

# THE DAILY ASTORIAN

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## Liquor initiative has a dirty little secret

If it ain't broke, don't fix it. That axiom is apt for the ballot initiative that would move liquor sales out of state-operated stores and into grocery stores. The measure is backed by the grocery industry. Petitioners will soon be gathering signatures.

When Washington voters considered this choice in 2011, it became known colloquially as the Costco Initiative. That's because Costco largely bankrolled the ballot measure campaign.

Oregon is one of 13 states that maintains state-owned stores. They are a considerable moneymaker for state government. How the state would replace that revenue is this ballot measure's dirty little secret.

On the other side of the Columbia River, there is a measure of buyers' remorse. The variety Washingtonians once saw in their liquor stores is gone. Restaurateurs find that particularly vexing. And the products cost more.

Oregon's burgeoning industries of craft brewers, distillers and winemakers oppose the initiative, because of what they see coming. Without the Oregon

Liquor Control Commission stores, craft distillers would lose their access to a state-wide retail network. If liquor is moved into supermarkets, brewers and winemakers will see their shelf space diminished. Grocery stores are a zero-sum game. If a body of new product gains shelf space, other products have less.

OLCC stores produce revenue in excess of \$200 million that's used for state and local government services. The grocers' ballot measure assumes the state Legislature will find another way to generate that amount of revenue. Good luck.

Washington's Costco Initiative has demonstrated who really wins with proposals such as this. The craft distillers, brewers and wine makers have it right. They will lose, big time. So will consumers.

## Primaries, not caucuses, are better voter gauges

Pacific County Democrats — or a small subset of them anyway — partook of the quaint ritual of caucusing last month. Though some local citizens also will participate in the May 24 presidential primary election, on the Democratic side that vote will count no more than voting in an online opinion survey.

Something like 1 percent of eligible Washington state voters typically participate in the caucus, which is how delegates pledged to specific candidates are chosen to attend the next phase of the Democratic Party's presidential-selection process.

A useful commentary in the internet publication *Grist* ([tinyurl.com/GristOnCaucuses](http://tinyurl.com/GristOnCaucuses)) points out some of the fundamental flaws and unfairness of the caucus system in Washington and 11 other states. (Oregon uses the "closed primary" system, with party members registered by April 26 being eligible to help select presidential nominees in the May 17 primary.)

At its roots, in a normal year the caucus is a process designed to keep people out rather than bring them in. This year, progressive voters

interested in Bernie Sanders clearly triumphed over party orthodoxy.

In general, caucuses remain one reason why American politics have gravitated away from the ideological middle ground. "Even after accounting for many other factors, caucus attenders were more ideologically extreme than primary voters," wrote Brigham Young University political scientists Christopher Karpowitz and Jeremy C. Pope in a 2014 *Washington Post* editorial quoted by *Grist*.

Washington's Democratic Party has been highly resistant to allocating presidential convention delegates via the far easier and more democratic primary-election process. Republicans have dragged their heels, too, but this year the Washington GOP is partly using voter preferences from the primary to determine presidential options.

The American political process benefits when the entire range of voter preferences are included, not merely those who are so passionate as to be willing to sacrifice a spring Saturday. Washington state Democrats should become more democratic by shifting away from caucuses.

## Elections and the (un)Democratic Party

By CHARLES M. BLOW  
*New York Times News Service*

There are two prominent features of the Democratic Party's presidential selection process that are thoroughly undemocratic and undermine faith in the party: superdelegates (which favor Hillary Clinton) and caucuses (which favor Bernie Sanders).

As *The New York Times* editorial board explained: "Superdelegates are party bigwigs — 712 Democratic leaders, legislators, governors and the like. They can vote for any candidate at the nominating convention, regardless of whether that candidate won the popular vote. These unpledged delegates make up 30 percent of the 2,382 delegates whose votes are needed to win the nomination, and could thus make all the difference."

Let's start there. Superdelegates, whose votes are not bound by the millions of individual voters, make up nearly a third of all delegates. That, on its face, is outrageous.

