

4. IOWA

Iowa is the state famous for holding presidential caucuses rather than a presidential primary. There is a good reason for that. The state of New Hampshire has a tradition of holding the first presidential primary. In fact, New Hampshire has a *law* requiring that the New Hampshire primary be one week before the presidential primary of any other state. By scheduling caucuses rather than a primary, Iowa is able to hold its caucuses ahead of New Hampshire and thereby escape the political ire of New Hampshirites. Iowa also thus prevents New Hampshire from scheduling its primary one week ahead of the presidential caucuses in Iowa. That is what that famous New Hampshire law would require if Iowa held a primary.

It was in 1972 that Iowa first scheduled its "First In The Nation" presidential caucuses. Four years later, in 1976, the Iowa caucuses were propelled to major importance when Jimmy Carter, a little-known former governor of Georgia, devoted virtually a year of his life to campaigning in Iowa. Carter's surprise victory in the Iowa caucuses made him the instant front-runner for the Democratic nomination. It was an advantage which Carter exploited so well he was eventually elected president of the United States.

But there is also a downside to the Iowa caucuses for presidential hopefuls. Iowa can be the burial ground for a candidacy instead of the launching pad. That is what happened to U.S. Senator Ted Kennedy of Massachusetts in 1980 when he challenged incumbent President Jimmy Carter for the Democratic nomination. President Carter polled 59 percent of the Iowa caucuses vote to 31 percent for Kennedy. The Massachusetts senator's campaign for president essentially ended at that point.

The Iowa caucuses regained some of their lustre in 1984 when Gary Hart, an obscure U.S.

senator from Colorado, ran for the Democratic nomination for president. In one of the great political surprises of all time, Hart finished second in Iowa with 16 percent of the vote. The political pundits were so shocked by Hart's unexpected second place showing in Iowa that he received a tremendous run of articles in the newspapers and interviews on television. Overnight, Hart became such a strong contender that he shortly thereafter won the New Hampshire primary.

Gary Hart subsequently lost the 1984 Democratic nomination to Walter Mondale, a former vice-president of the United States who won a number of major primaries after New Hampshire. But Iowa and its caucuses were given credit for transforming Gary Hart from an unknown into a major competitor.

One reason for the success of the Iowa caucuses was the way Iowa political leaders designed them to capture news media attention. The most important thing the press wants on primary election night is **reportable results**. Iowans organized their caucuses so that, the minute the outcome of the voting in each neighborhood precinct caucus was known, the results were telephoned to the state capital in Des Moines. Running totals for the various candidates were continually reported to the news media. At the end of the evening, in plenty of time to make the 11 o'clock news on the East Coast, the Democratic and Republican statewide winners were announced.

It was this swift reporting of results, as well as the early date, that made Iowa so instantly important in the presidential nominating process. And important the state of Iowa did become. By the mid-1980s, major television networks were broadcasting their evening news from Des Moines on caucuses night. Iowa officials lit up the exterior of the statehouse in Des Moines. That way, the classic Victorian building, with its beautiful dome and stately pillars, could serve as a television backdrop for the reporting of the latest Iowa voting results.

Perhaps most significant of all, on caucuses night downtown Des Moines was jammed with numerous *satellite trucks*. These vehicles could send television images of the latest electoral high jinx in Iowa up to a communication satellite and from there to the nation.

Presidential candidates came to Iowa seeking an elusive commodity known as the "Iowa bounce." Want-to-be U.S. presidents were hoping that a strong showing in Iowa would enable them to "break out of the pack" and grab the lead over the other candidates from their political party. Other ways for the Iowa caucuses to be described included "a slingshot to victory" and "a catapult to front-runner status." And, as the news media made an ever-increasing fuss over its caucuses, Iowa evolved into a "must-do-well" state for all presidential candidates.

