



## COLORADO – GATEWAY TO WESTERN DEMOCRATIC VICTORY IN 2008

### Introduction

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Colorado is in the middle of the changing landscape of the West. Over the past several years, a political transition has been taking place. Despite strict state campaign finance laws, Colorado managed to mobilize and strategically transform the state from being dominated primarily by Republicans. In 2004, Colorado's Democrats were able to capture both houses of the Colorado General Assembly, and further added another Democratic member of Congress and a U.S. Senator in 2004. In 2005, with the help of the Democratic Party, the state passed Referendum C, a suspension of the Taxpayers Bill of Rights ("TABOR").

With George W. Bush winning the state by less than five percentage points, Colorado is also rapidly becoming a national battleground state. **It's the ideal canvas on which to paint a new Presidential caucus bellwether.**



**1 - Newly-elected Senator Ken Salazar Addresses Colorado's Democrats on Election Night 2004**

### Demographic Data

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#### **POLITICAL DIVERSITY**

Colorado currently has 802,000 registered Democrats. In 2004, voter turnout for the general election was 88.6% of all active registered voters. Colorado's Democrats are working to increase voter activity in a state that has made great changes in Democratic voting performance – despite the fact that registered Democrats represent 30% of total registered voters.

The Colorado Democratic Party has developed a strategic plan and embarked on a 64-county strategy, which is strengthening the party from the precinct level to the state. We believe this transition makes Colorado the strongest contender to be the New Pre-Window Caucus State.

## RACIAL AND ETHNIC DIVERSITY



**2 - Local schoolchildren perform a traditional Mexican dance during an intermission at the Conejos County Democratic Party Central Committee Meeting in Southern Colorado**

The 2000 population of Colorado was 4,301,261. Of that, Hispanic or Latino population numbered 735,601, or 17.1%. African-Americans were at a level of 190,717, or 4.4%. Asian population was 95,213, or 2.2%. American Indian and Alaska Native account for 44,241, or 1%. Of the voting public, we are currently working with the DNC to obtain more accurate data on racial and ethnic voting patterns. Preliminary data in Colorado suggests that 11% of the voting public is Latino/Hispanic and 2% is African-American.

Much of Colorado's minority population is spread out across the state. For instance, Hispanic Coloradans form a powerful voting bloc not only in urban areas, but also in some of the most rural areas of Colorado.

## REGIONAL AND GEOGRAPHIC DIVERSITY

Colorado is the gateway to the Interior West. As such, it reflects the New Western attitudes concerning property rights, the environment, and energy independence, among other issues. Colorado is made up of three basic regions: the Western Slope; the Front Range; the Eastern Plains. Population concentrations tend to be largely along the Front Range and the I-25 corridor. Eighty-four and one half percent of the state's population is classified as urban.



**3 - Democrats in Prowers County, in the Southeast Corner of the State, Prepare for the Annual Parade**

Even within those broad geographic descriptions, great diversity exists.

Coloradans are primarily located in three media markets of extraordinary diversity. The Denver DMA is one of the "Top 20" DMAs in the nation. The Colorado Springs-Pueblo DMA is a medium-sized television market, and the Grand Junction-Montrose DMA is among the smallest in the United States. Colorado's rural areas range from struggling farming and ranching economies to booming resort areas.

## ECONOMIC DIVERSITY, INCLUDING UNION DENSITY



**4 - Labor leaders Chat at the Grand Opening of Congressman John Salazar's New Congressional Office in Pueblo. Labor Plays a Key Role in Colorado's Democratic Party**

The predominant industry in the state of Colorado is in the educational, health and social services, which represents 17% of employment. Retail trade, professional, scientific, and other management services account for almost 24% of the workforce. Construction, manufacturing and arts and entertainment make up approximately 9% each. Median household income was \$47,203 in the year 2000. There are 118,000 union members in Colorado. Of these, over 80% are registered to vote. Colorado is not a Right to Work state.

## Implementation Capabilities

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**Because of Colorado's long history with caucuses, the Centennial State is uniquely qualified to handle an early Presidential nominating caucus. Our caucus process is a true "grassroots" event, designed to maximize the input and voice of those at the neighborhood level.**

### PAST USE OF THE CAUCUSES IN THE PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATING PROCESS

With the brief exception of a Presidential primary in 2000, Colorado has historically been a caucus state for all purposes. Colorado holds precinct caucuses every two years, as they are the initiating event in Colorado's main method of ballot access – the assembly process. **Colorado's experience with precinct caucuses is simply unmatched.**



Colorado's "dual-track" system follows two similar, but distinctive, avenues. Every two years, "assemblies" are held at various levels as the main method of ballot access. Counties, state legislative districts, congressional districts, even judicial districts (for nomination of district attorney candidates) all hold separate assemblies.

