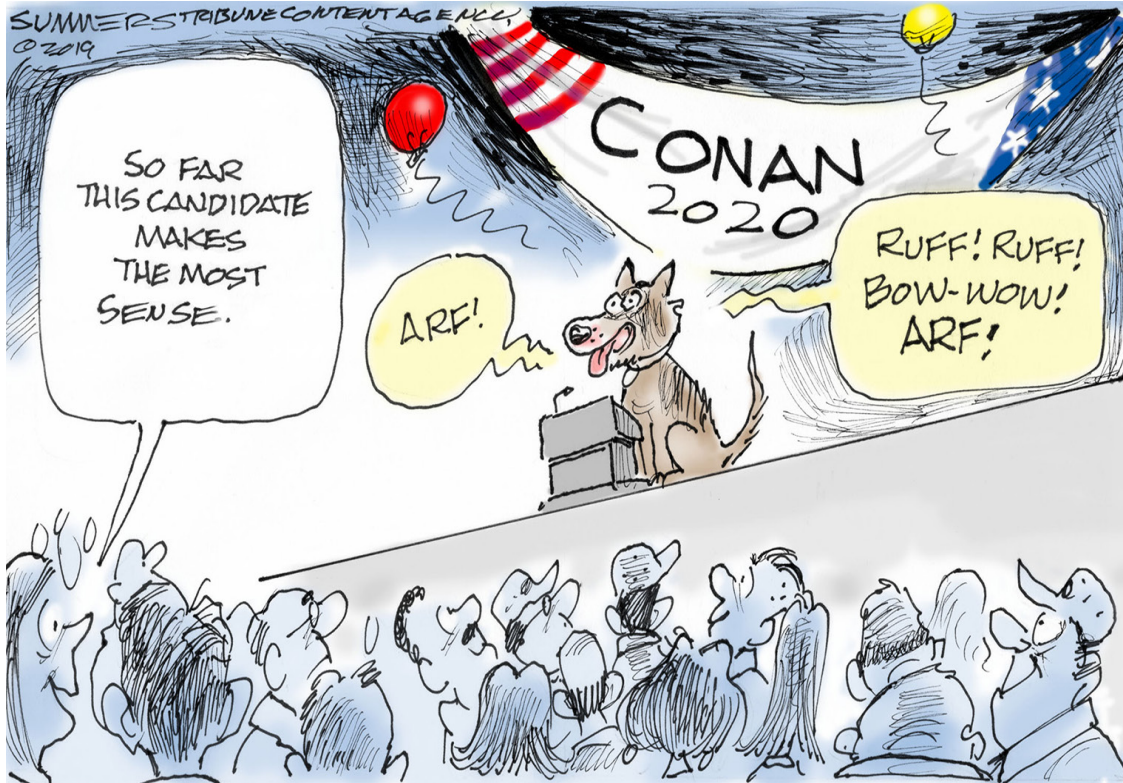


# O P I N I O N



## Jonah Goldberg

Primaries are a lot like Christmas: The shopping season begins way before, and things rarely live up to expectations.

I still like Christmas, but I'm happy to play the Grinch with the primaries. We should get rid of them. If I could, I'd sneak into the Whovilles of Iowa and New Hampshire and steal the voting machines, ballots and bad coffee.

In the past, my Grinchiness was mostly reserved for the "first in the nation" Iowa and New Hampshire votes. Why should these two states have so much power? Two generations of political consultants have made their careers by knowing how to fill hotel rooms in Des Moines and whose palms to grease in Nashua. Scour the Federalist Papers and the Constitution and you'll find no mention of primaries, never mind the Hawkeye and Granite State Hegemony. And yet, if you win in either or both, you're statistically likely to become your party's nominee.

The Iowa caucuses are a particular affront. If it weren't for them, there'd be no ethanol subsidies, which are bad for your car, the economy and the environment. If such things bother you, Iowa and New Hampshire are also very white places, and I don't mean in the white Christmas sense.

But the proposed remedies — rotating the primary states every four years, nuking Iowa from orbit, etc. — don't really fix the underlying problem. We shouldn't have primaries at all — and that goes for Senate and House primaries, too.

Primaries date back to the early 20th century, but they never mattered much until 1972, when the Democrats (with Republicans soon to follow) did something revolutionary: They voluntarily relinquished the ability to choose their own candidates.