Iowa became a place where the news reporters and television commentators enjoyed playing the **expectations game**. Going into the caucuses, there was always a sort of collective news media wisdom about how well or how badly a particular candidate was going to do. If the candidate exceeded expectations when all the Iowa caucuses votes were counted, that candidate was declared a "winner" by the news media, even if the candidate finished in second or third place. On the other hand, if a candidate did not do as well as predicted, that candidate was labeled a "loser" by the press, despite the fact that the candidate may have come in first in the actual voting.¹

Over the years from 1976 to 2000, a general rule developed among the political pundits about the Iowa caucuses. If a presidential candidate did not finish in at least one of the top three spots in Iowa, that candidate's quest for the White House was instantly doomed.

And another working principle emerged from the media. The Iowa caucuses were well established as the first stop on the presidential nomination trail, but the Iowa caucuses were not as important a stop as the New Hampshire primary. In fact, the best way to look at Iowa was as a

gateway to New Hampshire.

One of the most charming characteristics of the Iowa caucuses is the easy access that average Iowa voters get to the various presidential candidates. Campaigning in the Iowa caucuses means candidates having coffee with average citizens in Main Street restaurants in Iowa small towns. It means interested Iowans can stop by the local Holiday Inn in Cedar Rapids or Sioux City and hear a short talk by and shake the hand of a leading person in American national politics.

This street-corner-greeting, handshaking, baby kissing, coffee drinking type of politics that is fostered by the Iowa caucuses is known as **retail politics**. These highly personal techniques contrast with **wholesale politics**, the kind of campaigning found in the more populous states, where giant political rallies and impersonal television advertisements are the order of the day.

There could be no better example of the person-to-person character of the Iowa caucuses than a Republican caucus held in Clive, an upscale suburb of Des Moines, in 1996. U.S. Senator Robert Dole of Kansas was the leading candidate in that year's Republican presidential nomination race. Dole announced to the press that he was going to pay a visit to Clive at 7 P.M., exactly the time at which voting in that particular GOP caucus was scheduled to begin.

The caucus location was a modern brick building which housed the junior high school in Clive. The caucus itself was held in the school gymnasium, which on a normal night was where the Clive "Warriors" played their home basketball and volleyball games. A number of portable chairs had been set up so the caucus attenders would have a place to sit down.

Several minutes before the caucus was to begin, millionaire business publisher Steve Forbes and his wife, Sabena, walked into the gymnasium. Forbes was one of Robert Dole's strongest competitors for the 1996 Republican nomination for president. Forbes, surrounded by a dozen or so

television cameras and their accompanying boom microphones, began shaking hands along the front row of seats. There was a brief people jam as all the Clive Republicans who wanted to meet Steve Forbes and shake his hand began lining up for their brief share of the candidate's personal attention.

Steve Forbes did not disappoint his fans. Everyone who wanted to have a word with Steve and get their right hand gripped by a political celebrity got to do so.

As Steve Forbes was leaving the Clive junior high gymnasium, front-runner Robert Dole was coming in. There was a veritable army of reporters and television camera operators clustering around Dole, but the Kansas senator gamely pushed his way out of the media pack and began chatting and **pressing the flesh** with interested voters. Instead of being upset by the fact that Dole was delaying the Clive GOP caucus for 1996, the Republicans in charge seemed pleased that he was there and clearly wanted him to stay as long as possible.

So, at the moment when Robert Dole had shaken every available hand and was heading for the door, the caucus chairperson said in a loud voice: "Senator Dole may address the caucus if he wishes."

It was typical Iowa. When the great names of American politics come to Iowa looking for caucus votes, Iowa voters expected to be talked to and paid attention to. Senator Dole instantly reversed course, marched to the front of the room, and gave an impromptu and off-the-cuff speech to the party faithful in Clive.

Even after Robert Dole had left the caucus, the personal political fun-and-games were not yet over. Conservative newspaper columnist and television pundit Patrick Buchanan, another candidate for the GOP nomination, walked in the door. Once again the proceedings stopped while this additional campaigner made the rounds of the hall, indulging in political small talk, gripping

outstretched hands, and slapping backs.

When all the person-to-person campaigning at last was over, the Clive Republican caucus for 1996 was won by Robert Dole. Both Steve Forbes and Pat Buchanan finished well behind. Senator Dole went on to win the Iowa caucuses, which was a big help to his eventually winning the Republican nomination. In the general election in November, however, Robert Dole was defeated by incumbent Democratic president Bill Clinton.

