

What Comes Next

Last night's results in Iowa have upended the nomination races in both parties. On the Republican side, the decisive victory by former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee means that the GOP battle is wide open and probably won't be settled until at least Tsunami Tuesday on February 5th if not later. The big question about Huckabee is whether he can expand his appeal among Republican voters beyond his base of religious conservatives. According to the network entrance poll, that group made up 60 percent of Republican caucus goers in Iowa yesterday and 80 percent of Huckabee's supporters. But religious conservatives will make up a much smaller percentage of Republican primary voters in New Hampshire and other primary states outside of the South. Huckabee probably can't win the GOP nomination unless he is able to appeal to a broader spectrum of Republican voters. But Huckabee's win in Iowa was a huge setback for former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney who had invested millions of dollars of his own money and many months on Iowa and who now faces a very tough battle with a resurgent John McCain in New Hampshire. A loss to McCain in New Hampshire might spell the end of Romney's chances and produce an ultimate showdown between McCain and Huckabee for the GOP nod, unless former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani can resuscitate his campaign after basically skipping both Iowa and New Hampshire.

On the Democratic side, the nomination race is looking increasingly like a two person contest between last night's big winner, Illinois Senator Barack Obama, and the night's big loser, New York Senator and former first lady Hillary Clinton. Obama's decisive victory, based largely on strong support among younger voters who gave him overwhelming margins over both Hillary Clinton and John Edwards, has at least temporarily made him the frontrunner for the Democratic nomination. Unless Hillary Clinton can derail Obama in New Hampshire, he could parlay a win in New Hampshire into another victory in South Carolina, the first primary with a large African American vote, and then lock up the nomination on Tsunami Tuesday. Clinton has the financial resources to battle Obama to the end, but she desperately needs a victory in New Hampshire next Tuesday. Meanwhile, former Senator John Edwards faces increasingly long odds in his bid for the Democratic nomination. Edwards was counting on a win in Iowa to boost his fundraising and standing in the polls in the later states. He obviously didn't get it, and now it isn't clear where his campaign goes next. He's been trailing both Clinton and Obama in New Hampshire and last night's showing certainly won't help him there.

There were some other interesting features of last night's caucuses besides the winners and losers. The turnout set an all time record. About 330,000 registered voters took part in the caucuses yesterday, more than double the turnout in 2000, which was the last time both parties held caucuses in the same year. Turnout in both parties set records, but the Democratic turnout dwarfed the Republican turnout. About 220,000 Iowans participated on the Democratic side vs. about 110,000 on the Republican side. It's one more clear indication of the mood of voters in the two parties this year: Democratic voters are a lot more enthusiastic about their choices than are Republican voters. And in another positive sign for Democrats, voters under the age of 30 made up 22 percent of Democratic caucus goers vs. only 10 percent of Republican caucus goers. Since there were twice as many Democratic caucus participants as Republican caucus participants, this means that about four times as many young people participated in the Democratic caucuses as in the Republican caucuses. And of course Barack Obama was largely responsible for that disproportionate turnout. Obama's ability to continue to motivate younger voters to turn out in support of his candidacy will be one of the keys to his success in the remaining primaries and in the November election if he is the Democratic nominee. But for now, it's on to New Hampshire.

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