Two Problems With Caucuses

Robert Gehrke, August 18, 2023: "Ditching the 2024 presidential primary means fewer Utah Republicans will nominate a candidate," ***The Salt Lake Tribune***

This source is from a local newspaper in Salt Lake City. Robert Gehrke is a political reporter. [Changed for easier reading.]

There are **two** problems with the Republican decision to use caucuses. **First,** turnout at caucus meetings is much, much lower than turnout for primary elections. That means that fewer Republicans will pick the party's favorite candidate. In the 2016 caucuses, around 177,000 Republicans went. In 2020, when the party used a direct primary instead because of the pandemic, almost double that number participated (345,000). There are a lot of reasons why caucus turnout is lower. Jobs, kids' soccer games, and other family commitments make it harder to show up on a specific night than to submit a ballot. A lot of Republicans end up being left out.

That leads to the **second** problem: The people who do show up to caucuses have usually been much more conservative than other Republican voters. Several times, the caucus-chosen delegates have supported more extreme candidates than the ones who have ended up winning general elections. The delegates don't represent the average voter. Governor Spencer Cox said that in past elections, "the delegates did not represent the Republican Party at all" because not enough people go to caucuses. However, he said he supports the party's decision to use a caucus anyway because it saves money and could encourage more Republicans to participate next time.

GOP Chair Robert Axson disagrees with the idea that the caucus system leaves people out. He said, "I think the caucus creates a fair playing field for all the candidates." Axson also said that any Republican who wants to participate can, and that the party will try to help as many people as possible vote.

But if we really want more people participating, we know how to achieve that: Hold a traditional primary election.

Link: Ditching the 2024 presidential primary means fewer Utah Republicans will nominate a candidate, Robert Gehrke says

Utah Needs Caucuses

Gunnar Thorderson: "Why Utah's GOP needs the caucus system now more than ever." Utah County Republican Party

This source is an opinion article from the UCRP (Utah County Republican Party). *Gunnar Thorderson is a very active member of the UCRP who has run for party positions before. [Changed for easier reading with the help of ChatGPT.]*

Since many people have been criticizing Utah's caucus system, I must explain why it's actually a strength to Utah. The caucus gives regular people the chance to take part in choosing political candidates. The other option, primary elections, are more controlled by money, TV ads, and big outside groups. In a caucus, people in each neighborhood pick delegates, who then choose candidates based on their community's values.

The caucus system makes sure that candidates are carefully vetted. Delegates at a caucus look closely at candidates' backgrounds and values. This helps stop candidates with a lot of money from getting elected without being qualified.

Another great thing about the caucus is that it helps bring people together in the community. It encourages neighbors to talk about issues and share ideas. The delegates also share what they learn about candidates with their neighbors, so everyone is more well-informed.

Some people say that the caucus system does not work because Governor Spencer Cox did poorly at the caucus but easily won the general election. However, I think that if Cox had worked and talked more with delegates, he could have done better at the caucus. 12 of the 18 convention-chosen candidates won in the general election, which shows that the delegates do usually represent the average voter well.

In the end, the caucus system helps us pick leaders who manage our state well. We shouldn't get rid of it. Instead, we should teach people about how it works and why it's a good system. The more people understand how the caucus system works, the more they'll want to get involved. This will make the process better for everyone.

Link: https://ucrp.org/why-utahs-gop-needs-the-caucus-system-now-more-than-ever/

Caucus Chaos

March 6, 2024: Hannah Schoenbaum, "Caucus chaos makes Utah last state to report Super Tuesday results," *AP News*

This source is from a national news source. Hannah Schoenbaum is a reporter who focuses on the Utah government. Super Tuesday is a day when many states hold their primary elections or caucuses. [Changed for easier reading.]

The Utah Republican Party's caucus process is meant to restore a sense of community in politics, but it turned into chaos at several caucus locations. Voters like Richard Preiss, a University of Utah professor, say they ran into technology issues and were not given a chance to debate. On the freezing March evening, he went to the caucus at Evergreen Middle School in Salt Lake to find long lines stretching out the door. The scanners for checking registration QR codes had stopped working and volunteers eventually just let anyone inside. Then voters wandered around the school looking for the right room. Volunteers seemed unprepared to help.

