



## **Arab American Political Participation: A Quick History**

### **Background:**

Approximately 200 Arab American leaders from more than 20 states have registered for AAI's NLC. AAI expects an additional 300 registrants from Michigan.

AAI's NLC is a gathering of national Arab American leaders representing the diversity of the community. Participants include Arab Americans of different religious backgrounds who trace their ancestry to a variety of Arab countries.

### **Arab Americans and the Presidential Elections: A Quick History**

Until the 1980s, both Democrats and Republicans recognize groups of Syrian-Lebanese or Lebanese Americans.

1983: Rev. Jesse Jackson becomes the first presidential candidate to address an Arab American event.

1984: Democratic nominee Walter Mondale returns contributions to a group of prominent Arab American businessmen.

1984 & 1988: Arab Americans are part of the Reagan and Bush campaigns' ethnic coalitions.

1988: Sen. Bob Dole, a candidate for the Republican nomination, speaks at AAI's NLC along with Democratic presidential candidate Rev. Jackson. Democratic nominee Michael Dukakis rejects an endorsement from the Arab American Democratic Federation.

1992: Republican challenger Pat Buchanan speaks at AAI's NLC.

1996: Republican nominee Bob Dole refuses to meet with Arab American Republican leaders.

1999: As part of AAI's Campaign 2000 NLC, Vice President Al Gore and Sen. John McCain addresses Arab Americans via satellite.

2000: For the first time, Arab American groups are actively courted by presidential campaigns (George W. Bush and Al Gore). Arab American groups endorse presidential campaigns. Green Party candidate Ralph Nader becomes the first Arab American to run for President.

2003: AAI's Vote 2004 NLC event marked the first time that presidential candidates from major political parties addressed a national Arab American audience.

2004: Eight Democratic candidates and the Chair of the Bush/Cheney reelection campaign will address Arab Americans at the NLC. All of the major Democratic campaigns hired Arab

Americans—many in key staff positions. Arab Americans can be found serving throughout the Bush Administration.

2007: AAI received an exception from the Democratic parties in Iowa, New Hampshire, South Carolina, and Nevada, allowing presidential candidates to attend its NLC in MI. The NLC was placed in jeopardy after Michigan moved up its primary date and candidates signed the “four-state pledge” promising not to campaign in any state that broke Democratic rules governing the primaries.

**Positioned in Key States:**

On the national level, the electorate is almost evenly divided between Republicans and Democrats. The same situation exists in a number of key states. They include: Illinois, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Florida—all states with growing and organized Arab American communities, and some that will prove to be battleground states in 2008.

**About Arab Americans:**

At least 3.5 million\* Americans are of Arab descent. Arab Americans live in all 50 states, but two thirds reside in 10 states; one third of the total live in California, New York, and Michigan. About 94% live in metropolitan areas. Los Angeles, Detroit, New York/NJ, Chicago and Washington, D.C., are the top five metro areas of Arab American concentration.

Median income for Arab American households in 1999 was \$47,000 compared with \$42,000 for all households in the United States. Close to 30 of Americans of Arab heritage have an annual household income of more than \$75,000, while 22% of all Americans reported the same level of income. Mean income measured at 8% higher than that national average of \$56,644.

Similar to the national average, about 64% of Arab American adults are in the labor force; with 5 percent unemployed. Seventy three percent of working Arab Americans are employed in managerial, professional, technical, sales or administrative fields. Nearly half as many Americans of Arab decent are employed in service jobs (12%) in relation to Americans overall (27%). Most Arab Americans work in the private sector (88 ), while 12 percent are government employees.

*Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Summary File 4.*