

*Interview with David Mark*  
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Mithat Bereket: What happens exactly on Super Tuesday? I mean, who votes for who, and what is the importance of Super Tuesday in the whole presidential election campaign in the United States?

David Mark: It's a very complicated process, but Super Tuesday is important because it's when the most delegates are voted on and then sent to the National Convention. To win the nomination for either the Republican party or the Democratic party to be the presidential nominee, you have to win enough delegates who then gather at the national nominating conventions in the summer – this would be in August and September of 2008. What's being voted on now that we started in Iowa, New Hampshire, and South Carolina and Michigan, etc, we're voting on delegates to the national convention. And these are awarded based on the level of support, how many votes you get in various states. On Super Tuesday, we're going to see voting in 22 states, that's almost half the states. So in a sense, it's almost like a national primary. There are people voting all across the land from California to New York and New Jersey and Massachusetts, and the most people have the say on one day, on Super Tuesday, February 5.

MB: And can you tell us about the delegates, who are they? How do they become delegates, and what is the importance of them?

DM: Well delegates, usually they're just symbolic and a technicality because it's usually not this closely contested on either the Democratic or the Republican side. But delegates are people who are elected by party activists in the state. They're usually people who are active in the party, they might be a local elected official, a fundraiser, somebody of that nature. They don't really have the say, it's not up to them who to vote for in the convention, whoever supports them in the primary. Now it gets more complicated if you go to the convention and nobody is chosen in a majority on the first round, then the delegates are not pledged anymore. They're free to vote for whoever they like. We haven't seen a convention like that in a half century or so. But in a close race like this, it's possible we could have such a scenario.

MB: Yeah let's talk about this close race. Do you believe that a clear candidate, a front-runner will really emerge after Super Tuesday, or do you think the race will be too close?

DM: I think a front-runner is more likely to emerge on the Republican side where it's essentially a two person race between John McCain and Mitt Romney. The reason for that is the way that Republicans apportion their delegates. Most of the states where there are Republican primaries, its winner take all. That means whoever gets the most votes in Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, and several other states, wins all the delegates from that state. Whereas Democrats apportion it either by the percentage of votes you get

or by Congressional district, meaning if you get 51 percent of the vote, you generally get 51 percent of the delegates. But then the person who comes in a close second still gets a large number of delegates. So I think it's almost mathematically impossible that one of the Democratic candidates will have such an overwhelming lead that they can claim the nomination after Tuesday. Whereas the Republicans I think it's much more likely. Although it's not a done deal. The race could still go on depending on the delegate outcome on Tuesday.

MB: And as you mentioned before, what about the party conventions in the summer? Do you think on the Democratic side it could still be a surprise?

DM: Sure, it's quite possible that neither of the candidates, Barack Obama or Hillary Clinton will have a majority of the delegates needed at the national convention. At that point you start going to multi-round balloting, and as I said after the first round, the delegates are free to vote for whoever they want. That also means that another candidate, in theory, could come in and be chosen at that time. One wildcard unknown about this is the outcome of the super delegates where it gets even more complicated.

MB: What are they? Who are the super delegates?

DM: Super delegates are generally people who are important officials in the party. That means members of Congress, governors, elected officials, former elected national officials. That means that former presidents like Bill Clinton and Jimmy Carter could have an important say in who's elected. Obviously we know who Bill Clinton is going to go for, his wife. Jimmy Carter would be more of a wild card. Al Gore, a former vice president, would have a say, so would Walter Mondale who was the vice president under Jimmy Carter in the late 1970s. On the Republican side it's very similar. You could see outsized role for elected officials and party insiders.

MB: So they'll be effective in the party conventions?

DM: Potentially. If it gets that far.

MB: And which states are the most important for Super Tuesday and why?

DM: The most important is California, it has the largest number of delegates by far because it's the most populous state. Whoever "wins California" will have a very good chance at winning the nomination. However the problem for both sides is it's theoretically possible that you could actually have fewer votes, come in second in the overall vote total, and still win more delegates there. Because on the Republican side, California delegates are apportioned by Congressional district. There are 53 congressional districts in the state of California, and so it's a matter of targeting each individual one throughout the state. Democrats have a more proportional system in California, where whoever wins that portion of votes gets that proportion of delegates. For example if you get 54 percent of the votes in California, you get 54 percent of the delegates. But that's very different from winner take all.

