



KERRY WINS NEW HAMPSHIRE PRIMARY; CANDIDATES PREPARE FOR NEXT CONTESTS

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Massachusetts Sen. John Kerry, aided by his victory in last week's Iowa caucus, powered past former Vermont Gov. Howard Dean and six other candidates Tuesday night to capture the first presidential primary of the 2004 season.

Kerry, who had at one point trailed Dean by more than 30 points in opinion polls, won 39 percent of the vote in New Hampshire.

Second place winner Dean gained 26 percent of the vote while retired U.S. Army Gen. Wesley Clark got 13 percent, a close margin over fourth place winner North Carolina Sen. John Edwards.

Sen. Joseph Lieberman of Connecticut placed fifth with 9 percent and Ohio Rep. Dennis Kucinich and civil rights leader the Rev. Al Sharpton received less than 2 percent of the vote.

Winning the New Hampshire primary does not guarantee that Kerry will be the Democratic nominee to go up against President Bush in the November general election. Kerry and the rest of the Democratic candidates – those who choose to remain in the race – will continue to campaign in the states where the next primaries will be held in order to gain the 2,161 delegates needed to be nominated at the Democratic conventions in July.

How primaries work

In a primary, votes are not cast directly for candidates as many people think. Instead, they are cast in favor of delegates who will vote for the candidates at the national conventions that select each party's presidential nominee.

Party delegates are allocated to each state according to population size. Since the number of people living in a state is always shifting, so is the number of delegates assigned to a particular state.

In the Democratic primaries, most delegates are won on a state-by-state basis and are awarded proportionally by the number of votes the candidates receive. For example, if a state has 50 delegates up for grabs and Candidate X gets 60 percent of the votes in that state primary, then Candidate X will receive 30 delegates.

A key aspect of the primary system is that the elections are not held on the same day (like the general election) but are staggered over a period of months, from January to June. During this time candidates criss cross the country in an attempt to win enough delegates.

One result of this staggered schedule is that states with the first primaries are extremely important to the candidates. A politician who does well early is seen as a better bet to supporters and potential campaign donors, while those who do not do as well will typically see their support wither and their funds evaporate, forcing them to drop out of the race.

Upcoming primaries

After Tuesday's primary, many of the candidates are already on the road or in the air headed for the next primary states.

On Tuesday, Feb. 3, Arizona, Delaware, Missouri, Oklahoma and South Carolina will hold primaries. Tennessee and Virginia will hold primaries on Feb. 10. Several states, including New Mexico, North Dakota, Michigan, Washington and Maine will hold caucuses, similar to Iowa, where voters gather at community meetings to discuss the candidates' qualifications and choose who they support.

As the race spreads to different regions of the country, Kerry might face renewed competition. For instance, Edwards, who came fourth in New Hampshire and who is a Southerner, is expected to win in South Carolina where he is the most popular candidate according to surveys taken of registered voters. In Arizona, Dean, who placed second in New Hampshire, is expected to win because of his popularity with Arizona voters.

Historically, in the three decades since the Iowa and New Hampshire contests moved to the beginning of the primary season, Democrats who won both have gone on to win the nomination: Jimmy Carter in 1976 and Al Gore in 2000.

However, the leader of the Democrats in the House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi of California, said it will probably be another month before the nomination is certain. "Kerry has been impressive," she said, "but we have to see how this plays out in the rest of the country."

By Online NewsHour

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