

Using NewsHour Extra Feature Stories

STORY

Democratic Super Delegates Face Pressure Over Presidential Pick, 04/02/08

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/features/us/jan-june08/superdel_4-02.html

Estimated Time: One 45-minute class period with possible extension

[Student Worksheet](#) (reading comprehension and discussion questions without answers)

PROCEDURE

1. WARM UP

Use initiating questions to introduce the topic and find out how much your students know.

2. MAIN ACTIVITY

Have students read NewsHour Extra's feature story and answer the reading comprehension and discussion questions on the student handout.

3. DISCUSSION

Use discussion questions to encourage students to think about how the issues outlined in the story affect their lives and express and debate different opinions.

INITIATING QUESTIONS

- 1. Why is the Democratic party having trouble choosing a nominee to run for president?**
- 2. What is a super delegate?**
- 3. Who do you think should choose the Democratic candidate for president? All voters regardless of which party they are registered for? Only registered Democrats? Party leaders?**

READING COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS – [Student Worksheet](#)

1. Who are super delegates?

ANSWER

Super delegates are often influential party leaders, including former presidents, governors, members of Congress, and party activists elected by state representatives.

Super delegates are permitted to vote for whomever they choose, allowing the party to counterbalance traditional "pledged" delegates who are typically awarded in state primaries and caucuses.

2. When were super delegates created? Why were they created?

ANSWER

In 1982, Democratic Party leaders created the super delegate process in an effort to re-establish some measure of electoral control to party insiders after a decade of wide-open, populist primary results.

3. How are pledged delegates distributed?

ANSWER

Under Democratic National Committee (DNC) rules, pledged delegates are distributed proportionally after a state's primary or caucus votes are tallied, meaning that a candidate who receives 30 percent of the vote will receive approximately 30 percent of the available delegates.

4. Why is this issue of super delegates so important during this election cycle?

ANSWER

This year, as the tight race between Senators Obama and Clinton continues, neither candidate will likely gain the 2,025 delegates needed to secure the Democratic presidential nomination by popular vote and pledged delegates alone. As a result, the individual, unpledged support of some 800 super delegates is on track to be the deciding factor in the race.

5. Are super delegates united in how they think their support should be decided? Why or why not?

ANSWER

Super delegates do not all agree, however, on the appropriate means of choosing which candidate to support. Some, such as Congressman Chris Van Hollen of Maryland and Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, have suggested that super delegates have an obligation to reflect the will of the voters.

Others, such as former DNC national chairman Steve Grossman and current chair Howard Dean, believe super delegates should exercise their own judgment to determine who will best serve the needs of the party in a general election.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (more research might be needed)

1. What do you think, how should each super delegate decide their vote? Should their votes reflect the will of the voters in their district? Their state? Or should their votes reflect their own judgments? Explain your reasoning.

2. Do you think the super delegate system makes sense? Is it fair? What changes to the system of choosing a Democratic nominee for president would you make if you could? Explain any changes you would or would not make.

3. Using the Online NewsHour Democratic Super Delegate Tracker

(<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/vote2008/primaries/superdelegates/search.php>) research the latest information on the super delegates and their pledged votes. Do you notice any trends? What is surprising to you? What have you learned?

Extension Activity

Have students write a 300-500 word essay on this topic providing clear examples. Send your completed editorial to NewsHour Extra (extra@newshour.org). Exceptional essays might be published on our Web site.