New York is very important. Now you would think once again that Hillary Clinton would have a lock on New York because that's the state she represents in the Senate. Yes, she will probably win the overall vote there by a wide margin. But Barrack Obama can still win some key congressional districts, particularly in and around New York City and some of the other urban areas. New Jersey is an important primary state, Massachusetts, several states in the South as well. Alabama, Tennessee and Georgia also have primaries on Super Tuesday.

MB: I was here covering the last elections, and it was also neck to neck and it was decided later on, and also this time on the Democratic side it's neck and neck again. What does this show, what is the significance of this? That in the United States people are generally indecisive, or that Republicans and Democrats are very close to each other in terms of ideology?

DM: I'd look at it a little differently as a reflection of the vibrancy of democracy. People take their democratic duties very seriously. They're not willing to anoint candidates just because somebody has the most money. Mitt Romney with by far the most amount of money, even Ron Paul, the libertarian candidate has raised a significant amount of money but he hasn't done very well in the polls. I would say it matters to people about ideas, change, ideology. So I'd say people take their votes pretty seriously and they really want to hear from the candidates to see what they have to say.

MB: So do you think the race will still go on neck to neck, very closely on the Democratic side? And also in the general elections in November?

DM: I think we'll find out after Tuesday how close it's going to be on the Democratic side, but I think it's pretty safe to say the race will not be decided on Super Tuesday unless something very surprising happens. As for the general election, it's hard to say right now what the issues are that people will be voting on. The general election is still nine months off. Nine months prior to this we thought Iraq was the most important issue. Now it's turned out to be the economy and healthcare and other issues. We don't know what peoples' priorities are going to be.

MB: That's what I was going to ask. What are the main issues that will decide or that will influence the decision of voters?

DM: There's so many issues that play differently for different people. For Republicans for instance, some people are Republicans in their voting because of social issues, they care about abortion or stem cell research or gay marriage or something like that. Others vote Republican because they care about low taxes and cutting federal spending. Others vote in Republican primaries because of national security issues, they want a robust foreign policy, particularly after 9/11. On the democratic side similarly, some people are in the party because they strongly believe in labor unions, for others its similar social issues because they believe in abortion rights, whatever it might be. So I don't think there's one overriding issue. For some people it's the economy, that probably is the most

unifying issue. Right now the economy seems to be doing poorly and getting worse, so people are blaming President Bush and his administration, whether that's fair or not. I would argue the President has limited power over what they can do, both Democrats and Republicans. But nonetheless whoever is in power gets blamed or credited for what the economy is. Overridingly it's the economy, I think health care is a big issue, Iraq is still a very big issue even though it's not as prominent as it was a few months ago. It's still there, troops are still in that region of the world, and it's still a very contentious matter.

MB: So at the moment, what feelings or what words or what ideas are important for the American public, in general? Like experience or change. What are the basic sort of ideas that will shape the result of the presidential elections?

DM: Well clearly the key word is change, it's just a matter of what kind of change, what that means. What's interesting is even Republican candidates don't talk up President Bush very much, they don't mention his name. So even though they would frame it a little bit differently, Republicans are still running on a platform of change, just like the Democrats are. The democrats' change would be a lot more radical than the republicans' would. Hillary Clinton talks about greater government programs, what she would call a more international foreign policy. Barrack Obama has very similar positions, he just doesn't get into specifics as much. Republicans talk about change in terms of cutting taxes and drawing a harder line on immigration to kick out illegal immigrants and make sure people are coming to the country legally. So yes, change is a very important word, it just means something different for each candidate.

MB: There's also a very interesting aspect to this pre-elections and elections, because for a person to become a candidate of his or her own party, then he or she has to play for the party basics, the party rules. That means maybe have more radical arguments for abortion if it's a republican, for gay marriage, for homosexuality. But after he or she becomes a candidate, then the whole rules of the games change because then he or she has to go more public and hold a more moderate approach. Now don't you think there's a contradiction here?

