holding early presidential caucuses and primaries, the winners of the Democratic and Republican nominations for president were being quickly determined. This was mainly a function of the desire of the news media to declare an early winner. If a candidate won just five or six early caucuses and primaries in a row, the press would declare that candidate the de facto winner of the party presidential nomination. It did not matter that many states had not yet held their presidential caucuses or primaries.

This phenomenon of the news media declaring the race over after just a few early primaries and caucuses can best be described as *early closure*.

Horseman #3: *Compression*. As more and more states tried to schedule their presidential primaries earlier in the nominating process, the time between one presidential caucuses or primary and another was greatly reduced. In the 1970s and 1980s, there had often been two or three weeks between one presidential caucuses or primary and another. By 2008, however, many presidential primaries were scheduled only one week apart, and a few were scheduled just four or five days apart.

This effect, labeled *compression*, gave voters in a particular state very little time in which to react and respond to the results of previous presidential caucuses or primaries. It also was hard on the candidates for president. After surviving one presidential caucuses or primary, a candidate would have to try to win a subsequent caucuses or primary scheduled only a few days to one week later. The inevitable result was presi-

dential candidates who raced from state to state, campaigning in caucuses and primaries at a fever pitch and thereby exhausting themselves.

Horseman #4: *Mega-Tuesdays*. In the rush to get to the front of the pack and hold an early presidential caucuses or primary, a number of states began scheduling presidential caucuses or primaries on the same calendar day. At first only three or four states were holding caucuses or primaries on the same Tuesday. By the early 2000s, however, there had been instances where more than ten states were voting on the same day. Since most presidential primaries are scheduled for a Tuesday, these blockbuster election days with large numbers of states voting are called *mega-Tuesdays*.

At the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, political reporters and commentators were well aware of the way *front-loading*, *early closure*, *compression*, and *mega-Tuesdays* were effecting the nominating process. The magazine *Economist* noted: “The vital primaries now come so thick and fast that there is no chance to pause or regroup between them.” The *New York Times* concluded that the primary and caucuses calendar had become “a case study in democracy gone awry.” The *Washington Post* complained the emerging schedule had produced “the most absurdly foreshortened primary process the nation has ever seen.”

### **THE 2008 DEMOCRATIC PRIMARY CALENDAR**

The 2004 presidential election had not ended happily for the Democratic Party in the United States. George W. Bush, the incumbent Republican president who was a doctrinaire conservative, had been reelected to a second four-year term in the White House. The Democratic nominee who ran against Bush, U.S. Senator John Kerry of Massachusetts, was accused by a number of Democrats of running a lackluster campaign. The question was raised as to whether a faulty nominating system, the presidential caucuses and primaries, had saddled the Democrats with a weak candidate for president in 2004. Responding to this criticism, the Democratic National Committee, the group that runs the Democratic Party, appointed a special Rules Committee to study the nominating process

and try to come up with a better schedule of presidential caucuses and primaries.

This special committee met, held public hearings, and, after much deliberation, produced what it considered to be a reformed nominating system. The new plan provided for Iowa and New Hampshire, traditionally the first two states to hold a caucuses or a primary, to once again hold early events. Along with Iowa and New Hampshire, two new states, Nevada and South Carolina, were permitted to go early. After those four states had voted, any state that wanted to could schedule a presidential primary or a presidential caucuses on Tuesday, February 5, 2008, or later.

This new Democratic Party plan preserved the tradition of having Iowa and New Hampshire be among the early states to participate in the caucuses and primaries. Originally, Iowa and New Hampshire had pushed their way to first place by being more aggressive than other states in scheduling early caucuses (Iowa) and an early presidential primary (New Hampshire). In 2008, however, the Democratic Party had, in effect, affirmed that Iowa and New Hampshire were going to be among the first states to vote *by Democratic Party rule*.

Nevada had been added to the early presidential caucuses and primary calendar in order to have the West, traditionally left out of the nominating process, represented. South Carolina was included for geographical reasons as well, giving the South a voice. Those two states also provided ethnic and racial diversity. Nevada has a large Hispanic population. South Carolina is home to large numbers of African-American citizens.

Under the new calendar, the contest for the Democratic nomination for president would probably end on *Super-Duper Tuesday*, February 5, 2008. On that date, heavily-populated states such as California, New York, and New Jersey would probably schedule their caucuses and primaries. Having so many populous states voting would most likely determine the final outcome of the race. This would be the most *mega* of all *mega-Tuesdays*.

It is important to note that the Democratic Party made no changes to the presidential caucuses and primaries schedule for 2008 *after Super-*

Duper Tuesday. It was inconceivable to the Rules Committee that a nominating race could go on after so many states had held caucuses and primaries on one day.

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**DEMOCRATIC CAUCUSES AND PRIMARY SCHEDULE  
AS ADOPTED BY THE DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL  
COMMITTEE - JANUARY 14 TO FEBRUARY 5, 2008**

January 14	Iowa caucuses
January 19	Nevada caucuses
January 22	New Hampshire primary
January 29	South Carolina primary
February 5	Any state on this or a later date

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Presidential caucuses and primaries are scheduled and conducted by the individual states but are governed by rules set by the national political parties. Occasionally, what a state will want to do with its presidential caucuses or primary will come into conflict with national party rules. Such conflicts had a dynamic effect on the final form of the Democratic Party presidential caucuses and primary calendar for 2008.

After the Democratic National Committee adopted its new schedule of presidential caucuses and primaries for 2008, two states decided to defy the national Democratic Party and scheduled presidential primaries prior to February 5, 2008 (*Super-Duper Tuesday*). The state of Michigan scheduled its presidential primary for Tuesday, January 15, 2008, only one day after the Monday, July 14, 2008, date assigned to the Iowa caucuses. The Iowa state legislature refused to have its traditional first-in-line status compromised in such a way and re-scheduled its caucuses for Thursday, January 3, 2008, twelve days ahead of Michigan.

