



## **PRESIDENTIAL CONVENTIONS HEAT UP ELECTION SEASON**

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*The 2004 presidential election season officially heats up this month as both parties make final preparations before the summer's national conventions.*

This convention season is especially significant as it is the first time voters will be able to choose a president after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. Americans also are divided by the war in Iraq and struggling with an economy on the rebound.

People are paying more attention to the issues now, says Kathleen Hall Jamieson, director of the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania.

She compares this election to 1996, the last time a sitting president tried to convince the public to grant him a second term. "Clinton never seemed seriously threatened by Dole. ... The economy was doing reasonably well and there was no war," Jamieson told USA Today.

### **Convention opportunities**

Both major political parties hold conventions every four years. The party officially nominates its candidate for president and vice president and presents its platform, or major political themes and ideas, to the public. The Democratic National Convention will be held in first-time host city Boston July 26-29.

"We believe in a nation that is 'Stronger at Home, Respected in the World,' and this convention will showcase the team that Americans can trust to always be on their side to achieve that goal," said Governor Bill Richardson, who is in charge of planning the 2004 Democratic Convention.

The list of speakers at the convention contains many prominent Democrats including former Vice President Al Gore and former Presidents Bill Clinton and Jimmy Carter. The keynote speaker will be Barack Obama, a popular young African-American politician from Illinois who is running for the U.S. Senate. Another speaker to watch is Ron Reagan, son of former President Reagan, who will talk about stem cell research. Ron Reagan, a self-described liberal whose political views were often at odds with his conservative Republican father, has said publicly that he does not support President Bush's re-election.

The Republican National Committee, which will hold its convention in New York City from Aug. 30 through Sept. 2, has not yet released its major themes, but prime-time speakers include Republican Senator John McCain of Arizona and former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani. Republicans are preparing for an energetic speech from California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, and an appearance by Senator Zell Miller of Georgia, who will talk about being a pro-life Democrat.

### **A window of interest**

Political analysts say that many Americans begin to pay attention to the race for the White House during the national political conventions.

“Voters have 'windows of time' when they're interested,” Matthew Dowd, chief strategist of President Bush’s campaign told USA Today. The days leading up to the conventions are one of those windows, he added.

"The convention is the second most viewed event of the general election campaign — behind the presidential debates. ... People do tune in," Thomas Hollihan, associate dean of the USC-Annenberg School for Communication told the LA Times.

### **Unprecedented security**

Security in Boston and New York will be tight. Earlier in the month Secretary of Homeland Security Tom Ridge warned that there was intelligence indicating al-Qaida might strike the United States sometime this summer in an attempt to influence the presidential election, as some say was done in Madrid, Spain in March.

"Credible reporting indicates that al-Qaida is moving forward with plans to carry out a large-scale attack in the United States aimed to disrupt our democratic process," Ridge said at a Boston press conference.

But he added that no specific intelligence pointed to a specific attack to either political convention.

Precautions will include the closure of key train stations and interstate sections, X-raying of convention attendees as well as the usual bomb sniffing dogs and 24-hour surveillance of key buildings.

*By Annie Schleicher, NewsHour Extra*

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