

by Bev Harris, founder of [Black Box Voting](#)

Brad Friedman at Bradblog.com reports on some key procedures in the 2012 Iowa Republican caucus. At issue is just how transparent and public the process is, and whether there are any holes in the cheese. Fewer holes than 2008, it seems. A bit of diligence on the part of caucus participants will be needed (see end of this article for what to do).

There is also some consternation from concerned citizens about a recent Politico.com story, which reports that the Iowa statewide caucus counting will be moved to an undisclosed location, its author chiding those who question the transparency behind such a move as "conspiracy minded types." To be clear about this, insisting on transparency is a necessary and patriotic element of running any public election, and ridiculing public citizens who examine transparency is kind of embarrassing. For the reporter. Not the citizens.

The truth is, the counting process, even if it is moved to a secret location, will not destroy transparency if the process I outline at the end of this article is followed.

In order to protect any election, we need to boil the process down to its simplest components, refuse to take our eye off them, and understand the difference between a public election, which is democratic in nature, and a non-public election, which is simply a bit of theatre.

ARITHMETIC AND ACCOUNTING

You can't get away from it. Elections are composed of two crucial things that lots of Americans don't love too much: (1) Arithmetic; and (2) Accounting

The ARITHMETIC needs to add up. The ACCOUNTING needs to be available to the public, and the numbers have to match up. I'll show you exactly how to do that below, in the section called WHAT TO DO IN IOWA.

Never forget that to have an election process that is truly democratic, the key word is not "election", but "PUBLIC." If the accounting is concealed from the public, under no circumstances can the election be described as public.

Arithmetic = $1+1+1+1$ (etc) = _____ (final tally)

Accounting =

- (1) Who can vote (voter list)
- (2) Who did vote (poll list)
- (3) Chain of custody

(4) the count

Components (1), (2), and (4) each generate a number, which must match up, and must be something the public can see and authenticate. Component (3), Chain of Custody, helps make sure the numbers in the other components are the real thing, not a substitute.

The numbers have to match up, like this:

[a] - You can't have fewer people who CAN vote than people who DID vote. (500 people who CAN vote ... 800 people who DID vote = IMPOSSIBLE)

[b] - You can't have more votes COUNTED than people who DID VOTE. (1,500 votes COUNTED ... 900 people who DID vote = IMPOSSIBLE)

HERE'S WHY THE IOWA CAUCUS WILL PROBABLY MEET REQUIREMENTS FOR A TRULY "PUBLIC" PROCESS:

As reported by Bradblog.com, the key elements in the Iowa Caucus accounting will be public. We think. This will enable caucus-goers and the general public to see and authenticate the essential accounting. We hope.

Keep in mind that if you successfully manipulate any ONE of the four crucial accounting areas (who can vote, who did vote, chain of custody, the count), you can take the whole election.

For this reason, I will caution you to beware of any election process that concentrates control into a funnel at any stage of the contest. In the past, the Iowa Republican caucus was a funnel; this year, we think, it will not be. But just in case, let's examine what an election funnel looks like, so you will recognize it if you see it.

ELECTION FUNNELS (= A BAD THING)

You can set up something that looks very welcoming, very public, very transparent, which I call the wide end of the funnel. You can choke off public scrutiny by creating a funnel later in the process, fooling most of the people who thought their participation at the wide end meant it was a public process.

A good example of an election funnel is AmericansElect.org, which seduces the public into believing they control the process because the front end feels very open, very public. However, the Internet voting process at the end closes off public ability to see and authenticate who actually voted, chain of custody, or the count.

If you narrow the process into a funnel, removing public ability to see part of the accounting, you can completely alter an election outcome. Therefore, all four crucial components need to remain wide-open all through the process.

In any election, watch for any situation that narrows public ability to see. The election is most at

risk, and is likely to be stolen, at that narrow point.

PAST PROBLEM AREA: CHAIN OF CUSTODY - This area has been my beef with the Iowa Republican caucus in the past. In Iowa, the funnel has traditionally appeared at chain of custody.

At the wide end of the funnel, we have warm bodies in the caucus room, which anyone can plainly see. If you have a public signup list showing the names of everyone who casts a vote, and if everyone can see that the list had no one on it before the caucus opened, and if everyone can watch people signing their names onto that list, you've still got a wide open public process.

If, as Bradblog reports, they will be using paper ballots, hand counted, in public, the counting process remains wide open.

Chain of custody enters the scene when all caucus results are added together. Because there are more than 1,700 caucus locations in Iowa, all this wide open stuff can suddenly narrow or close off public view when votes are called in to the state headquarters.

THE REMEDY FOR THIS IS QUITE SIMPLE; JUST MAKE SURE THEY DO IT THIS YEAR:

(1) Promptly commit local results, in writing, at each caucus location, and posted, allowing any person at the caucus to photograph the result and send it to friends or post it on any Web site.

(2) Also, make sure the state apparatus promptly commits their grand total, and shows their work, which means providing each individual caucus result along with the total.

Step (1) commits the data at a source independent of the state apparatus.

Step (2) allows the public to check that:

[a] The individual caucus results used by the state are the same numbers as those committed in writing and captured by cell phone photo at each caucus location; and

[b] All local caucus results actually do add up to the reported grand total.

Note the concepts here:

- "COMMIT THE DATA";
- Commit PROMPTLY (commit locally before or at same time results are transmitted to the state.);
- Commit PUBLICLY, locally; and
- Provide local results INDEPENDENTLY of the state

Hopefully, this will happen in Iowa this year. Certainly, the Iowa citizenry should remain watchful, to make sure all parts of the essential accounting remain open to public view and can be authenticated by any person.

WHAT TO DO IN IOWA:

- 1) Check that the number of people who vote does not exceed the number of people who attend the caucus;
- 2) Check that the number of votes counted does not exceed the number of people who voted;
- 3) Use your cell phone to capture a photo or video of the local caucus result, as evidence. It doesn't matter what you say happened; only a photo or video matters. Compare this with the state party's report of your local caucus report to make sure it's the same.
- 4) Make sure the state party promptly provides the result of each local caucus together with the total.
- 5) Check that the sum of all the local caucuses adds up to the total reported by the state party.

In Iowa, a little cooperation from the state committee, a reasonable amount of vigilance from the caucus attendees and the campaigns, and you've got a transparent process. Not so in New Hampshire, at least, as of this writing. Stay tuned.

REFERENCED ARTICLES:

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