

With Christmas Behind Them, Presidential Candidates Now Focusing Their Attention Here

Christmas dinner was barely digested and some presidential candidates were already back to campaign mode. That's because the first votes in the Republican and Democrat nomination processes will be cast in just five weeks.

For many of the campaigns, that means their attention will be mainly focused on Iowa's first-in-the-nation caucuses. The candidates in the wide-open Republican field know a top-tier finish will be necessary to continue.

U.S. Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) had originally planned to hit the ground running on Monday with a town hall event in Burlington, located in the southeastern corner of the state along the Mississippi River. There, he was to be joined by U.S. Rep. Trey Gowdy (R-S.C.).

However, a winter storm expected to drop ice and several inches of snow across the Hawkeye State forced the cancellation of the first event. Weather permitting, Rubio is scheduled to appear with Gowdy on Tuesday in Clinton and Waterloo in the eastern half of the state, and in Sioux City in the northwest corner of Iowa in the evening.

Wednesday's plan includes stops in Pella, Newton, and Boone in the central part of the state. Rubio has been under immense pressure within the Republican Party establishment to campaign more in Iowa, where voters expect to see the candidates face-to-face, called retail politics.

This latest trip to Iowa, however, will again retread familiar territory for his campaign, adding just one new county, bringing his total to just 19 of the state's 99 counties. Of

the 12 candidates still campaigning, only Ohio Gov. John Kasich and former New York Gov. George Pataki—who have both decided not to compete in the Iowa campaign—have visited fewer.

That said, Kasich has made a few more appearances in Iowa in the past two weeks, and is scheduled to appear in the Des Moines area on Jan. 4. To date, he's visited only eight counties in Iowa.

New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie was also scheduled to appear Monday to kick off his own three-day swing through Iowa, and has not yet announced any changes to his plan. Monday and Tuesday, he will spend in eastern Iowa, visiting Dubuque, Davenport, Muscatine, Iowa City, and Cedar Rapids.

Wednesday, Christie will start in Waterloo, but also plans to be in central Iowa with stops in Marshalltown and Waukee.

Former U.S. Sen. Rick Santorum, the 2012 winner of the Iowa Republican Caucus, will return Tuesday, visiting a series of "house parties" across the state. He will be in Waukee that evening, and on Wednesday, he will visit Holstein, Sioux City, and Sioux Center in the northwest part of the state.

On the opposite end of the retail politicking scale from Rubio, Santorum had already visited all 99 counties this past fall, and has now visited nearly half of them a second time. After this week, he will have made more than 200 campaign stops in Iowa.

Another leading candidate who hasn't visited as many counties a first time as Santorum has twice is U.S. Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Texas). A trip to Iowa—where he currently leads the GOP field in the polls—scheduled to begin Jan. 4 aims to change that.

Monday, Jan. 4, Cruz will launch a bus tour of the state in which he will stop in more than a third of the state's 99 counties. That will bring his total to 79 Iowa counties, just

nine fewer than former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee, the 2008 Iowa Republican Caucus winner.

The first day, Cruz will visit Boone, Greene, Carroll, Audubon, Guthrie and Madison counties in central Iowa, followed by Harrison, Monona, Ida, Cherokee and Sioux counties in the western part of the state the next day. Wednesday, Jan. 6, he will visit Lyon, Osceola, Dickinson, Emmet, Palo Alto and Clay counties in the northwest part of the state.

The second half of the bus tour will feature stops in Buena Vista, Pocahontas, Humboldt, Kossuth, Hamilton and Wright counties in the north-central part of the state on Thursday, Jan. 7, followed by Cerro Gordo, Worth, Mitchell, Floyd, Chickasaw, Howard and Winnishiek counties the next day. The tour ends Saturday, Jan. 9, with stops in Allamakee, Clayton, Fayette, Bremer, Butler and Marion counties.

Democrat front-runner Hillary Clinton hasn't scheduled any new appearances in Iowa for the next two weeks. Her challengers, however, will be all over the state.

U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders (D-Vt.) will visit Muscatine and Davenport on Tuesday, and Burlington, Keokuk, and Ottumwa on Wednesday. Thursday, he will visit Knoxville before hosting a New Year's Eve party in Des Moines.

Former Maryland Gov. Martin O'Malley was in Des Moines Sunday, and was scheduled to appear in Webster City, Waterloo, Iowa Falls, and Tama on Monday. Tuesday, he is slated to visit Jefferson and Fort Dodge before winding up his swing on Wednesday with stops in Humboldt, Clarion, and Des Moines.