The Phyllis Schlafly Report

Early Voting Sparks Brokered Convention Nightmare

By John and Andy Schlafly

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A contested or brokered convention is the worst nightmare for the Democrat or Republican Parties, because it fractures the base and alienates the supporters of candidates not picked. Neither major party has had a protracted, contested nominating convention since 1952, and neither party wants one.

The modern presidential primary system has made a brokered convention unlikely. While some candidates establish themselves as frontrunners for a nomination, other candidates drop out and voters then coalesce around a few candidates, and ultimately the nominee.

The staggering of the primaries should have a salutary winnowing effect. After a few primaries the more popular candidates become clear, and eventually one of them secures enough delegates to ride into his party's convention as the nominee and the flagbearer for the party in the general election.

But pervasive "early voting" undermines this process, leaving a hodgepodge of too many candidates continuing to win votes after they ceased being serious contenders. By mailing thousands of ballots weeks before primary day in a particular state, its voters then choose among many candidates who will drop out prior to the primary day in that state.

California, the biggest prize of all, lists about a half-dozen people on its ballot who have already dropped out of the race. Yet California Democrats have been mailing their ballots in early, well before the primary election day in that state.

Half of the Democrat primary voters in California are expected to vote early by filling out ballots listing candidates who have or will soon lose any chance of winning. These ballots fail to guide the nomination process towards a successful conclusion.

Political commentators act as though the race among the Democrats will narrow by the time Californians cast their ballot, but early voting frustrates that helpful process of elimination. It is unclear whom the early voters would have preferred among a narrower field of candidates.

The results from California will not be known immediately, either, thanks again to this disastrous early voting. It takes time to tally mail-in votes, and in a general election the votes from California continue to be counted for weeks after Election Day.

Some Democrats, recognizing the self-inflicted harm caused by this process of early voting, are telling each other not to cast ballots early in primaries. Democrat leadership does not want a brokered convention, or a repeat of their fiasco in Iowa when results were delayed.

"Sure, I'd wait," said Darry Sragow, an experienced California campaign manager, in explaining why he prefers not to vote early in a primary. "If one of the candidates trips up three days before the primary and I already cast my vote, I'm gonna regret it."

Regret it indeed, particularly if the candidate for whom one voted drops out, or changes his position in an unacceptable way, or commits an unforgivable gaffe. In each of those situations the early voter who cast his ballot for that candidate is stuck.

It is cost-prohibitive to allow early voters to change their ballots prior to the election, and yet voting rights would seem to require that. After all, a juror can change his vote before a verdict is rendered, and the change will be recognized.

A traditional election, without thousands or millions of mailed-in early ballots, yields results on the night of the election. But time for delivering and opening mail causes weeks to go by before final results can be tallied and announced for early voting in a high-turnout election, causing chaos and a loss in public confidence.

Despite this, some political consultants tell people to vote early. One argument is that people should vote early in case they die before Election Day, which is not an issue for most voters and such ballots are not even counted in some states.

Proportional voting, also fashionable among Democrats, further interferes with the goal of coalescing around a winning nominee. Democrat primaries typically award delegates based on the proportion of votes received, rather than the winner-takes-all system preferred by Republicans, but proportional voting makes it harder to win a majority.

The left-leaning FiveThirtyEight blog, which does extensive statistical analysis to predict election outcomes, declared last week that the likelihood of a contested Democrat convention "is high and increasing." The socialist Bernie Sanders is considered the most likely nominee, but he has only a 38% chance now of winning a majority of pledged delegates prior to the convention.

A floor fight at the convention would be an unmitigated disaster for Democrats, but one for which they would have only themselves to blame. By promoting early voting and insisting on proportional voting, the Democrat Party has created a system whereby it is more difficult for any candidate to win prior to its convention.

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