It's no surprise that superdelegates were created by establishment elites to increase their own power. Superdelegates were invented by a Democratic rule change in the early 1980s after the nomination of George McGovern in 1972 and the devastating loss of Jimmy Carter to Ronald Reagan in 1980, precisely to help the establishment prevent the nomination of insurgent candidates of whom the establishment disapproved. (Sanders is nothing if not an insurgent candidate.)

As *The New York Times* reported in 1981: "Gov. James B. Hunt Jr. of North Carolina, who heads the latest Democratic rule-changing group, an unwieldy, 29-member agglomeration of the innocent and the experienced, describes its task as one of writing 'rules that will help us choose a nominee who can win and who, having won, can govern effectively.'"

The article continued: "Much of this year's deliberations have seemed infused with a desire to deny future nominations to political reincarnations of the Jimmy Carter of 1976."

So today we have an establishment structure that equates a single establishment vote with thousands of citizen votes.

As Tom Foreman wrote for CNN.com in 2008 when the role of superdelegates was also being hotly debated: "A few decades ago, Democratic leaders felt that sometimes, Democratic voters were choosing poor presidential candidates: campaigners who couldn't win elections, or even if they could, they didn't please Democratic kingmakers."

This system is unjust, in part because those superdelegates are not prohibited from declaring their loyalty before voting has ended. At the very least, they should be barred from committing before voting is completed in their own states.

Without this prohibition, the establishment puts its thumb on the scale and signals its approval and disapproval ahead of Democratic voters. How can this be defended?

**Superdelegates were created by establishment elites to increase their own power.**

This cycle, nearly three months before a single vote was cast, *The Associated Press* found that at least half of all those superdelegates (359) had already committed to supporting Clinton. Only eight had committed to supporting Sanders. Clinton's popularity among superdelegates has only continued to rise. This is not to say that superdelegates can't switch allegiances, but the initial, premature declarations are the real problem.

Then, there are the caucuses. As Zachary Roth wrote for MSNBC ahead of the Iowa caucuses: "The tightly limited hours are perhaps the most glaring problem — especially at a time when Democrats are emphasizing the impor-



Charles Blow

ance of expanding access to voting, and are responding to the needs of working people."

He continued: "The restricted hours are increasingly out of step not only with the direction of the Democratic Party, but also with broader economic trends. Many of those who will be shut out are likely to be low-wage workers, who typically have little control over their schedules."

This says nothing of the burden caucuses put on families without child care, students and senior citizens.

It's the height of irony that the caucuses have favored Sanders, the candidate promising to decrease income inequality and fight for higher wages.

So far, the Democrats have held 21 primaries, including Democrats abroad, and 14 caucuses in the states and the territories. Clinton won 16 primaries but just four caucuses, while Sanders won 10 caucuses but just five primaries. For context, Democrats will have a total of 19 caucuses in the states and the territories, while the Republicans have only 13. (North Dakota doesn't hold a caucus or a primary, while Colorado and Wyoming hold only informal caucuses, where constituents vote for delegates, not candidates.)

Furthermore, caucuses dispense with the privacy and anonymity of the voting booth and have the potential to inject an element of peer pressure into the democratic process. People should be free to vote with their conscience — and in private! — and feel no pressure whatsoever to bend to the consensus of the community.

Indeed, the *Boston Globe* editorial page argued for the elimination of caucuses last month, saying: "In a caucus, voters who aren't physically able to sit in a school gymnasium and debate the merits of their candidate with their neighbors get shut out. And obscure rules that vary from state to state governing delegate allotment and proxy balloting make for confusing inconsistencies when tallying results."

For a Democratic Party that prides itself on the grand ideals of inclusion and fairness, the nominating process is anything but.

## Obama's ideological holiday in Havana

By CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER

*Washington Post Writers Group*

WASHINGTON — The split-screen told the story: on one side, images of the terror bombing in Brussels; on the other, Barack Obama doing the wave with Raul Castro at a baseball game in Havana.

