

Primary ends before Northwest can speak

■ OUR OPINION: Election system should be changed to give all Americans a voice

Well, it appears that the Republican nomination is all-but-decided. After a slow start in Iowa and New Hampshire, Bob Dole landed a big win in New York Thursday after winning eight states the previous Tuesday. Once again, by the time primary elections arrive on the West Coast, the race has ended.

Oregon had decided to move its elections up this year to "have more of a voice" in the direction of the campaigns. But to no avail.

As long as the Midwestern and Northeastern states get first crack at the presidential hopefuls, the rest of the country wields little power in deciding who will lead this country. The order of the primary elections, as it stands, keeps almost half of the states effectively out of the process.

But we can change the system.

For decades, Iowa and New Hampshire have been allowed to set the tone of the primaries. These states receive massive national attention and hundreds of thousands of dollars from news crews that flock to their door, eat in their restaurants and stay in their hotels.

Aside from the obvious fact that neither of these states represents the country (Pat Robertson won the Iowa primary in 1992), it is not their right to be first.

Each state determines when it will have its primary. If Oregon decided to

have its election in February, it has every right to do that. However, this would only lead to us being more ignored than we are. Out of respect for the tradition (and the relative affordability) of starting the race in Iowa, most politicians would turn their attention there instead.

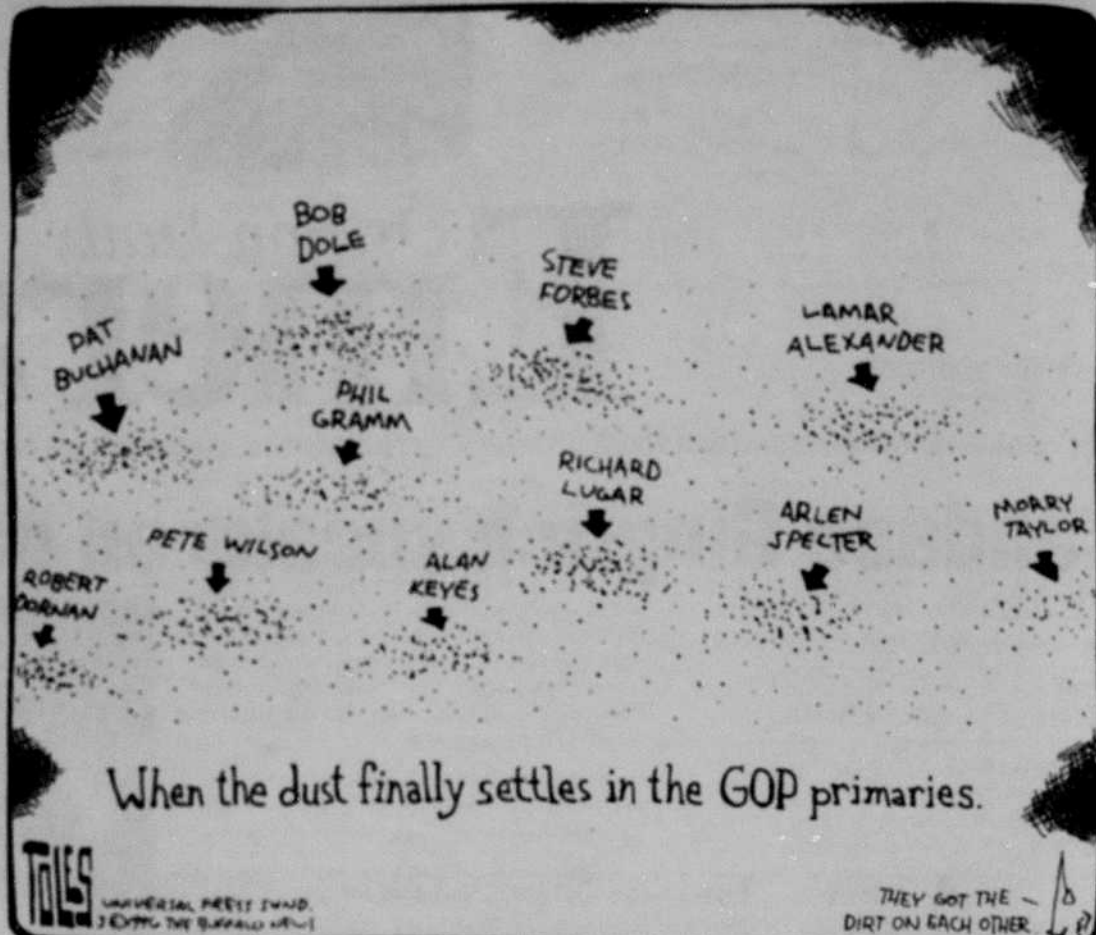
In addition, if this state decided to have its primary on the same day as a delegate-rich state such as New York, we would take a back seat. Campaigning is expensive, and no savvy politician would waste time coming to Oregon when he can spend his money on 93 delegates in the Northeast.