The argument for democratizing the selection of candidates was justified with the preposterous notion that there's nothing wrong with democracy that more democracy can't fix. (It's this potent thinking that leads people to argue for lowering the

voting age to get more electoral input from teenagers).

Those infamous "smoke-filled rooms" — among my favorite kinds of rooms, by the way — were supposedly bad because they allowed party bosses to impose their choices on voters. There's no doubt mistakes were made by those party fat cats and fixers, but those smoke-filled rooms also gave us Lincoln, Coolidge, the Roosevelts, Eisenhower, Truman, Kennedy, et al.

One of the paradoxes of democracy is that it depends on healthy institutions that are fundamentally undemocratic. Families don't put everything to a vote, nor do churches, the Boy Scouts or the Marines. Back before the parties were castrated by the primaries (and other subsequent "reforms"), they had the power to impose standards on candidates and to protect their long-term interests and principles.

James Madison was a better philosopher than Alexander Hamilton (though a worse rapper). He understood that parties were a necessary tool of democracy because they forced different factions and interests to compromise in order to win. Kindred groups were willing to sacrifice a few items from their wish lists if it meant their party would be able to deliver on most of its agenda.

Primaries blow all of that up. Candidates on the left and right promise purity in all things, and elected politicians are often more scared of a primary challenge than a general election contest. Pandering to the most passionately ideological voters is the direct result of democratizing party decisions.

This leaves the parties behaving like advertising agencies for whichever candidate happened to exploit outrage the best — or lied most convincingly about the things they can deliver. The Democrats right now are like department store Santas promising the kids jet-packs and lightsabers. Once elected, they'll be lucky to deliver socks. And the resulting outrage will restart the whole stupid cycle all over again.

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## Letters to the Editor...

The Nugget welcomes contributions from its readers, which must include the writer's name, address and phone number. Letters to the Editor is an open forum for the community and contains unsolicited opinions not necessarily shared by the Editor. The Nugget reserves the right to edit, omit, respond or ask for a response to letters submitted to the Editor. Letters should be no longer than 300 words. Unpublished items are not acknowledged or returned. The deadline for all letters is noon Monday.

To the Editor:

When does freedom of speech become defamatory, partial truth and disrespectful? Craig Rullman harms his credibility by painting every Democrat or maybe every Republican with the same brush. Rullman suggests that all Democrats are guilty of fighting tirelessly for slavery and on he goes ad-nauseum to support his generalizations.

My great-grandparents, dyed-in-the-wool Southern Democrats, were a historically documented part of the Underground Railroad, helping to shelter, clothe and feed countless slaves seeking freedom.

Rullman's column, September 25, does nothing but create further divisiveness between political parties. Where is the respectful discourse in such a short-sighted and narrow-minded article? I expect more from him than mean-spirited, disrespectful generalities. Let us live to respect others and recognize that all of us want the same things for our community,

our families, our world.

The pen may well be mightier than the sword — but when you wield it, be ever mindful of the wounds you inflict.

As for the main gist of his column, the right to keep and bear arms, he went for the humor with the mental picture I had of Elizabeth Warren arriving to kick down my mom's door and take her firearm. My 80-year-old mom claimed to be Charlton Heston's best friend and staunch member of the NRA. Nobody would take her firearms, but then my mom didn't sport an UZI!

Karen Keady



To the Editor:

In reaction to Roger Engstrom, who wants to help prevent bee extinction and evidently was surprised from the Science Club lecture

See **LETTERS** on page 30

### Sisters Weather Forecast

Courtesy of the National Weather Service, Pendleton, Oregon

| Wednesday              | Thursday               | Friday                 | Saturday               | Sunday                 | Monday                 |
|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| Partly Cloudy<br>56/29 | Partly Cloudy<br>59/37 | Partly Cloudy<br>72/40 | Mostly Cloudy<br>67/42 | Partly Cloudy<br>63/35 | Partly Cloudy<br>60/40 |

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442 E. Main Ave., P.O. Box 698, Sisters, Oregon 97759

Tel: 541-549-9941 | Fax: 541-549-9940 | [editor@nuggetnews.com](mailto:editor@nuggetnews.com)

**Editor in Chief:** Jim Cornelius

**Production Manager:** Leith Easterling

**Graphic Design:** Jess Draper

**Community Marketing Partners:**

Vicki Curlett & Patti Jo Beal

**Classifieds & Circulation:** Lisa May

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