In 2016, many voters ran into similar problems. Things went much smoother in 2020 when the GOP used a standard direct primary system. But Robert Axson, Utah's GOP Chair, downplayed the problems and said that he thought the caucuses were "successful," even though results were not in until after midnight. He said the GOP brought back caucuses because they promote community political engagement.

However, the level of engagement seemed to vary. Some precincts had structured debates for more than an hour, but others were done within minutes because volunteers chose to skip debating and just vote. The people who came were mostly elderly or adults without kids.

One political scientist said that the caucus system often draws out the most politically active members of a community, while making it hard for anyone who cannot attend a Tuesday night meeting to contribute. Because of that, they can be less representative than a traditional primary. However, primaries cost the state a lot of money. Parties pay for caucuses themselves, so they are much less expensive for the government.

Link: Caucus chaos makes Utah last state to report Super Tuesday results | AP News

GOP Caucus Booklet

Utah Republican Party, 2024: "Caucus Booklet: America's Best Election System"

These quotes and the chart below are from a booklet produced by the Utah Republican Party. Follow the link to explore more of the booklet or see the chart bigger (scroll to page 6). [Quotes changed for easier reading.]

When Utah became a state in 1896, it adopted a neighborhood caucus convention system for its election process (common at the time). Then in 1937, a Democrat named Herbert Maw wanted to become the governor, but was unpopular with the delegates chosen at the caucuses. Maw strategized that skipping the caucus convention process would allow him to use his money and popularity to win the election. So, he convinced the Utah legislature to replace the caucus system with a direct primary.

Over the next nine years, Utah used a direct primary system. However, it did not work well. Campaign costs rose and voter participation dropped to only 10%. Because people were unhappy, the legislature got rid of the direct primary law and established a balanced hybrid system, which is what Utah uses today.The controversial Senate Bill 54, passed in 2014, added the signature path.

Why the Caucus System Works

- Neighbors elect delegates. Anyone can run for delegate positions.
- All regions in Utah have a voice, including rural and minority communities that are often neglected in a direct primary system.
- Delegates are unpaid volunteers that research candidates and their views.
- Candidates have to rely on their ideas and hard work rather than money and popularity. They have to answer tough questions about important issues affecting Utahns.
- Delegates thoroughly evaluate candidates through multiple in-person events. The average delegate spends roughly 90 hours vetting candidates.
- Delegates serve for two years. They work to keep candidates accountable for their campaign promises and actions.

Link: https://ucrp.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/UTGOP-CaucusBooklet-2024.pdf

Direct Primary vs Neighborhood Caucus System

What is the economic impact of a direct primary election system in California?

GOLDEN STATE

CALIFORNIA JOB OPPORTUNITIES ARE LIMITED:
92 Workers per 100 jobs

STATE DEBT:
1.6 Trillion+ 6.4 billion to be added in 2024

Cost of Illegal Immigration per household:
$7,074 per household per year

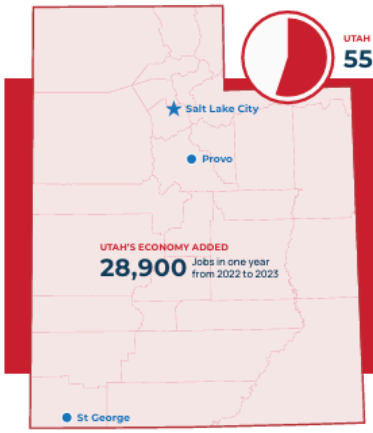
Cost of Illegal Immigration per state:
$22,821,903,942

UNEMPLOYMENT:
5.3% (highest in the nation)

California's sharp drop in population over the last few years has also meant a sharp drop in the number Californians who are working or available for work.

COMPANIES LEAVING CALIFORNIA
352 companies moved out of California between 2018 and 2021.

BEEHIVE STATE



UTAH OFFERS ABUNDANT JOB OPPORTUNITIES:
55 Workers per 100 jobs

Utah State Debt:
Below 1.8B 35 year low

Cost of Illegal Immigration per household:
$901 per household per year

Cost of Illegal Immigration per state:
$931.1 Million 2023

Unemployment:
2% (national average 3.9%)

UTAH'S ECONOMY ADDED
28,900 Jobs in one year from 2022 to 2023

Will Utah Become Like California?