At the same time, in

**5 - Attendees vote for President at the rural Lincoln County Convention, 2004**

Presidential election years, counties, congressional districts, and the state all hold “conventions” for the primary purpose of selecting delegates to the national convention.

At the levels where assemblies and conventions are both held (county, congressional district, and state), they are almost always held simultaneously, and it is not uncommon for counties to seamlessly conduct business in “convention” and next move to a piece of “assembly” business without anybody really noticing. Indeed, it is often the case that the same people that are assembly delegates are also convention delegates.

At every level of the caucus / convention system, a candidate preference must reach a 15% “threshold” to be awarded delegates to the next-highest level. “Uncommitted” is treated as any other candidate preference.

Finally, past use of Colorado’s caucuses at the Presidential level have shown Colorado’s Democrats to be “independent” thinkers unafraid to buck trends and make their voices heard to the nation.

## LEVELS OF THE CAUCUS SYSTEM IN COLORADO



**6 - Attendance at the Boulder County Convention and Assembly in 2004**

As mentioned before, Colorado follows a dual-track caucus system in Presidential years. The first tier of the caucus system in Colorado is the precinct-level caucus. Caucuses are used at the precinct level to select delegates to both subsequent conventions and subsequent assemblies (described previously).

There are three levels to the caucus system for selecting delegates to the national convention. The precinct caucus elects delegates to the county convention, and the county

convention elects delegates to the state and congressional district conventions, where national delegates are then chosen.

In Colorado, precincts are generally required to be small enough that each precinct has fewer than 1500 registered voters<sup>1</sup>. Voting precincts are designated by the county

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<sup>1</sup> Colorado law provides a couple of exceptions to this generality. In counties which use a purely paper ballot system (without any electronic equipment whatsoever), the precincts must be no larger than 600 voters per precinct. Also, a county’s Board of County Commissioners may allow a County Clerk to draw precincts of up to 2000 voters. C.R.S. § 1-5-101. However, the general rule of 1500 per precinct remains nearly universal.

commissioners, in conjunction with the county clerk and recorder. In many counties, precincts are redrawn only once every decade, in conjunction with redistricting; however, in counties experiencing faster growth, mid-decade precinct realignment is not uncommon.

Caucuses are held at the same time and date for both the Democrats and Republicans at the precinct level for each of Colorado’s roughly 3,300 precincts. The county parties are responsible for organizing and arranging each precinct caucus, following uniform rules set forth in the Colorado Democratic Party bylaws, state statute, and the Delegate Selection Plan.

At the precinct caucus, delegates are elected to both the county assembly (as part of the state nominating process), as well as to the county convention (as part of the Presidential nominating process)<sup>2</sup>. Delegates are selected using “fair reflection;” i.e., if 25% of the attendees support candidate x, then roughly that same proportion of delegates should be designated for supporters of that candidate. The number of delegates from each precinct to the county assembly and convention is chosen using a formula (designated by the county party) which takes into account the population and Democratic voting strength of each precinct.



**7 - A Caucus Attendee in Fremont County's Precinct 9 Talks About the Democratic Candidate for Governor**

congressional district conventions.

At the precinct caucus, attendees can choose to take “straw votes” to determine roughly the support for each of the candidates. This is purely voluntary. However, the precinct caucus must eventually take a “preference poll” on the Presidential race. The results of that poll – which can only be done once – determine the allocation of the precinct’s delegates to the county convention among the Presidential candidates.

At the county convention<sup>3</sup>, the preference poll process is repeated for election of delegates to the state convention and the

Delegates to the national convention are selected at the state convention and the congressional district conventions. The congressional district conventions must be held prior to the state convention; many are held the night before the state convention at the

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<sup>2</sup> Note that two of Colorado’s 64 counties (Adams and Pueblo) follow a complicated aberration of this process, and instead directly elect delegates to the state and congressional district conventions from the precinct level.

<sup>3</sup> The county convention is almost always held at the same time and place as the county assembly, where candidates are designated for the countywide and single-district legislative races. This is also true of the congressional district convention and the state convention.

same location. At both the state convention and congressional district conventions, national convention delegates are elected using the same preference poll process as in the prior steps.

## Funding Mechanism / Proposed Budget

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**Because precinct caucuses are done every two years in Colorado, the execution of the caucuses is a way of life for our political system.**

Precinct caucuses and county assemblies are funded by the respective county parties; often, these are in venues that provide their space for free or very limited cost.