The folks in New Hampshire, determined to continue their role of

conducting the first presidential primary, were not going to let Michigan horn in either. The New Hampshire secretary of state, operating under explicit New Hampshire law, moved the New Hampshire primary from January 22, 2008, to January 8, 2008, seven days earlier than Michigan.

Talk about *compression*. The New Hampshire primary was going to be only five days after the Iowa caucuses. Iowans would caucus on Thursday, January 3, 2008, and New Hampshire would vote on the following Tuesday, January 8, 2008.

Florida scheduled its primary on January 29, 2008, the date assigned by the Democratic National Committee to South Carolina. Unwilling to vote on the same day as Florida and thereby be forced to share the news coverage with Florida, South Carolina moved its Democratic presidential primary ahead three days to Saturday, January 26, 2008.

The Democratic Party in Washington, D.C., punished Michigan and Florida for violating national party rules and scheduling presidential primaries prior to Tuesday, February 5, 2008. The national party took away those two states' delegates to the Democratic National Convention, to be held in Denver, Colorado, in August of 2008.

Democratic political leaders in Michigan and Florida were not upset by this loss of all their delegates to the national convention. They knew that, as soon as the Democratic Party had decided on its nominee for president, Michigan and Florida would be reassigned their convention delegates. The national party and its presidential candidate would not want to risk losing Michigan's and Florida's electoral votes in the general election against the Republicans in November by eliminating each state's national convention delegates.

So, with all the changes caused by Michigan and Florida defying the Democratic Party and scheduling early primaries, the final Democratic caucuses and primary calendar for 2008 was:

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**DEMOCRATIC PRESIDENTIAL CAUCUSES  
AND PRIMARY SCHEDULE - FINAL FORM -  
JANUARY 3 TO FEBRUARY 5, 2008**

January 3	Iowa caucuses
January 8	New Hampshire primary
January 15	Michigan primary (delegates not to be seated)
January 19	Nevada caucuses
January 26	South Carolina primary
January 29	Florida primary (delegates not to be seated)
February 5	California, Colorado, Connecticut, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Tennessee, etc. ( <i>Super-Duper Tuesday</i> , 22 states in all)

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As the 2008 Democratic Party presidential nominating season got under way, three things were evident to the political cognoscenti who pay close attention to such an arcane thing as the presidential caucuses and primary calendar:

1. The presidential nomination of the Democratic Party would most likely be determined on that first *mega-Tuesday*, scheduled for Tuesday, February 5, 2008, when 22 states, including California and New York, would be voting. It is rare for a presidential nominating contest to last beyond the first *mega-Tuesday*, particularly if one candidate carries all or a preponderance of the states voting on that *mega-Tuesday*.

2. Iowa and New Hampshire were allowed to have specifically protected positions at the beginning of the Democratic Party presidential caucuses and primary calendar. This would make winning in Iowa and New Hampshire even more critical than usual for winning the presidential nomination race. It seemed obvious to many observers that, if one of the Democratic candidates won both the Iowa caucuses and the New

Hampshire primary, that candidate would be the odds-on favorite to dominate the remainder of the early primaries and caucuses. Such a winning candidate could get an early lock on the nomination after only two days of voting (one day for Iowa and one day for New Hampshire). The elapsed time, from the January 3, 2008, Iowa caucuses to the January 8, 2008, New Hampshire primary, would be only five days.

Notice that, under the new Democratic Party calendar, six of the key voting days (Iowa, New Hampshire, Michigan, Nevada, South Carolina, and Florida) were scheduled in January. Thus, due to the accentuated effects of *front-loading*, the 2008 nominating process for the Democratic Party could well be titled the *January Jump*.

### THE 2008 REPUBLICAN PRIMARY CALENDAR

Over the years, the Republicans have more-or-less routinely followed the schedule of presidential caucuses and primaries promoted by the Democratic Party. The year 2008 was no exception. In most cases, Republican caucuses and primaries were authorized for the same days chosen by the Democrats. There were two exceptions. Wyoming scheduled its Republican *nominating convention* on Saturday, January 5, 2008, only two days after the Iowa caucuses (Thursday, January 3, 2008). South Carolina Republicans, anxious to preserve their traditional role of being the first state *in the South* to hold a Republican presidential primary, moved their primary to Saturday, January 19, 2008, in order to not go on the same day as Florida (Tuesday, January 29, 2008).

The Republicans also followed the Democratic pattern of punishing states that scheduled “unauthorized” caucuses and primaries prior to February 1, 2008. In the case of the Republicans, however, only *one-half* of the state’s allotment of delegates would not be seated at the Republican National Convention, to be held in Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota, in early September of 2008.

When all the switching was completed, the Republican calendar of primaries and caucuses closely resembled the Democratic one. The final combined calendar for both political parties, Democratic and Republican,



looked like this:

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**DEMOCRATIC AND REPUBLICAN  
CAUCUSES AND PRIMARY SCHEDULE -  
FINAL FORM - JANUARY 3 TO FEBRUARY 5, 2008**

January 3	Iowa caucuses
January 5	Wyoming convention (Republicans only; ½ of delegates seated)
January 8	New Hampshire primary
January 15	Michigan primary (no Democrats seated; ½ of Republicans)
January 19	Nevada caucuses
	South Carolina primary (Republicans only)
January 26	South Carolina primary (Democrats only)
January 29	Florida primary (no Democrats seated; ½ of Republicans)
February 5	California, Colorado, Connecticut, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Tennessee, etc. ( <i>Super-Duper Tuesday</i> , 22 states in all)

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