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The 2000 Democratic caucuses in Iowa actually began in Missouri. Bill Bradley, the former New York Knicks basketball player turned New Jersey senator, suddenly remembered that his boyhood hometown was Crystal City, Missouri. Bradley returned to Crystal City to formally announce his candidacy for the Democratic nomination for President on September 8, 1999. It did not require a political wizard to notice that the state of Missouri shared its northern border with the state of Iowa.

Thus did a man who had long been associated with East Coast professional basketball and eastern politics suddenly rediscover his midwestern roots. Standing in front of Crystal City High School, where he first displayed his skills as an outstanding basketball player, Bill Bradley called for "new leadership" of a more robust nature for the United States. Setting the major theme of his upcoming campaign, Bradley pledged to "do some of the *big* things that need to be done." He faulted his main rival, Vice President Al Gore, for having small-time attitudes toward government.

Bradley attempted to turn the prosperity of the Clinton-Gore years into a negative for Gore. Bending over a portable podium on the front steps of his old high school, Bradley asked searchingly: "What are we doing with that prosperity? After ten years of a robust economy, are the important

things truly better? Our health care system? Our schools? Our civic life? Our family life? Our children's future?"

It was clear that Bradley was going to make the promise of a better future the cornerstone of his campaign. But it was to be a future of improved lives rather than just more material goods. Bradley called for a "deeper prosperity," one that "adds up to more than the sum of all our possessions. A prosperity that makes us feel rich inside as well as out."²

Not unexpectedly, the state of Iowa kept coming up in candidate Bradley's recollections of growing up in Missouri. He recalled playing in a baseball tournament in Ottumwa, Iowa, in which he was thrown out at first base and his team lost the game. "Ever since," Bradley said with a gleam in his eye, "I've dreamed of going back to Iowa and winning one."³

The announcement of Bradley's candidacy ended with Bill Bradley posing for the photographers and TV camera crews on a dock in Crystal City that jutted out into the Mississippi River. That wide rolling river symbolized the American Midwest. Many Iowans would recognize the setting. The Mississippi River is the eastern boundary of the state of Iowa, flowing past the well-known cities of Dubuque and Davenport. The Mississippi River's major tributary, the Missouri River, runs along Iowa's western side, flowing past such riverside cities as Sioux City and Council Bluffs.

Bill Bradley made it very clear from the very beginning that he was going to make a major effort to win Iowa away from Vice President Al Gore. His strategy was to use the kitchen conversations and living room coffee gatherings of a typical Iowa campaign to project the image of a man with really big plans who really cared about America's future. As one Bradley campaign insider put it: "Bradley is the beneficiary of our collective aspiration. Gore is the recipient, by

default, of our collective revulsion" against the Clinton administration.⁴

The Bradley campaign in Iowa was pointedly thoughtful, intellectual, and liberal. It was aimed directly at independent voters who, Bradley hoped, would turn out and go to their Iowa caucuses and vote against the political establishment as represented by Al Gore. In his meetings with voters throughout Iowa, Bradley sprinkled his talks with high-minded phrases and glowing promises about the future. It was the kind of action-oriented campaign long associated with former Democratic President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and his New Deal programs of the 1930s.

Thus, speaking on the porch of a big old Victorian home in Des Moines, Bradley began his talk by doing the unthinkable. He asked the television camera operators to shine their bright portable lights on the audience rather than on Bradley himself. "I'd kind of like to see the people," Bradley said. Not many candidates would rather see and relate to their immediate audience rather than be well-lighted on the next day's television news.

When Bradley began his talk, the lilting phrases came thick and fast. It is wonderful, Bradley said, that "this, is where the presidency begins, in a neighborhood on a front porch" in Iowa. He asked his audience to join his crusade to build "an economy that takes everyone to higher ground." He wanted to help America work at "finding a meaning in life that's deeper than the material."⁵

Al Gore and his campaign staff had a completely different strategy for winning Iowa, one that contrasted strongly with Bill Bradley's intellectual approach and soaring phraseology.

