



# San Antonio Alamo Area Local Legislative Updates

Letty Alejandro – Legislative Director  
LD0195@att.net



Alex Aleman – President, San Antonio Alamo Area Local

Volume 2 No. 6

February 26, 2016

## Super Delegates

In the Democratic Party, super delegates are democratic members of Congress, governors, party leaders and selected former officials who haven't pledged themselves to any particular candidate in advance, totaling about 20 percent of the total convention delegates. The idea is that, guided by their loyalty to the party (and their own election prospects), they will back a candidate who can win the general election and avoid a messy fight at the nationally televised convention.

To understand why the Democratic Party super delegates have a major influence over the nomination process you have to go back a few decades.

The 1968 Democratic convention in Chicago was a disaster. New York Senator Robert Kennedy's assassination left his delegates uncommitted, but he and Minnesota Senator Eugene McCarthy, favorites of the anti-war left, had a combined majority of delegates. After chaos on the convention floor that mirrored that in the streets, sitting Vice President Hubert Humphrey emerged as the nominee. A defender of the Vietnam war who had not campaigned in a single primary, Humphrey lost handily to Richard Nixon in the general election. Humphrey's win was widely seen as the result of machinations by the party establishment, and pressure mounted to make the Democrats more democratic. Up until 1968, party bosses chose candidates in smoke-filled rooms, and primaries were largely for show, but now the party conventions were on television and the fractious Democrats had an image problem.

In 1972, the first election where primary votes were decisive, Senator George McGovern's insurgent campaign tapped the antiwar sentiment in the party, another convention descended into chaos, and Nixon won another landslide victory. Georgia's Jimmy Carter — a former governor whose lack of national renown and surprise surge in the early primaries made "Jimmy Who?" an unofficial campaign slogan — won the 1976 nomination and, in the wake of Watergate, unseated President Gerald Ford.

In 1980, the incumbent Carter was faced with an insurgent campaign by Senator Ted Kennedy. A weakened Carter held on to the party nomination, but lost to Ronald Reagan in a landslide. Faced with three compromised candidates and three general election losses out of the last four, the Democrats decided the pendulum had swung too far, and again tweaked the process, this time in the name of stability.

The Hunt Commission, headed by Governor Jim Hunt of North Carolina, recommended the addition of super delegates, originally to be 30 percent of the total. Some party insiders worried that this would leave women and minorities underrepresented, so that number was cut to 14 percent.

In 1984, the first election under the new rules, no one came to the convention with a majority of delegates. Former Vice President Walter Mondale had a narrow lead in votes and delegates, though Colorado Senator Gary Hart had won more states, but the Rev. Jesse Jackson's 20 percent delegate share prevented either from having a majority. Super delegate votes put Mondale over the top, preventing a messy convention as planned. It was the last time "as planned" would describe the Mondale campaign, which won only Minnesota and the District of Columbia in the general election.

Super delegates have not been decisive in any convention since 1984, however. Early pledges of support do serve to signal whom the party establishment is backing.

In general, super delegates are a way for the party elite to exert additional influence over the nomination process. If voters were on the verge of nominating a candidate who the party felt didn't have a good shot at winning the general election, the super delegates might step in and tip the scales.

That could conceivably happen this year on the Democratic side. However, it's simply not possible for Republican super delegates to override the wishes of Republican voters. The 2016 Republican super delegates will have way less power and autonomy than the super delegates on the Democratic side.

## **VOTE**

### **Super Tuesday Primary Election March 1**