Iowa Rocks

Positive residents can steer the ’08 race.

January 1, 2008 By Kathleen Reeves

Iowa’s extraordinary influence over the course of the presidential election stems not only from the early, pace-setting date of its caucuses (January 3). The town-hall caucus system, comprising 1,784 meetings in many precincts, gives HIV-positive Iowans a rare showcase for swaying candidates and fellow voters toward HIV-related issues.

“Each [Iowan’s] vote counts more,” says Kaytee Riek of Iowans for AIDS Action, a loose affiliation of positive people and their advocates. The group trains people living with and affected by HIV to question the contenders. “Nobody in the country has the access that Iowans do,” says Riek, citing the caucuses’ intimate gatherings of candidates and citizens. Each county contains dozens of precincts; the counties with the most positive citizens have even greater influence.

HIV-positive Tami Haught, of Iowans for AIDS Action, says, “HIV is the last thing the candidates expect an Iowan to ask about. They’re expecting ethanol, the farm bill, the economy.” But if Iowans can convince the candidates that AIDS is on the map—not just in Africa, but in the heart of America—we may finally see AIDS at the heart of campaigns.

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