Iowa is an agricultural state. It is located in the heart of the fertile American Midwest. Iowa is composed almost totally of plains and rolling hills that are ideal corn and livestock country. Iowa fields are filled with corn stalks. Iowa meadows are home to herds of grazing cattle. And many of

the people who live and work in Iowa's numerous small towns are just as dependent on agriculture as the farmers are.

In a typical Iowa caucuses media ploy, Al Gore paid a visit to a rural farm near Sioux City. The customary gaggle of news reporters and television camera operators came along. Gore repeatedly made the point that, because Bill Bradley played basketball for New York and represented New Jersey in the U.S. Senate, Bill Bradley had no understanding whatsoever of midwestern farmers and their mounting agricultural problems.

Gore pledged to save Iowa's family farmers from economic hard times. Making a familiar biblical reference, Gore promised to "raise Cain until we fix this farm economy."

But that was just the beginning that day of Al Gore's broadside attack on Bill Bradley and his lack of knowledge of Iowa's agricultural problems. The Gore campaign had paid for a New Jersey farmer, Roy Etsch of Monroe Township, to fly out to Iowa and walk around the farm near Sioux City with Al Gore. Then, addressing some 150 Iowa farmers gathered in the barn, New Jersey farmer Etsch said that, in the 18 years Bill Bradley was in the Senate, Etsch had never been able to get a meeting with Bradley to discuss farm issues.

Etsch then threw a major political bomb in Bradley's direction. Based on "my personal experience," Etsch said, Bill Bradley "knows nothing about agriculture and cares even less."⁶

Although Iowa is famous for the retail politics of farm walk-arounds and barn speeches, candidates back up these **media events** with plenty of television commercials beamed at those Iowans who are not experiencing the campaign personally. The Gore campaign pressed its attack on Bill Bradley's lack of knowledge of agriculture with a television commercial. The TV ad charged that Bradley, when in the Senate, had voted against flood relief for Iowa when the state was hit by

devastating river and field flooding in 1993.

The Gore TV commercial was narrated by Tom Harkin, a U.S. Senator from Iowa who was popular with his fellow Iowa Democrats. Harkin pointed out in the ad that Al Gore was "the only Democratic candidate for president who helped make sure that Iowa got the help we desperately needed after those floods."

The ad was effective. It gained **traction** with Iowa Democratic caucus goers, which is to say the ad worked in Gore's favor and began producing improved polling results for Gore's campaign. But an ad that worked with the average Iowa Democrat began to give Al Gore a great deal of trouble with the press. Careful inspection of Bill Bradley's actual voting record in the Senate revealed that Bradley had voted for the Iowa flood relief bill after all. What Bradley had voted against was a Harkin amendment to the bill which provided additional funding. Bradley explained at the time that the Harkin request for even more flood relief funds was "too broad and not targeted to the people who need it most."⁷

The somewhat overstated and unfair nature of the Gore campaign TV ad on Iowa flood relief gave Albert Gore a bad reputation with the working press where truth-telling was concerned. Gore already was known for overly gilding the lily in his own behalf, particularly in view of the fact that at one time he claimed to have invented the computer Internet.

Following that flood relief ad in Iowa, the news media took to scouring Al Gore's public statements and television campaign ads extra carefully, searching for overstatements, false claims, and attempts to mislead or confuse voters. It was a problem that would dog Al Gore long after the Iowa caucuses were over and the nomination campaign had moved on to other states.

With one week to go before the Iowa caucuses, it appeared that Al Gore's attacks on Bill

Bradley were working well. Bradley was slipping badly in the polls, some tallies showing him as much as 20 percentage points behind Gore in Iowa. More significantly, Bradley was getting a roasting in the news media for running a boring and lackluster campaign. And it was charged that Bradley had blown an important opportunity by not responding more aggressively to Vice President Gore's attacks on the agricultural issue.