However, the Colorado Democratic Party understands that the technical undertaking of a pre-window caucus significantly changes the nature of running caucuses statewide. The Party expects to raise and expend \$560,000 in order to have a successful early caucus for the November 2008 Presidential Election. The following is a summary of the expenditures and fundraising:

### EXPENDITURES

Staff	\$500,000
Technology (rapid counting)	10,000
Training	40,000
Forums	10,000
Total, Expenditures	\$560,000

### FUNDRAISING

Voter File Sale	\$200,000
Fundraisers by Presidential Candidate	200,000
Increased contributions from Colorado residents	160,000
Total, Fundraising	\$560,000

- **STAFF** – we would increase the staff of the Colorado Democratic Party to ensure a successful caucus. We would hire an additional 3 staff members for a year before the caucus, these positions would be Assistant Political Director, Assistant Communications Director, and Caucus Coordinator. In addition we would hire an additional 10 staff for 3-6 months prior to the caucus to help our current regional coordinators work with the county parties. Finally, we would hire one person in each of the 64 counties for the day of the caucus and several days before to help counties with the logistics and facilitate the rapid tally of caucus results.
- **TECHNOLOGY** – this would be some sort of real-time, or relatively immediate, reporting of results. The State Party has the technical expertise primarily in-house to create a secure online form for the reporting of results. For counties without the ability or inclination to report results utilizing the Internet, the State Party

would have staff and volunteers at State Party headquarters available by phone to accept results and enter those results into the database.

- **TRAINING** – this would be expanded caucus from the usual training provided for each county as well as additional training on how to use the technology to rapidly tally the results.
- **FORUMS** – we anticipate conducting 10 forums with the candidates in the different regions of the state dealing with a diverse range of topics such as health care, renewable energy, defense, immigration, and other topics.
- **VOTER FILE SALE** – we anticipate selling access to our voter file provided to us by VAN to all of the Presidential candidates.
- **FUNDRAISERS BY PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES** – due to the increased activity in the state from the time the caucus location is announced and the actual caucus day we plan to work with each Presidential candidate to organize fundraisers for the State Party throughout 2006, 2007 and 2008.
- **INCREASED CONTRIBUTION FROM COLORADO RESIDENTS** – because of the increase excitement from the early caucus, and the ability to do direct fundraising for that purpose, we expect to be able to increase the contribution to the State Party from the residents of Colorado.

In the past, materials and training are generally provided by the State Party, out of the general funds available to the State Party. Again, these costs have not been terribly daunting in the past. In 2006, State Party officers and staff traveled around the state conducting caucus and assembly training sessions for county parties, primarily in well-attended regional sessions.

## Legal Issues

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**8 - Party Leaders from over a Dozen Counties Attend Caucus and Assembly Regional Training in Gunnison, Feb 2006**

Colorado does not need pre-clearance or approval from the Justice Department to enact these changes.

Colorado's caucuses are currently set by state law as the third Tuesday in March, which would put the caucus at March 18, 2008. There are two options for changing this date, if the DNC provides approval.

The first, and more preferable, option would be a change in statute. The Colorado Democratic Party cannot say with certainty whether this will be

possible, as any change approved by the DNC in 2006 could not be made until early 2007, when the Legislature would next meet (they adjourn in early May of each year). At that time, we will have a new Legislature and a new Governor.

The State House and State Senate are both currently controlled by Democrats. It is believed that a Democratic legislature would be amenable to changing the caucus date to the earlier date sought by the State Party<sup>4</sup>. **This bid for a Pre-Window Caucus is supported by the Democratic leadership of both the Colorado House and the Colorado Senate. It is also supported by our full Congressional delegation, and Colorado's labor community.** It is unclear whether a Republican-controlled legislature or governor would feel similarly; however, the State Party believes the odds are good in either event due to the increased attention and economic benefit that an early caucus could bring.

If the Legislature does not make the date change in the statute, the State Party could split the “dual track” system into two by a rules change made by the State Democratic Central Committee. In other words, a caucus would be held on the date selected by the DNC for the purposes of electing delegates to the county convention based on Presidential Preference, and then a second precinct caucus would be held on the date set by statute for the state's own candidate nomination process.

Because the selection of delegates to the national convention is an internal party process, rather than part of the assembly nominating process set forth in statute, court decisions indicate that Party bylaws could override state statutes. Colorado's courts have held that political parties may, in cases like this, control their own procedures regardless of state law.

While the State Party would much rather have a uniform date set by statute for the caucuses, we are prepared to split the caucuses into two in order to hold the “second-in-the-nation caucus”. The Colorado Democratic Party believes that the potential increase in participation by Colorado's Democrats would be well worth any hassles generated by holding dual precinct caucuses.

## Conclusion

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Colorado is at the forefront of America's new political landscape. Our long experience with caucuses in Colorado, combined with the great diversity seen in the state, gives us a unique ability to successfully hold the caucus between Iowa and New Hampshire.

We look forward to the work of the Rules and Bylaws Committee as it deliberates on this important issue. Please do not hesitate to contact the State Party if further information is needed.

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<sup>4</sup> Note, however, that the State Legislature and current Governor have been cool to the idea of changing to a Presidential Primary because of the costs of conducting such a primary to the state. It appears quite certain that Colorado will remain a caucus state for 2008, regardless of the decision of the DNC on scheduling.