...Only if we follow California by replacing the Neighborhood Caucus System with a Direct Primary.

“You Have an Appointment”

March 20, 2006: “You have an appointment,” *Provo Daily Herald*

This article was published in March of 2006 in the Provo Daily Herald, a local Utah newspaper. Remember, the signature-gathering path was not added until SB54 passed in 2014. [This article was shortened and simplified using AI for easier reading.]

If you want your voice to be heard in this year’s election, Tuesday night is very important. Neighborhoods all over Utah will meet to choose delegates to represent them at party conventions. These meetings might seem boring or unimportant, but they actually have a huge impact on who gets to run for office. An individual voter has far more power at a caucus meeting than during an election.

Unfortunately, the caucus system is easy to manipulate. A special-interest group can easily take advantage of low voter turnout and elect delegates who support their specific interests. This means that the caucus delegates might not represent what most people want and could even leave out candidates who are more popular with average voters. For example, some moderate Republicans feel that the more extreme members of their party have taken over the caucus system.

The best way to fight this is to get rid of the caucus system and go straight to primary elections. This would allow everyone to vote for the candidates they like most. But many party leaders don’t want to do this because it would cost a lot of money and create other problems.

This is an issue the Utah government needs to figure out soon. Meanwhile, the best solution is for more people to try to attend the caucus meetings and question the people who want to be delegates. For the system to work, all voters need to attend. Be there.

Link to original:
https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=28295866&page=2&q=caucus+system&sort=rel&year_start=1982&year_end=2022

Social Media Posts

These social media posts are all from political accounts around the time of the 2024 Utah Republican convention meeting.

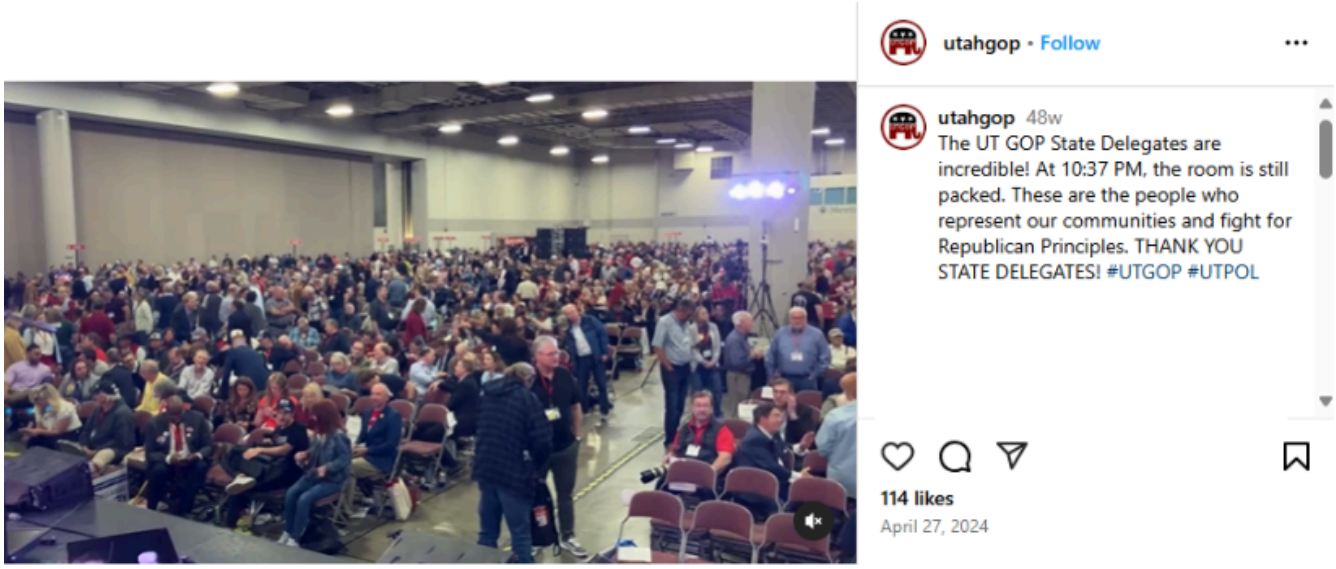
Post #1: Deidre Henderson, X: Convention Environment

From 2021 to now (2025), Deidre Henderson has been Utah's Lieutenant Governor (the second-highest elected official). She was formerly a Utah state senator representing the Republican Party.