Bradley's dismal prospects in Iowa were further damaged by the fact that the former New Jersey senator was making such a big effort to win in Iowa. Bradley pumped an impressive \$2.2 million in campaign funds into the state, filling the airwaves with more than \$1.3 million worth of television advertisements. The Bradley campaign was bringing more than 400 volunteers from other states into Iowa to encourage voters to attend their caucuses. And Bradley devoted more than 75 days to campaigning in Iowa, nearly double the number of days that Al Gore campaigned there.⁸

As the Bradley campaign began to fade in Iowa, the Gore organization began coming on strong. Gore made his major appeal to the labor unions in Iowa, pledging to defend existing Democratic programs such as welfare and Medicare (medical care for the aged) from Republican attempts to scuttle them. With more than 180,000 members in Iowa, the labor unions were a crucial part of Gore's support.

But most important, there was a sharp contrast between the way Al Gore campaigned in Iowa and the way Bill Bradley took to the stump. Gore was a lively campaigner, working hard to overcome his previous reputation for being "wooden" when giving a speech or participating in a debate. Bill Bradley tended to talk casually and intellectually to his Iowa audiences, seeking to get a discussion of "big ideas" going. Al Gore, on the other hand, would parade back and forth on the stage, waving his arms, and almost shouting at the audience his determination to serve their

particular interests.

A typical Gore campaign foray to Iowa found him in Davenport, one of the more populous cities in the state, about ten days before caucuses day. Gore was speaking in the gymnasium at West High School. The school cheerleaders were seated behind the Vice President, giving the event a fresh and youthful look. In front of Gore, the audience was packed with Gore supporters from the building trades union and the teachers' association.

The new, more animated Al Gore was every much in evidence as he hammered away at his "I will fight for you" theme. Referring to the Clinton administration's struggles against congressional Republicans, Gore proclaimed: "But never for one moment did we lower our sights.... With determination and the will to take on the special interests and *fight* for what's right, we replaced paralysis with progress."

As he said the word "fight," in a single swift and dynamic motion, Gore forcefully pressed his right index finger into the palm of his hand.⁹

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The public opinion polls appeared to be the major players on the Republican side of the year 2000 Iowa caucuses. From beginning to end, the polls showed Texas Governor George W. Bush with a commanding lead over all the other GOP candidates.

Typical was the highly respected Iowa Poll, conducted in early January for the *Des Moines Register* newspaper. That poll showed Bush with 45 percent support and his nearest competitor, millionaire magazine publisher Steve Forbes, a distant 27 points behind with just 18 percent. All the other candidates, including U.S. Senator John McCain of Arizona, were in single digits.¹⁰

Thus the Iowa caucuses in the Republican Party in 2000 should have been a done-deal for

George W. Bush. But this was Iowa, and the expectations game is always played there. With a week to go before caucuses day, political reporters and pundits began speculating on the damage to George W. Bush if he finished first but somewhat below the expected poll results.

The Bush campaign worked hard at playing the **expectations-game-in-reverse**. George W. Bush let it be known that he would consider 37 percent a big victory, some 8 points below what the polls were predicting. To substantiate 37 percent as a measure of victory, the Bush camp pointed out that 37 percent was the highest amount any Republican candidate had ever polled in the Iowa caucuses.

Bush's commanding lead in the Iowa polls presented another problem. Confident that Bush was going to win without their support, some GOP voters might decide to go off and cast their caucuses ballots for one of the fringe candidates whose views particularly appealed to those voters. Campaigning in Pella, Iowa, Bush himself acknowledged this problem. He stated: "I am worried that people will say that 'Governor Bush doesn't need my help.' So we're working hard to get out the vote."¹¹

The candidate who worked the hardest to make a creditable showing against Bush in Iowa was Steve Forbes. The publisher of *Forbes* magazine drove hard towards the right wing of the Republican Party. Forbes promised to cut and simplify the tax structure to get the economic-conservative vote. He also pledged to outlaw abortion in an effort to appeal to the social-conservative vote. Such tactics on Forbes's part cast George W. Bush as the moderate, middle-of-the-road candidate in the Iowa campaign.