DM: Well I don't know if I'd put it as a contradiction. I would say it does present candidates with a problem, this is an age old problem for presidential candidates. There's nothing new. I wouldn't say that they have to change but they have to emphasize different parts of their candidacy. The good ones don't change, and if you look like you're changing too much like Mitt Romney, voters can see right through that. The issue for democrats is, the people who come out and vote in the democratic primary, probably for the most part want to draw down and withdraw troops from Iraq as quickly as possible. Many people who vote in Democratic primaries want a government funded healthcare system that everyone pays into. Many want to raise taxes. On the republican side, many want to close the borders and deport illegal immigrants, even limit legal immigration to a certain extent. Some people want to cut taxes, very much so particularly on businesses. Now these are positions that the majority of Americans don't hold. And so the candidates have to walk this very fine line between going to the extremes of the party and then coming back in the general election. I think that's

exemplified best by John McCain who's really made a name for himself as sort of an independent, maverick candidate. Somebody who's willing to take on and contradict his own party. Yet right now, in the run up to Super Tuesday voting, he's been emphasizing his conservative credentials. And I would suspect if he wins the nomination, and that's a big if, he'll come right back towards the middle and show himself to be more of a bipartisan figure. Just like I suspect Mitt Romney, if he wins the nomination, would go from being a right wing ideologue, as he's been marketing himself in the primary season, to portraying himself more as a can do business man, the management consultant guy who can make government work again, just like he did in the private sector. Democrats too will have a similar metamorphosis, to an extent they already have. Barack Obama has tried to straddle that line between going for liberal policies but still talking to the broad majority of people in the electorate.

MB: Talking about party politics, I've seen that the Republican candidates, in Iowa for example, were debating more than tax cuts or other policies, they were debating who is a better Christian than the other. So how much do you think religion is important, or plays an important role in American society, or in the American Republican party for this primary?

DM: It plays a very big role in the Republican primary. And this is probably the trickiest role the Republican candidates have in that it's very important to a select group of people who vote in the Republican primaries, but for the general election, the majority of Americans I'd say don't like to mix religion and politics. That's not to say Americans aren't religious, but generally I think there's a view that they should stay separate from each other. Because it turns into, in a sense, a theocracy where office holders are basing policies on whatever their religious beliefs might say. And democrats too have tried to infuse their own politics with religiosity. It hasn't been nearly as successful, people who vote in democratic primaries don't take that very well. But for republicans, it's a big problem. It's a very delicate balancing act that they have to do.

MB: The other hot issue is the war in Iraq. Why do you think that the democrats, both candidates, neither Clinton nor Obama, want to say, or are courageous enough to say that they want to withdraw the army from Iraq. Why is it such a hot issue? Why can't a candidate from the democratic side go against the Bush administration and declare that the next day after they're elected they're going to withdraw the army from Iraq and stop this bloodshed?

DM: Because democrats are scared of looking soft on national security, like they're weaklings, like they can't stand up to republicans on terrorist and other threats. There's a whole history of losing democratic candidates from Walter Mondale, Michael Dukakis, John Kerry. They are spooked by that and they don't want to be labeled as the party of appeasement and cowardice. Now, the American public may actually be with them on this matter, if they want to just withdraw from Iraq and get that adventure done with. But for whatever reasons democrats feel that it would probably hurt them more than it would help them to take that kind of approach.

MB: And coming to Muslims of the United States, how much do you think they'll be influential in the outcome of the elections? What sort of role will they play?

DM: Well, Muslims are a fast growing minority, particularly in the state of Michigan. I would say that's where the Muslim vote might have the most potency because that's where the biggest Muslim population is concentrated. Like many religious groups, it's not my area of expertise, but I think the Muslim vote is dispersed. Some vote democratic, some vote republican, for various reasons. A lot are socially conservative and they generally back republicans, they went heavily for George W. Bush. Others might agree with democrats on middle eastern policies, so I don't think it's a monolithic voting bloc. I think it's up for grabs.

MB: Another ingredient of the whole election campaign process is the money. We know that a tremendous amount of money has been involved in this whole process. Now how much money are we talking about for candidates? Why is this so important? What does it mean to fundraise, why is it so important for the candidates?

