

MEMBER ARTICLE

The Mystery Behind Becoming a Delegate to the Democratic National Convention

by **Thor O. Emblem**
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To become a delegate to the Democratic National Convention, you do not have to be a life-long Democrat, as I am. You do not have to have been a President of a Democratic Club, a Vice-Chair to the San Diego County Democratic Party, an Officer in the California Democratic Party, or have been a delegate at two prior conventions, as I have. But it helps because you do have to run for election to become a congressional district level delegate. Persons who wanted to run as a district level delegate or alternate for the 2008 Democratic National Convention (to be held in Denver on August 25-28, 2008) were required to file a statement of candidacy designating their presidential preference with the California Democratic Party by Wednesday, April 2, 2008. See, **WWW.CADEM.ORG**. I am pleased to report that I will be a delegate again this year.

As Bob Mulholland, a campaign adviser for the California Democratic Party, recently joked about the party's delegate selection process, "It's not that complicated to the three of us who actually understand it."

In California's February 5 Primary, two presidential candidates met the 15% threshold in each of California's 53 congressional districts, as well as statewide: **Senator Hillary Clinton** and **Senator Barack Obama**. These two candidates held caucuses (or district level delegate elections) in each of California's 53 congressional districts at which Democrats express their Presidential candidate preference and vote for Delegates to the 2008 Democratic National Convention. Caucuses are open to all Democratic voters who are registered to vote in the appropriate congressional district. One can register to vote at the caucus.

California district level delegates and alternates are elected and appointed among the districts based on a formula giving equal weight to total population and to the average number of votes for the Democratic candidates in the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections. California has a total of 441 delegates and 62 alternates.

More than 23,000 Democrats showed up Sunday afternoon, April 13th, to support more than 2,500 candidates vying for 241 slots. I used my phone list, calling people and walking my precinct to get my voters out. The caucus system is politics at both its most basic and most complicated. Candidates meet voters and mingle for about an hour before giving one-minute speeches. Voting immediately follows and results are counted and announced on the spot.

Two males, one female and one female alternate were elected from the 50th Congressional District, last vacated by Randy Cunningham and currently held by Brian Bilbray. I ran as, and was elected as, a Hillary Clinton delegate, and Tracy Emblem, my wife and partner, was elected a female alternate behind Francine Busby, who was the congressional candidate last term. Francine got the most votes, I was second, Tracy third, and a personal injury defense lawyer came in fourth to become the second male delegate allotted to Hillary.

The 241 **elected** delegates will gather to elect an additional 81 at-large delegates and 22 alternates on May 18. Tracy and I will go, but only I and the other two district delegates will vote for the at-large delegates. Any registered California Democrat is eligible to be an at-large delegate. The May 18 vote also will select 48 delegates from among eligible party leaders and elected officials who have applied for the position. These additional delegates are intended to help fill out the party objective of a broad-based representative delegation including minorities, gender, regional and candidate preferences. The party chair, Sen. Art Torres (Ret.), will have an analysis completed to help us with that part. This is also our only delegate meeting before the Convention. We will get our hotel and event information then. At the May 18 election, 129 delegates will be elected: 70 will be pledged to Clinton and 59 to Obama, based on the Primary election results. The end result will guarantee Clinton 204 delegates and Obama 166 delegates from California at the national convention. Delegate representation requirements are female 50% /male 50% (gender-balanced within one) with consideration given to Delegate Affirmative Action Goals; Latino/Hispanic, African-American, Asian/Pacific Islander, Native American, LGBT, Persons with Disabilities and Youth Under 30 (born 8/29/78 or later). Those 370 delegates will be joined at the convention by 71 super-delegates, automatically seated from the ranks of Democratic members of Congress and state Democratic National Committee members not pledged to either candidate.

Tracy and I will both attend the Democratic Convention every day, but, as an alternate, Tracy will be allowed to vote only if Francine Busby is not there. In practice, it is very rare for a delegate to go against his or her original choice, but all delegates are free to support any candidate once at the convention. The uncommitted super-delegates can make the final count even closer.

Political activism is at a record high during this election year. I think being a delegate is interesting, invigorating and fun. The people who want to be delegates are turned on by the political movement. We're the people who watch the news and talk about what's happening. I was a Gore delegate in 2000 and an Edwards (turned Kerry) delegate in 2004. In Los Angeles in 2000, the California Delegation was the host and we put on some really spectacular parties and rubbed elbows with high level elected officials from around the country. A highlight of my 2004 convention trip was hearing a relatively unknown Obama speak to delegates. A hush came over convention. I also fondly remember hanging out with Willie Nelson and Rob Reiner. The delegates return to their districts from the convention super-charged with energy to get out the vote for the candidate who has won the nomination.

We should be proud of California Democrats for recognizing what is at stake for our state, our nation and our world in this Presidential election. Not everyone can attend the Democratic National Convention this year, but everyone can participate from now until Election Day on November 4, 2008 to help elect a Democratic President and increase Democratic numbers in the House and Senate.