The solution, then, is to have regional primaries that rotate. States in each region would have their elections on the same day or within the same week, and the order in which those elections take place would rotate with each election.

Thus, in each election a different region would reap the benefits now enjoyed only by the Northeast. The rest of the country would get the opportunity to see the candidates in person and hear their take on regional issues.

This would also be more cost-effective for politicians. They could blanket a region instead of state hopping from one side of the country to the other.

All it takes is for regional states to get together and set an election date. States that refuse to participate will be ignored, because politicians will target the blocks rather than the individual states. The blocks can then establish a rotation pattern that gives everyone an opportunity to cut the ribbon on America's future.



Dignified death act allows peaceful exit

When Measure 16 barely squeaked by with 51 percent of the vote, I felt vindicated. My vote really did count. If just 1 percent fewer people had voted for the measure, it may have never been enacted.

That's where it gets sticky. Because the Death With Dignity Act never was enacted. On Dec. 7, the very day before the law was to take effect, US District Judge Michael Hogan put the law on hold to give himself time to conduct full hearings to determine its constitutionality. Later in the year, he found it unconstitutional, and it was thrown out.

Death with Dignity groups vowed to take it to highest courts. And that is where it has stagnated for the past year. Until last Wednesday that is. In a decision that is expected to become the Roe vs. Wade of assisted suicide, the 9th US Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco said that mentally competent, terminally ill adults have the fundamental right, not requiring special legislation, to end their lives with the help of a physician (The Oregonian, March 7).

Some opponents would argue that it goes against the commandment, "Thou shalt not kill." Before I would even enter the church vs. state debate I would point out that in the Bible several people are reported to have ended their own lives (1 Samuel 31; 2 Samuel 17; 1 Kings 16; Matthew 27) with no condemnation from God or their peers.

Others would say that suicide is unconstitutional. The 14th Amendment guarantees that there shall be equal protection and that no state shall "deprive any person of life, liberty, or property without due process." But by allowing citizens to choose when and where they die, the government is actually giving them the freedom to choose their own fate.

The main medical argument against the right to die is that without depression, suicide is not considered, and without pain, people are willing to go on living. The solution to pain and depression? Drugs, of course. But who is to say that living in a drugged stupor, unable to truly live, is better than death?

Then you get into the really heart-jerking stories. The "Five years ago I had three months to live and look at me now," stories. I don't deny that those people are truly fortunate. Or that it would have been too bad if they had killed themselves when they were really not going to die.

But I do argue that they are not the norm and, so we cannot base the rules for all on their miraculous recoveries. I instead think about the people whom we cannot hear. The ones who suffered through months of physical and mental anguish. The ones who are not here to tell the tale of the hell they went through on the path to death. How it ate away at them to cause their

loved ones such pain. How they hated losing their bodily functions and the pain and embarrassment they went through. The ones who died in needless pain and frustration.

This is the most poignant argument for me. What if I had six months left to live? What if I knew I would gradually decline — I would not recognize people, I would not be able to do the activities I love, I would have to see the pain in my loved ones eyes as they see what I was going through.

It seems cruel and barbaric to me. I would want to be able to end it.

Then I think of the way it could be.

A responsible adult is diagnosed with six months left to live. They are told their last days will be filled with body-racking pain. After seriously thinking it over, the person decides they want to take their own life. Instead of having to be secretive in fear of implicating their loved ones in a crime, they are able to discuss their reasoning with them. They talk to their doctor, get a second opinion and if all goes well, after an additional waiting period, they are given a prescription.

Then, after saying good-bye to the people and places they have loved best, they are able to die with dignity. Not alone, but surrounded by their friends and family. Not in pain, but with the knowledge they lived and died a good life. And peace is gained.

It already happens every day. According to a survey 21 percent of doctors who treat the dying have been asked for such a prescription. What is more amazing is that they actually do it. One hundred and eighty-seven Oregon doctors have reported writing such a prescription (The Oregonian, March 8). Of those people, 124 actually ended their own lives. This was not a spur of the moment decision. Just because you get a prescription does not mean that you need to take it.

But the right needs to exist. Charles Hinkle, attorney for Oregon Right to Die points out, "[Measure 16] is entirely voluntary. No one is required to participate. No doctor, no hospital, no nursing home. No person."

You can back out anytime.

As a progressive nation, we should give people the right to die with dignity. We cannot call ourselves free in life unless we have choices. In this case the choice is clear — it is the ability to choose to die.

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