Which appeared to be just the way George W. Bush wanted it. When challenged by reporters to give his opinions on the abortion issue, Bush repeatedly tried to change the subject. As far as

Bush was concerned, the only issues at stake in the election were improving education, helping lower-income workers rise into the middle class, and searching for a "purpose to our prosperity."

It did not take reporters long to figure out that Bush was quietly assuming he had Iowa won. Bush therefore was spending his time in the Hawkeye State casting a moderate image for the purposes of running in the general election against a Democrat the following fall. While campaigning in Waterloo, Iowa, the Bush campaign sat three black children behind George W. Bush where they would show up clearly on national television. There is no substantial black vote in Iowa, but the image projected of racial tolerance on Bush's part could prove critical in the general election in November.¹²

Despite his miserable poll numbers, Steve Forbes did all the things a candidate is supposed to do to win in Iowa. He used his unlimited financial resources to build a get-out-the-vote organization in virtually all of the state's 2,142 precincts. Because Forbes was going after the conservative vote in the Republican caucuses, he made it a point to go on every conservative radio talk show that would put him on the air and let him answer questions from the radio audience.

Forbes also toured Iowa by bus and held "town hall" question-and-answer style gatherings in school gymnasiums and motel meeting rooms. He drew as sharp a distinction as he could between Forbes's conservatism and Bush's moderation. In a flier given out along the Iowa campaign trail, Forbes described himself as the "only viable candidate" ready to do away with the nation's overly long and complex tax code and replace it with something simple and understandable. Forbes also pledged that he would choose an out-spoken opponent of abortion as his vice-presidential running mate.¹³

Some real excitement was generated in the year 2000 Republican caucuses when Arizona

Senator John McCain, who was skipping running in Iowa, decided to show up in the state for a television debate between all the GOP candidates. The debate was held by WHO-TV in Des Moines with MSNBC as co-sponsor. MSNBC, a cable television news channel, broadcast the debate nationally.

And that was the reason given for John McCain attending the debate. "It's a nationally televised debate," explained a McCain staffer. The Arizona senator was bypassing the Iowa caucuses, but he was not about to pass up some free national exposure on cable TV.

The debate symbolized the way national cable television news networks, such as CNN and MSNBC, were by the year 2000 changing the caucuses process. The cable channels were willing to carry presidential candidate debates that, because of their small audiences, did not interest the major networks such as CBS and NBC. The audiences for such debates were comparatively infinitesimal, only drawing the viewership of professional politicians and political junkies. But the major newspapers covered these television debates and commented on them at length, often declaring one candidate the winner and portraying some of the other candidates as losers. The candidates had to pay attention to these **cable channel debates** mainly because the news media did.¹⁴

A number of Iowans made fun of John McCain for refusing to take the risk of running in Iowa - and perhaps losing the caucuses badly to George W. Bush - but seeking the national television spotlight when it was shining on the debate in Des Moines. "We're going to put a giant clock downtown to count off the minutes [McCain] is in Iowa," said state Republican leader Kayne Robinson. His voice dripping with sarcasm, Robinson noted that the amount of time McCain would be spending in Iowa would be "the absolute minimum he can possibly do."¹⁵

The debate made clear that, if Steve Forbes was attacking George W. Bush strongly from the

right, John McCain was sniping hard at Bush from the left. McCain charged that Bush's proposed tax cut was so steep it would leave no money to rescue the nation's faltering Social Security retirement system. Bush proposed to cut taxes over five years by \$483 billion while McCain wanted to cut only \$240 billion over that period of time. The Arizona senator contended that his much smaller cut in taxes would leave enough money in the U.S Treasury to "bail out" Social Security.

John McCain sought to make some fun of George W. Bush by using an old time western expression. "When you run ads saying you're going to take care of Social Security," McCain said looking straight at the Texas governor, "that's all hat and no cattle."

The audience laughed at the implication that Bush was the kind of cowboy who only sported a big hat but did not have any real cattle to herd.

