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Democrats set rules for Jan. 19 presidential caucus

Procedures similar to Iowa's, allow at-large precincts to help shift workers participate

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

RENO -- Nevada Democrats on Saturday approved rules that will govern their new early presidential caucus and stuck closely to the model established by first-in-the-nation Iowa.

The caucus, or series of political party meetings, will take place at 11:30 a.m. on Jan. 19, making it the second nomination contest in the nation.

Under rules approved by the party central committee, attendees will meet in public places, likely schools and community centers, and will divide into groups based on their favored candidate.

Candidates win a proportion of the precincts' allotted delegates based on the number of their supporters.

Nevada Democrats said they followed the Iowa model closely, in part to fend off a challenge from New Hampshire, whose primary election has long held the No. 2 spot.

New Hampshire state law says its primary must be held a week or more before any "similar election," but it has never challenged Iowa's lead.

New Hampshire officials are determining whether Nevada Democrats' caucus constitutes a similar election and warrants a move up the calendar.

Nevada Democrats did approve some differences from Iowa's system.

Attendees will be allowed to register to vote at the precinct and participate in the caucus that day. Same-day changes to party registration also will be permitted.

Nevada Democrats also allowed for creation of "at-large precincts" for shift workers unable to attend the Saturday caucus in their home district.

The rule will allow casino workers, a strong Democratic voting bloc, to attend a caucus on the Strip.

In line with state law, each precinct will receive one delegate per 50 Democrats registered.

Attendees divide up into groups based on their candidate preference, and groups that don't have enough supporters to meet a "viability" threshold must dissolve and pick new candidates.

For many precincts, that threshold is set at 15 percent of the total number of attendees.

The threshold varies depending on the number of delegates allotted to the precinct.

Once supporters have realigned with other candidates and all groups are viable, a caucus chair trained by the state party will use a formula to divvy up delegates to each candidate.

Party officials said they believe the results will be reported within a few hours, early enough to make newspaper and television deadlines on the East Coast.

Central committee members elected Jill Derby, an 18-year member of the State Board of Regents, as the state party chairwoman.

Derby lost a bid for Congress in Northern Nevada in November.

She made headlines for running a strong campaign in a solidly Republican district.

Derby will replace Clark County Commissioner Tom Collins, who says he wants to focus on his re-election to the commission and his role as head of a caucus-planning committee.

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