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Black Votes Matter
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Black Lives, Black Poverty and Black Votes Matter.

This column began last month with a hopeful call for our community to energize and understand that **Black Votes Matter**. We have celebrated the 50th anniversary of the important 1965 Voting Rights Act and the one-year anniversary of the tragedy of Ferguson, Mo which includes a total lack of voter recognition that **Black Votes Matter** in a city with 67% Black population. For 2016, we have reviewed the offices up for election and the voter legislation, education and participation needs.

This week's column will attempt to educate you on how elections are held in Nebraska every four years while electing a president as well as other federal, state and local races. We will focus on the Caucuses and Primaries.

Throughout Nebraska history, most all of the elections have a primary and then a general election. The primary is meant to narrow a field of multiple candidates down to two finalists. Those two finalists then run against each other in the general election to determine the winner. In partisan elections, the two finalists are usually a democratic candidate against a republican candidate. There are some additional factors that come into play if there is a strong independent candidate. There are very few times when this has occurred and I will ignore that issue until that times comes.¹

In Nebraska, the primary is held on the second Tuesday in May and the General election on the first Tuesday in November. In 2016, that's May 10th and November 1st, respectively.

In the past, during presidential years, Nebraskans voted in a primary election to decide the party nominee and the recipient of the Nebraska delegates to the National Party Conventions. The votes are tallied in each of Nebraska's three congressional districts (CD). Lincoln is the center of CD1, Douglas County is the center for CD2 and CD3 is the remainder of the state. After the primary elections, delegates are given to the winners by their voted percentage in each of the three congressional districts.

There are different rules during the General Election. The problem with that is, no matter who wins, and how narrow the victory in each congressional district election, the winner of the overall popular vote in the entire state gets all of the CD delegates. That is called "winner take all." It was not a fair method.

We will discuss the General Election in a later column.

Now a little national perspective:

1. Every state has a date when they hold their primary, starting in January and into June. Candidates accumulate the delegates from the states until they have enough delegates to guarantee them as the party nominee for President. That usually happens before Nebraska even has its May primary. The Nebraska vote comes after the result is already apparent.
2. Some states don't have a presidential primary, but a presidential Caucus. Example Iowa.
3. In 2008, Nebraska Democrats changed from a presidential primary to a presidential caucus. The national Democratic Party allowed Nebraska to have a caucus and to have it early in March. The purpose and result of having the early caucus is to make the Nebraska vote relevant.

¹ BVM.3

4. What is a presidential Caucus? First there are no polling places. There are caucus sites. Example, Douglas County has 224 polling places for a primary but only 14 Caucus sites. People attend a Caucus site within districts, centered on the state senate legislative districts (LD). People are gathered into a school auditorium and simply stated, decide what presidential candidates are preferred in that Caucus site. All the site results are added together and “voila” a winner. The results are reported officially, and delegates are assigned to all candidates based on their percentage of the Caucus votes. The Caucus is on a Saturday morning and usually takes several hours to complete. The Democratic Party handles all the proceedings concerning the Caucus.

5.

With that historical perspective let me make four key points you should know going into the 2016 Nebraska elections.

1. The Nebraska Caucuses only apply to Democrats. It is Saturday, March 5th.
2. Elections for all offices will be during the Nebraska Primary on May 10th.
3. Confusing to most, in the primary the democratic presidential candidates will also be on the ballot, but the result will not be official. It is only a popularity contest and not counted in the delegate count.
4. Caucus sites will be announced in time for all to know where to go. If you want your candidate to win the caucus you must show up.