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THE CURRENT: After Iowa and New Hampshire, what's next for the Democratic race?

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PITA: You're listening to The Current, part of the Brookings Podcast Network.

With Iowa and New Hampshire, the opening contests of the 2020 Democratic primary race, completed, the field of Democratic candidates is starting to narrow, and the journalists, pundits, and political operatives are shaping their stories of momentum, dashed expectations, and predictions for all the rest of the contests between now and the July convention.

With us to sort through all of this is Elaine Kamarck, senior fellow and founding director, Center for Effective Public Management here at Brookings. Elaine, thanks for being here.

KAMARCK: Thank you for having me.

PITA: Between Iowa and New Hampshire, Bernie Sanders and Pete Buttigieg appear to be the main leaders. Elizabeth Warren took third in Iowa, but Amy Klobuchar came in third in New Hampshire. Were there any surprises for you in how the results of these two contests shaped up?

KAMARCK: They were pretty much according to the polls. The surprise in Iowa and New Hampshire was how poorly Joe Biden did. The other surprise in New Hampshire was how Amy Klobuchar moved ahead of Elizabeth Warren. She really had a very good night. She was close to the two frontrunners in the vote count and she now is the lead woman in the race.

PITA: Are you chalking that up to her strong performance in the debate that preceded the New Hampshire primary, or what are some of the factors that contributed to that?

KAMARCK: I think the main one was a very strong performance in the debate, and the fact that there were a lot of undecided New Hampshire voters over the weekend. It was an unusual election in that there were a large number of undecideds. I think the other thing that helped her was that with Biden under-performing significantly in Iowa, she became the other centrist, the centrist [for] the person who turned to Elizabeth or turned to Bernie, and said "Come on, get real." I think there was a need for that in the race, some voters were looking for that, and there she was Friday night in Manchester in the debate, and people said, "oh, yeah, she's in the place that I'd like to be in."

PITA: One of the disappointing takeaways out of Iowa for Democrats was turnout did not match expectations for what's going to be a very crucial election. What was turnout like in New Hampshire?

KAMARCK: New Hampshire made up for the Iowa disappointment. New Hampshire's turnout exceeded 2016 and is very close to the record turnout, which was 2008. So, New Hampshire turnout is turning out to be extremely high. It was a great turnout, so Democrats who were disappointed in Iowa I think can feel better about what happened in New Hampshire.

PITA: Whoever the Democratic candidate turns out to be in November is going to have to bring together a pretty broad and disparate group of people. Do we have demographic data out of New Hampshire to understand who is supporting whom and how the candidates are drawing [supporters]?

KAMARCK: One of the biggest differences between the candidates is age. Bernie Sanders did very well, extremely well, among young voters, and very poorly among older voters. Amy Klobuchar did very well among older voters, with Pete Buttigieg kind of in the middle there. There turns out to be a significant demographic difference along the lines of age. Bernie Sanders did very well among white men with no college degree, and that's significant because in some of the old industrial states that Democrats have to win, that is a demographic that Democrats have not done well in. There's an emerging picture of who does well where. Put it this way: in the exit polls there was something for everybody to be happy about, and something for everybody to be upset about. So, I think we'll have a lot more elections, a lot more exit polls before a nominee is chosen.

PITA: In that vein, there's been some growing discontent in recent years at having two states that are much more rural, much more white than a lot of the rest of the country, that these two states are the pace-setters for a national election. That combined with also growing criticisms about the undemocratic nature of caucuses – that they require a lot of time and the ability to go and do a caucus rather than a primary. Do you see these pressures maybe starting to build and possibly shifting Iowa & NH's place in the overall primary system?

KAMARCK: Yes, I do think these pressures were there before Iowa and New Hampshire this year. And particularly the last couple of years where the Democratic Party itself has become a very diverse party, with lots of people of color, all colors, in the Democratic coalition. So, starting the Democratic contest in these two states is becoming more and more of a problem. And frankly, as the population changes, it will become even more of a problem. So, that was there going into this.

The issue of the caucuses was frankly also there well before the vote problems happened in Iowa. The Democratic Rules Committee, which I sit on, had addressed this issue, and me and other people had argued that caucuses were getting too big for states to administer. And it was just becoming a logistical problem. It was almost as if they were outgrowing their original form. Let me give you an example. In states where they use a state primary, run by the state government, there's a group of civil servants and year in and year out, all they do is work on elections. That's their job: make sure that the election goes smoothly. And I think you saw last night in New Hampshire, the results started coming in, they came in consistently throughout the night, nobody has charged fraud or any problems. It worked well. And frankly in most states it works pretty well. In these caucus states, every four years, the party – not the government – the party has to find the money, recruit the people to do this, recruit the volunteers, train the volunteers, and they're all volunteers. There's no professionals working on this; they're all volunteers. It's a system that frankly, those of us on the rules committee had warned was a perilous system. And as a result, two of the biggest states that used to be caucus states – Washington state and the state of Minnesota – moved from caucuses to primaries this time around. In fact all

together seven states moved from caucuses to primaries. And mostly because of the difficulty in administering caucuses where you have a lot of people turning out.

And then of course there's always been the question of the inherit unfairness in participation, because in a caucus you have to go and actually participate for several hours, whereas in a primary, you can pick the kids up from soccer practice and then go vote. Frankly, that argument never bothered me quite as much because there's sort of a quality versus quantity issue here. The great advantage of caucuses is they are real exercises in small-d democracy. People participate, they talk about issues with their neighbors, they talk about candidates; there's something very appealing about caucuses. But I just think the numbers have gotten too big for the states to administer, and I think in the next cycle, you'll probably see many fewer caucuses. We're already seeing many fewer caucuses.

PITA: The next major contests are South Carolina and Nevada. What's important to know about then primaries in those two states and, what are some of your expectations?

KAMARCK: Well, Nevada comes first, and the important thing to know about Nevada is, it's also a caucus, so it will be subject to the same pressures that Iowa was subject to. They have already canceled the contract with the software company that Iowa had contracted with, so hopefully that will be replaced by something better. I'm hoping they will let the news anchors know that they will need time to get a good vote count. One of the things that exacerbated the situation in Iowa was you had all the anchors on TV sitting there with nothing to talk about, so they started talking about why they had nothing to talk about, which was not really very good for Iowa, put a lot of pressure on them, made things look bad, when really Iowa did come out with a decent count. It just took them much longer than anybody expected. So I'm hoping that Nevada will warn everybody to – don't get on air until we've got something to tell you. But Nevada is a complicated caucus system like Iowa's. They're going to use some early voting as part of it, which is going to complicate the precinct caucus procedures, it's going to complicate the voting. Nevada could be another test of the ability of states to run this kind of system.

South Carolina is a simple primary. South Carolina comes three days before the big Super Tuesday states. I think South Carolina's going to be an extraordinarily critical place. That's what we're going to see coming before Super Tuesday is the first state where there's a very large African American vote. That will be a big test for some of these candidates who've not had much African American support. And for Joe Biden, this is the place where he has to make a comeback. He has not done well in the first two contests – much more poorly than people expected – and I think he's got to come back in South Carolina. So, South Carolina is looming very, very large in this lineup.

PITA: Elaine, thanks very much for being here and explaining this to us.

KAMARCK: Thanks for having me.