

How To Be Effective At Your Precinct Convention

The process of becoming a delegate to your County or Senatorial District Convention, and then to the State Convention, begins at your precinct convention.

When: 7:15 p.m. Tuesday, March 7, 2006

Where: At every precinct polling location in Texas

When you get there, don't expect anyone to know where it's occurring. If you're the Democratic Precinct Chair, you should figure out the best location. It occurs wherever you make space for it to be. If you're in a building with Republicans, nicely work out arrangements of who'll be where. There is no rule or regulation about location as long as people can find you. It wouldn't hurt to take some tape, paper, and markers and make signs for the doors to say where the Democrats are meeting (e.g., Democratic Convention in cafeteria ... or basement ... or room 101). If the doors are locked and you're standing there with some others, you can declare that you're the convention and hold it on the sidewalk. **JUST DO IT!**

WHAT HAPPENS (in a nutshell):

- Everyone signs in.
- The group elects a chair and secretary of the Convention by majority vote.
- The chair announces how many delegates the precinct is allocated.
- Attendees elect their allocated delegates and alternates.
- Participants propose, discuss, and adopt any resolutions they wish to forward to the next Convention level.
- Adjourn.

WHAT YOU NEED

Each Democratic Precinct Chair should have with him/her some basic documents, such as: Rules of the Party, simple "how to" instructions for running the convention, a minutes form you can merely fill in the blanks, and sign-in sheets. If you haven't ever met or can't find who's in charge *before* the meeting, be assured there won't be anyone in charge. ... **JUST DO IT!** Use a tablet and make your own sign-in sheets, your own minutes, etc. You will not have your delegates disqualified if you do your best to make your convention happen!

Here is the link for Rules of the Texas Democratic Party: www.txdemocrats.org/files/Rules2004.pdf

Who are the attendees?

Anyone can participate who lives in the precinct and who voted in the Democratic Primary either early or on election day.

How many delegates and alternates will be elected?

Every precinct is different in the number of delegates it is allotted (based on 2002 Democratic vote for the Democratic candidate for Governor, one for each 25 votes).

Although this document is about the precinct convention, let's jump ahead to explain the process at succeeding steps so you understand the big picture up front:

At the next level, the County or Senate District Convention, each precinct elects one or more delegates to the State Convention (one delegate for each 300 votes cast). These elections at the County/Senate Conventions are won by plurality votes. The highest vote-getter is the delegate, the second-highest vote-getter is the second delegate if there is one, etc. Each precinct also elects alternates in the same number as the delegates. (If you have two delegates allocated, you also get to elect two alternates.)

Note: Don't worry about alternates. Use all your strategy at the County Convention to win the delegate slots. If someone cannot go to the State Convention, he or she can, in writing, appoint any other delegate from your county as a replacement. The alternate from your precinct does not automatically move up to delegate status unless the delegate fails to make an appointment. This explanation is important in that if you can allocate your votes so that you assure that your folks bloc vote and win first and second, and therefore the delegate seats, you'll want to do that.

Whether you're in far-flung rural Texas or urban Houston, getting you to the State Convention matters to us. Surprisingly, the more rural you are, the easier it is to get elected because of the disorganized nature of the local Democratic party in many counties. You can do lots of good with little effort.

SIGNING IN AT THE PRECINCT CAUCUS

When a person arrives at the convention, he or she will sign in with name, address, voter certificate number, and demographic information.

If you don't have your voter registration card, you can usually get the election judge to assist since the judge will have duplicative voter lists for this purpose. If a person can't prove he or she voted (stamped voter card, affidavit signed by election clerk, or name on the roster of voters provided by the election judge), you could deny them entrance to the convention; however, you should play fair. If it's pretty clear the person voted and simply forgot documentation or the election judge left with the ballots and list, please do not deny anyone the right to participate. The Party can assist you in getting certificate numbers later.

Once the person signs the list, he or she does not have to stay around. Those who remain can elect the delegates,

even listing people who aren't there. (So if you have someone who has to get to work or needs to get home to children, etc., accommodate them. Let them sign in and go.)

