Iowa Democratic Party rejects audit of caucus vote

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The Iowa Democratic Party has rejected calls by the campaign of Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders and the state's leading newspaper, the *Des Moines Register*, for an audit of the vote in Monday night's dead-heat contest between Sanders and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

Clinton, in a highly unusual move, went on television late Monday night to effectively declare victory over Sanders, despite the fact that vote counters had her ahead by a razor-thin margin of only 0.2 percent, with a number of key precincts still unaccounted for.

Preempting the victory speech of Republican Senator Ted Cruz, she thanked Iowans for allowing her to "breathe a sigh of relief," a reference to her loss to Barack Obama in the 2008 Iowa caucuses and the collapse of her lead over Sanders in the state, which just months before had been polled at more than 50 percent.

At 2:30 AM Tuesday, the chairwoman of the Iowa Democratic Party, Dr. Andy McGuire, declared Clinton the winner based on results from 1,682 of 1,683 precincts. The Iowa Democratic Party said the final tally of delegate equivalents for all the precincts statewide was 700.59 for Clinton and 696.82 for Sanders—a margin of just 3.77 delegate equivalents.

At 2:35 AM, Clinton's Iowa campaign director, Matt Paul, issued a statement saying, "Hillary Clinton has won the Iowa caucus." Campaigning the following day in New Hampshire, the scene of the first primary election, to be held February 9, Clinton made much of her victory in Iowa. With Sanders poised to score a decisive victory in New Hampshire, the Clinton campaign had feared a possible meltdown in the event of a loss in Iowa.

Under the Democratic caucus process, a head count is taken at each precinct of the supporters assembled there for each presidential candidate, which is then translated into delegates to a county convention, which, in turn, selects delegates to a statewide convention. That convention then selects national delegates for the competing candidates to the Democratic National Convention, to be held in July of this year in Philadelphia.

Amid complaints of disorganization at many of the caucus sites, including long lines, delays of up to two hours, and a lack of trained staff and designated chairpersons, the Sanders campaign initially asked to sit down with state party officials to review the paperwork submitted by precinct chairs. Sanders aides told the *Des Moines Register* that they had found discrepancies between tallies at the precinct level and numbers that were reported to the state party.

McGuire, whose state organization, like the national party apparatus, is solidly behind Clinton, rejected the request, telling the *Register* in an interview Tuesday, "These are the final results." Democrats have never released actual head counts in Iowa caucuses, and McGuire flatly said they would not be released this time either.

On Thursday, the *Register* published an editorial headlined, "Something smells in the Democratic Party," denouncing state party officials for refusing to agree to an audit or release details of the voting. "What happened Monday night at the Democratic caucuses was a debacle, period," the *Register* wrote. "Democracy, particularly at the local party level, can be slow, messy and obscure. But the refusal to undergo scrutiny or allow for an appeal reeks of autocracy."

The newspaper argued that the results, with "two tenths of 1 percent [separating] Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton," were "too close not to do a complete audit of results." It continued: "Too many accounts

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have arisen of inconsistent counts, untrained and overwhelmed volunteers, confused voters, cramped precinct locations, a lack of voter registration forms and other problems."

The editorial alluded to the fact that ties for six county delegates were decided, in accordance with party caucus rules, by coin flips. Clinton won all six.

State party Chairwoman McGuire issued a reply to the *Register* editorial, which the newspaper posted on its web site Thursday night. Headlined "Caucuses show party's strength," the statement dismissed calls for an audit or release of "raw vote totals" as the result of "confusion and a lack of understanding of the [caucus] process, both of which were represented in the *Des Moines Register'* s editorial."

The Sanders campaign appears to be downplaying the controversy. On Thursday, campaign spokesman Mike Briggs said, "We're not contemplating a lawsuit." In the Thursday night televised debate with Clinton, Sanders indicated he did not intend to press the matter.

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