McCain concluded by charging that George W. Bush's proposed tax cut would mainly benefit only rich Americans. The Arizona senator charged that 36 percent of Bush's tax cuts would go to the wealthiest one percent of the nation. "I don't do that," McCain said to Bush. "Let's not have the Texas two-step here."¹⁶

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The Democratic Party in Iowa uses a very unique system when holding its presidential precinct caucuses. After some discussion and debate about the merits of the various candidates, the caucus attenders are asked to group together according to which candidate for president they are supporting. It really is a situation where Bradley supporters are instructed to stand over near the cloak room and Gore voters are told to gather under the picture of George Washington.

Once they are all in place, the people standing in each candidate's section are counted. The results then are telephoned to Democratic Party election central in Des Moines.

Actually, Iowa caucus goers no longer really need to bother with voting. That is because the television networks and other news organizations conduct **entrance polls**, the Iowa version of an **exit poll**. Since everyone votes in their caucus at the same time, the news media poll the voters as they walk *into* the caucus. There really is nothing to be gained by waiting until after the caucus is over.

The result is that political junkies can be watching a Democratic caucus being televised live on C-SPAN, the all-politics all-the-time channel, while over on Fox News or CNN the winners are being announced and the results analyzed.¹⁷

As expected, the news was all bad for Bill Bradley. Al Gore won the year 2000 Iowa caucuses by almost two-to-one. The actual percentages were 63 percent for Gore to just 35 percent for Bradley. The defeat was all the more grim for Bradley because of the gigantic effort he had made to win Iowa.

The pundits immediately attributed Gore's lopsided victory to his strong labor union support in Iowa and the backing of the state's Democratic establishment. Also critical was the way in which Gore played up Bradley's lack of understanding and support for the unique problems of Iowa farmers. "That was a crystallizing moment," said Chris Lehane, a Gore supporter.¹⁸

In his victory statement, Al Gore took note of the fact that he won by a bigger percentage than any other candidate in history who had faced serious opposition in the Iowa caucuses. Speaking to more than 500 supporters at a late caucuses night rally at the Iowa State Fairgrounds in Des Moines, Gore said:

"Thank you for the biggest victory of the contested caucuses here in Iowa. Wow!"¹⁹

Over on the Republican side, the vote was somewhat less lopsided but equally definitive.

Iowa Republicans, who simply conduct a straw poll at their caucuses, voted 41 percent for George Bush to only 30 percent for Steve Forbes. In third place was Alan Keyes, an outspoken opponent of abortion, who raised an eyebrow or two by finishing with 14 percent. All the other candidates, including Arizona Senator John McCain, were in single digits.

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Political pundits often argue that results from the Iowa caucuses mean very little to nothing. But, once the results are tallied, there is always something to be learned from Iowa's unique exercise in early presidential voting.

It seemed obvious that Bill Bradley's campaign for the Democratic nomination for president had **peaked** too soon. In December of 1999 Bradley received a tremendous run in the national press, which included being on the covers of some national magazines. But the favorable news coverage came too early. It would have been better to get those magazine covers in mid-January. And the Bradley campaign wilted badly in early January when Gore began attacking hard on Bradley's muddled voting record on Iowa-type agricultural issues.

One point came through loud and clear. If there was such a thing as an "Iowa bounce," Gore had collected a big one. The vice president's dramatic lead over Bradley in Iowa gave him a big lift and made him the runaway front-runner in the quest for the year 2000 Democratic presidential nomination.

The results were less clear on the Republican side. George W. Bush had won Iowa, that was for sure, but reasonable showings by Steve Forbes (30 percent) and Alan Keyes (14 percent) presented some problems. Both of those Bush opponents had bid strongly for the anti-abortion vote and received a great deal of it. Bush had wanted to take a moderate stance in Iowa (and throughout

the nation) on the abortion issue, but Forbes's and Keyes's heavy emphasis on the issue had forced Bush to constantly repeat in public that he was, at heart, Pro-Life rather than Pro-Choice.

So thus it was that George Bush came "bouncing" out of Iowa with a victory. But he also came out of the Hawkeye State with the abortion issue, which he had tried so hard to avoid, draped conspicuously around his neck.

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