On one side, the real world of rising global terrorism. On the other, the Obama fantasy world in which romancing a geopolitically insignificant Cuba — without an ounce of democracy or human rights yielded in return — is considered a seminal achievement of American diplomacy.

Cuba wasn't so much a legacy trip as a vanity trip, vindicating the dorm-room enthusiasms of one's student days when the Sandinistas were cool, revolution was king and every other friend had a dog named Che.

When Brussels intervened, some argued that Obama should have cut short his trip and come back home. I disagree. You don't let three suicide bombers control the itinerary of the American president. Moreover, Obama's next stop, Argentina, is actually important and had just elected a friendly government that broke from its long and corrupt Peronist past.

Nonetheless, Obama could have done without the baseball. What kind of message does it send to be yukking it up with Raul even as Belgian authorities are picking body parts off the floor of the Brussels airport?

Obama came into office believing that we had vastly exaggerated the threat of terrorism and allowed it to pervert both our values and our foreign policy. He declared a unilateral end to the global war on terror and downplayed the threat ever since. He frequently reminds aides, reports Jeffrey Goldberg of *The Atlantic*, that more Americans die annually of bathtub accidents.

It's now been seven years. The real world has stubbornly refused to accom-



Ismael Francisco/Cubadebate

**Cuban President Raul Castro, right, and U.S. President Barack Obama react to a baseball match between the Tampa Bay Rays and Cuba's national team in Havana, Cuba, March 22.**

modate Obama's pacific dreams. The Islamic State has grown from JV team to worldwide threat, operating from Libya to Afghanistan, Sinai to Belgium. It is well into the infiltration phase of its European campaign, with 500 trained and hardened cadres in place among the estimated 5,000 jihadists returned from the Middle East. The increasing tempo and sophistication of its operations suggest that it may be poised for a continent-wide guerrilla campaign.

In the face of this, Obama remains inert, unmoved, displaying a neglect and insouciance that borders on denial. His nonreaction to the Belgian massacre — his 34-minute speech in Havana devoted 51 seconds to Brussels — left the world as stunned as it was after the Paris massacre, when Obama did nothing. Worse, at his now notorious November news conference in Turkey, his only show of passion regarding Paris was to berate Islamophobes.

David Axelrod called Obama's response "tone deaf." But that misses the point. This is more than a mere mistake of presentation. Remember his reaction to the beheading of the American journalist James Foley? Obama made a statement expressing his sympathies — and then jumped onto his golf cart for a round of 18.

He later told NBC News' Chuck Todd that this was a mistake. "Part of this job is also the theater of it," he explained, "it's not something that always comes naturally to me." As if postponing a bucolic recreation was a required piece of political playacting

rather than a president's natural reaction — a mixture of shock and sorrow — to the terrible death of a citizen he could not save.

It's not as if Obama is so super cool that he never shows emotion. Just a few months ago, he teared up when speaking about the Sandy Hook school shooting. That was the work of a psychotic. But when speaking about the work of Islamist terrorists, he offers flat perfunctory words.

**Cuba wasn't so much a legacy trip as a vanity trip.**

I cannot fathom why. Perhaps having long seen himself uniquely qualified by background and history to make peace between Islam and the West, to now recognize how badly things have gone on his watch is to admit both failure and the impossible grandiosity of his original pretensions.

Whatever the reason, he seems genuinely unmoved by a menace the rest of the world views, correctly, with horror and increasing apprehension. He's been in office seven years, yet seems utterly fixed on his campaign promises and pre-presidential obsessions: shutting down Gitmo, rapprochement with Iran, engagement with tyrants (hence Havana), making the oceans recede (hence the Paris climate trip). Next we'll see yet another useless Washington "summit" on yet another Obama *idee fixe*: eliminating nuclear materials.

With the world on fire, the American president goes on ideological holiday. As was said of the Bourbons: "They have learned nothing and have forgotten nothing."