

# WHAT THE HECK IS A SUPER-DELEGATE?

The Democratic Party has three types of delegates; two types are elected at the state level. The third is less well publicized or understood: the super-delegate.

## What Are Political Party Delegates?

Delegates are people who attend a political party national convention and who elect the party nominee. Some states select delegates during a Presidential primary and others during caucuses; some states also have a state convention where national convention delegates are selected. Some delegates represent state congressional districts; some are "at large" and represent the entire state. The Democratic Party also has a third type: super-delegates. A super-delegate is a leader in the National Democratic Party who has a vote at the national convention; they not selected by state party members.

## Who Are Super-Delegates?

Super-delegates (approximately 850 in 2008) include the following:

- Elected members of the Democratic National Committee (~450)
- Democratic Governors
- Democratic US Senators and US Representatives (including non-voting delegates)
- Distinguished party leaders (current and former Presidents and Vice Presidents; former Democratic leaders of the Senate and House; former DNC chairmen)
- Unpledged "add-on's" chosen by the DNC



## Rationale For Super-Delegates

The Democratic Party established this system in part in response to the nomination of George McGovern in 1972. McGovern took only one state and had only 37.5 percent of the popular vote. Then in 1976, Jimmy Carter was a dark-horse candidate with little national experience. Super-delegates were implemented in 1984.

Super-delegates are designed to act as a check on ideologically extreme or inexperienced candidates. It also gives power to people who have a vested interest in party policies: elected leaders. Because the primary and caucus voters do not have to be active members of the party (in New Hampshire they can sign up and sign out going-and-coming at the polls), the super-delegate system has been called a safety-value.

## Importance of Super-Delegates

The Democratic Party allocates delegates based on a state's Presidential vote in the prior three elections and the number of electors. In addition, states that hold their primaries or caucuses later in the cycle receive bonus delegates.

It has been 30 years since the Democratic Party had a cliffhanger going into the Convention. If there is no clear winner after state primaries and caucuses, then the super-delegates -- who are bound only by their consciences -- will decide the nominee.