Technically, as long as one person stays behind to make nominations, vote for the delegates and alternates, and turn in the results, that works. The only way this can get messed up is if the person remaining doesn't have a "list" of delegates to nominate ... but if you're reading this, that won't happen!

ELECTION OF CHAIR AND SECRETARY

These positions are ministerial in nature. There is no advantage to having the Chair's seat if your convention follows the rules. Play by the rules!

The advantage of being Secretary is that you get to take home the sign-in list. You can make copies of everyone's email addresses and contact info before you mail them to the Party office. If you are NOT Chair or Secretary, ask to copy the list that night during the meeting or to have them send you a copy the next day. You're going to want to talk to the delegates to the next Convention before you get there.

VOTING FOR DELEGATES

Each person casts as many votes as there are delegates to be elected. You may cast your votes for one person or split them among several people. This type of "bullet voting" where you can vote for one candidate or spread your votes around is allowed. The top highest vote getters are selected in rank order until all delegate and alternate positions are filled. The persons with the highest vote totals are delegates, and the next highest are alternates.

In reality, this is a very cumbersome process, especially if you have 100 people nominated. Be patient and make sure everyone is treated fairly.

Automatic Delegates: There are only a few automatic delegates to the next Convention. Everyone must be elected except: Democratic County Chairs, State Democratic Executive Committee members, and Democratic National Committee members. Since they are already automatic delegates to the State Convention, don't waste a spot for them in your delegation.

Consensus votes for a delegation list: Often the delegates at this convention have an open discussion on who can take off to attend the State Convention. If after this discussion it is abundantly clear who the delegates and alternates would be, by **UNANIMOUS** agreement, you can just have a motion to elect the consensus delegates and alternates by acclamation. (Example: The leader says, "We have to elect 30 people as delegates and 30 as alternates. Raise your hand if you really want to attend the next Convention on a Saturday in three weeks." If only 30 people raise their hands, then move to elect them all without the tedious balloting process. You can then make a list of up to 30 alternates.)

However, if any **ONE** delegate asks for the rules about voting be followed, you **MUST** hold the election. Remember that if you don't follow the rules, anyone from the convention can file a challenge at the County Convention and ask that their name(s) be substituted for the names submitted. They will win that challenge, and you might have spent a lot of time just to be tossed out on your ear from the Convention! Play fair and by the rules!

The reality is that, in an off-year, you are very likely to have more slots to fill than people to fill them. Just fill as many as possible.

RESOLUTIONS

The final action of the convention is the passage of resolutions. Many people will have brought their own resolutions, some come from interest groups, and others are just strong feelings of the individual. Any delegate can propose a resolution. The group can discuss, amend, table, or adopt any resolution.

AFTER THE CAUCUS

Sign-in sheets, minutes form, resolutions, and the list of delegates and alternates must be forwarded to your county party.

COME PREPARED WITH THE ANSWERS

You can make up your own sign-in lists, minutes, etc. if the preprinted ones aren't there, but you **MUST** know how many delegates to elect. Call your local party office and **ASK** sometime the week before the conventions. Know that number, and you'll save yourself headaches at the meeting if no one there knows it!

Since you may have to elect more delegates than there are people in attendance, come with a list of folks you know have voted and you know you can get to attend the County Convention three weeks hence. You can elect them to the County Convention even if they are not present at the precinct convention. (Example: You're at the convention but your husband couldn't be there. You know you can get your husband to come to the County Convention. You can elect him to attend.)

Also, your goal is to get to the State Convention. If your precinct has ten delegates to elect and there are only three of you at the convention, you don't have to fill out the entire delegation with people who are not going to show up anyway. At the County Convention, one of the three will be elected to the State Convention and another can be the alternate. If you are the only one at the convention, you have a sure lock on being elected as the State delegate at the County Convention.

We hope you'll increase involvement in the Party by getting people to attend, but also realize you are trying to win delegate slots for yourself and your allies.

That's it — **JUST DO IT!**