DM: Well unlike many democracies, the United States has very little government funding of elections. Most of the money raised by candidates is from private sources. And remember, in a country of 300 million people, 50 states, it is incredibly expensive to campaign, to run television advertisements, websites, keep that updated, to travel, to charter airplanes so you don't have to wait around on commercial flights, you can just go wherever you need to at a moment's notice. It's very expensive. So candidates have to raise tens of millions of dollars. Barack Obama raised 32 million dollars just in the month of January. In one month – that's more than a million dollars a day, that's an incredible amount, and that's something that would not have been possible in the pre-internet age. So it's a very important part of American politics, for better or worse. Also, campaigns in America go on much longer than in other places. In many European parliamentary systems, campaigns are five or six weeks. Here it goes on for the better part of two years.

MB: Don't you think it's too much? That the money spent is just going for nowhere? It seems that the election process has created a money or election campaign economic sector of its own. We're talking about hundreds of millions of dollars.

DM: Yeah, that's an excellent point. There are people, vendors, consultants, who make their living off of these campaigns. Also, that's one of the reasons why states fight so hard to have their primaries early. New Hampshire, the primary there, the Iowa caucuses, it is immensely important to the economies of these states to have reporters coming in, spending money in restaurants, staying at hotels, buying other goods and services. It pumps millions if not billions of dollars into the economy in these various states. So there's a lot of money that's wrapped up in these campaigns.

MB: It's also been mentioned that the amount of money that's been raised for these campaigns is over the top, is really increased. Why is that? Does that mean that the

television networks increase the prices for the advertisements for example? How much does it cost for one political advertisement?

DM: Oh television ads can get very expensive. It depends on the market – in a major television market like Los Angeles, New York, Washington DC, half a million to a million dollars for a spot during prime time. During the Superbowl, I heard estimates of 2.5 to 3 million dollars for a 30 second spot. Now that's the high end, usually it's not quite that expensive. In a lesser market, if you're advertising in say South Dakota or Tennessee, it's less expensive and it's much more efficient to buy advertising in television. So it really just depends where you're doing the advertising.

MB: So how much money are we talking about it total for this election campaign?

DM: Oh probably over a billion dollars or so.

MB: Who is the most money gatherer or spender in this –

DM: Oh by far the biggest spender will have been Mitt Romney, the former governor of Massachusetts who's running for the Republican presidential nomination. It's estimated just in the third quarter, the last three months of 2007, he spent 18 million dollars of his own money. He's probably spending a lot more now, he doesn't have to report that until a couple of months from now. But it just goes to show you that money does not mean everything in American politics. Just because Mitt Romney spent all those millions of dollars does not mean that people supported him. And I would dare say he wouldn't even be in this race right now if it weren't for his own funding.

MB: And also another angle, it seems that there are many firsts in this election. I mean for the first time Americans might have a woman or an African American as president, or from the republican side for the very first time they might have a Mormon or a very old man, about 75 years old in the case of Senator McCain. So do these have any significance about the mood of the American people at the moment?

DM: I'd say it reflects well on the public that they're open minded about this. If they just wanted to take a middle aged Protestant white guy, there are plenty of candidates out there that they might have chosen from. Instead, they narrowed to field down to as you said, the first African American or woman on the democratic side, possibly the first Mormon or potentially oldest president in American history. So I think it actually reflects well on the democracy that people have this open mindedness...

MB: But does it show any sort of tendencies within the American society – they want a change, they want a difference, or they want an experience difference. What is the mood? I'm trying to grasp the tendency

DM: I actually, I wouldn't read too much into that. I think it's just by coincidence actually that these candidates all kind of converged at the same time. Now it's really interesting that they all came together in the same year. And maybe it's a testament to

democracy that finally after all these years the country is ready for these various kinds of candidates. When maybe just twenty years or so ago they weren't so ready for it.

MB: And very lastly, what is your assessment? What's your guess for Super Tuesday?

DM: I don't have predictions, you never know. Just like we saw in the Super Bowl where the New York Giants beat the undefeated New England Patriots, you never know until you play the game. Clearly John McCain is in a good position right now. But I can easily see a scenario in which Mitt Romney does well enough to stay in the race. On the democratic side I will say it will probably not be decided on Tuesday, it could go on for several weeks if not two or three more months.

MB: And then things will be clear at the party conventions –

DM: Maybe. Probably, but not for sure. You could also have a case where you have the candidates going undecided to the party conventions, which would be truly unprecedented. I think that's much more likely on the democratic side than the republicans just because of the way the delegates are decided and apportioned.

MB: David Mark, thank you very much.

DM: My pleasure, thank you.