Post found in this article:
https://www.deseret.com/opinion/2024/04/27/convention-reveals-disgraceful-behavior-is-it-a-sign-of-the-times/

Post #2: Utah Republican Party, Instagram: Delegates

This post is from the Utah Republican Party's official instagram account. The picture shows some of the caucus-chosen delegates at the 2024 Republican Convention.



Link: https://www.instagram.com/p/C6Syx1ssRik/

Post #3: Utah Republican Party, Instagram: Spencer Cox

This post from instagram is revealing the Republican nominee for the 2024 state election. Spencer Cox lost to Phil Lyman, another Republican candidate with more conservative views, at the convention. However, Cox became the party's official candidate after he gathered signatures and won the party primary election.

Link: https://www.instagram.com/p/C_vvO6YIVNe/

2024 Caucus Day Promotion

Geoff Cox, March 4, 2024: "Caucus to be held Tuesday in Utah; here's how it works," *Herald-Journal*

The Herald-Journal *is a local newspaper for the Cache Valley area based in Logan, Utah. Geoff Cox is the Republican Party chair for Cache County. [Changed for easier reading with the help of ChatGPT.]*

Utah will hold caucus meetings on Tuesday. The caucus system is how political parties in Utah make sure that candidates running for office are committed to the party's values and are qualified for the job. How does it work?

A precinct is a neighborhood where people come together in caucus meetings to choose delegates. Delegates represent their neighborhood and choose candidates to put on the general election ballot. Why delegates? Without a delegate system, a candidate running for office would need to talk to thousands of Republicans, instead of only the smaller group of chosen delegates. Delegates can have real conversations with candidates instead of just learning about them online. That means that candidates can be more closely investigated.

The best part is that the neighborhood caucus lets people choose the candidates who best represent their values—*but only if you show up and participate!* Caucuses are the answer to money-driven, superficial campaigns.

We hope you will come participate and elect delegates you trust to represent you.

See you on Tuesday!

Link:
https://www.hjnews.com/news/local/caucus-to-be-held-tuesday-in-utah-heres-how-it-works/article_64febf84-da6f-11ee-9de8-63c1da444d56.html

GOP Pledge

Utah Republican Party, June 14, 2024: Caucus Convention Pledge

This is an official pledge that many Utah officials from the Republican Party have signed to show their support for the Caucus Convention system.

SIMPLIFIED for easier reading:

I support Utah's Neighborhood Caucus System. It is important because it makes sure that people can use their voices and have a say in their government, as protected in the United States Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and the Utah Constitution.

This system, used by the Utah Republican Party, encourages democratic engagement. It lets unpaid, elected volunteers represent their neighborhoods and vote on candidates, which helps make sure that government leaders have to listen to voters.

I pledge to protect Utah's Neighborhood Caucus System by fighting against any changes that could limit the freedom of parties to choose their nominees. My commitment honors America's founding principle of a government "of the People." Because of these values, I firmly support the caucus system as the foundation of fair, active, and meaningful political engagement in Utah.

ORIGINAL:

I affirm my support for Utah's Neighborhood Caucus System, a pivotal force in upholding the principles of republican government, freedom of political association, and the right to self-govern as enshrined in the United States Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and the Utah Constitution.

This collaborative system, adopted by the Utah Republican Party, actively fosters democratic engagement, and increases government accountability by empowering unpaid volunteers–elected by their neighbors across Utah–to nominate candidates for public office.

I pledge to strengthen and safeguard Utah's Neighborhood Caucus System and oppose any legislation, resolution, initiative, or executive action that undermines its integrity or the critical freedom of parties to self-select their nominees. My commitment honors America's founding principle of a government "of the People." Aligned with these values, I resolutely advocate for its ongoing implementation in our electoral process, ensuring it remains the bedrock of fair, active, and meaningful political engagement in Utah.

Link: https://legacy.utgop.org/announcing-the-new-caucus-convention-pledge/