

HOW DOES A CONVENTION WORK?

Although each convention is somewhat different, and the specific rules and agenda are set by the delegates to the convention, there are certain common elements. These elements are part of almost any convention you will see, and they happen at each level along the way, from precinct caucuses (a kind of mini-convention), all the way up to national conventions. Each convention deals with the following four items:

District Level People and Policies
Delegate Selection

Resolutions
Endorsements

Although you may not have realized it, you dealt with each of these at your precinct caucuses. You elected a precinct chair (and associates); you elected delegates to the next higher level, which was for the Senate District or County Unit convention; you discussed resolutions that would be passed up to the next level convention; you voted on your Presidential Preference Ballot, which is part of the process that leads to the endorsement of a candidate (this actual endorsement can only happen at the national convention, because it is for a national election).

At your Senate District convention, you perform many of the same duties, but on a larger scale. This convention includes people from throughout the same Senate District who were elected to be delegates from their precinct caucuses. Each Senate District is represented in the Minnesota Legislature by one senator and two representatives (from two distinct halves of the district). In some areas of the state, County Units and Senate Districts are not equivalent, and will have separate conventions; in the Metro area they are the same, and most will combine all business into one convention.

DISTRICT LEVEL PEOPLE AND POLICIES

Just as you elected a Chair of your precinct, you will elect a Chair of your Senate District. As the business of an entire Senate District gets much more complex than that of a single precinct, you will also elect a number of other officers, each of whom serves within the Senate District. The officers you elect serve your Senate District specifically, but your Senate District will also elect people to serve within the DFL Party structure—these are known as central committee delegates. They help to represent your district within the party process—they are different than the delegates we'll discuss later (all of these people serve for two years; delegates are chosen for specific conventions only). You may also consider changing how business is done within the Senate District; this is sometimes done by changing the Senate District Constitution (this is a much easier matter than changing the U.S. Constitution—if your convention delegates agree, then it is changed).

DELEGATE SELECTION

Just as you were elected to be a delegate to a convention out of your precinct caucus, your convention will elect delegates to the next higher level of conventions. The people who you elect will go to those conventions and represent your Senate District. These delegates serve on a short-term basis—they will serve as delegates to a Congressional District Convention and a State Convention, but they do not serve beyond that, unless they are elected to be delegates to the highest level, the National Convention.

Delegate Selection at all levels is most commonly done through a process called “subcaucusing,” which ensures that even a small group of people can at least have some voice in the party.

RESOLUTIONS

Resolutions, put simply, are ideas about what the DFL should stand for. If a resolution makes it all the way to the State Convention, and the delegates vote in favor of it, it becomes part of the DFL Platform, and helps to define what it means to in the DFL. Similar to the way in which delegate selection works, resolutions start at the precinct caucus level, and progress upward through the different levels of conventions. Your precinct can pass any number of resolutions, but the process starts to get more selective at the Senate District level. The delegates at your Senate District convention will determine which resolutions to bring to the State Convention, but they can only bring a limited number.

ENDORSEMENTS

A DFL endorsement is a kind of seal of approval. It means that the people of the DFL in a particular district believe that voting for a specific candidate best fits the goals of the DFL. To get an endorsement at a DFL convention, a candidate needs to get the votes of at least 60% of the delegates to the convention.

To endorse a candidate, a convention must represent the district in which the candidate is running. This is why your precinct couldn't actually endorse a presidential candidate; in fact, there aren't elected officials at the precinct level. At the Senate District convention, for example, the convention could endorse a candidate for Senate, but Minnesota's Senate isn't up for election this year. Because there are two different districts for the Minnesota House of Representatives, at some point your convention will divide in half by House district. This means that people on the 'A' or 'B' side of the district only help to endorse candidates for the election in which they get to vote. In order to vote in the endorsement of a candidate, you need to be elected as a delegate to that convention level.