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OUR VIEW

Primary problems

The Iowa primaries are over. Or are they? Bernie Sanders is demanding a recount. Donald Trump is demanding a redo.

And with one primary in the bag, neither the Democrats nor the Republicans are any closer to naming a nominee.

What has been a crazy political season shows no sign of sliding into sanity anytime soon. The spotlight now shifts to contests in New Hampshire, South Carolina and Nevada.

But before those take place, let’s have one more thought about Iowa, a state most newshounds are surely sick of talking about.

The Iowa caucuses (or the Hawkeye cauci, as the *EO* edit board refers to them) are either a beautiful display of civic action and democracy, or one of the strangest and most inexplicable forms of “voting” in America. We haven’t made up our minds either.

The way the Democrats do it is by far the most baffling.

You signal your candidate of choice by shuffling into a designated corner of a room. That by itself violates one of tenants of a healthy democracy: the private ballot.

Next comes the ability to “poach” voters from nonviable candidates — those who do not qualify for a single delegate. This year only Martin O’Malley hit this ignoble mark. After his supporters were poached, he finished with just 0.3 percent of votes cast, despite the fact that more voters surely named him as their top candidate.

No mind, the 0.3 percent mark is what is recorded for cable news and history’s sake, and O’Malley promptly dropped out of the race. That most of his voters were almost demanded to drop their support was of no matter.

Considerable media attention was given to the fact that there were coin flips to decide the number of delegates in at least seven caucus locations. But it’s nothing to get worked up about. The math is fuzzy up and down the Iowa caucus process, and “winning”

is never as easy as tallying votes.

The Republicans go through a more straightforward process: a simple, private, paper ballot turned in for counting.

But each candidate is allowed a representative who can make a last minute plea to voters, which pushes another tenant of our democracy — no politicking around the voting booth — off to the wayside.

The results for the GOP? Ted Cruz came out a surprising winner, Donald Trump a surprisingly defeated runner-up, and Marco Rubio a surprisingly strong third place. The key word there is surprising, as most polls had Trump with a safe lead. But Iowa is a notoriously difficult place to poll, and the Iowa caucuses are a notoriously unpredictable process.

Perhaps that is a good thing, perhaps not.

The last two winners of the Republican caucus have been Rick Santorum and Mike Huckabee, who promptly went nowhere.

On the Democratic side, you can look back to Tom Harkin’s butt kicking of Bill Clinton in 1992, and the 1976 Iowa caucus win of “uncommitted,” who outlasted eventual president Jimmy Carter.

This year, Iowa did nothing to clear up a muddy political picture for both parties. Donald Trump and Ted Cruz are going after each other like grade school bullies. Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders are each claiming to have won a tie.

Iowa — bless its big unwieldy civic heart — wasn’t of much use, despite the millions of dollars spent by everyone there.

Could it come down to Oregon? Primary election day is May 17 for both Republicans and Democrats, putting us among the last 10 states to have a say.

But if things are as wide open in three months as they are right now — (thanks for nothing Iowa!) — Oregon can expect some visitors, innumerable annoying TV ads, and more political pollsters than this state has seen before.

Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the East Oregonian editorial board of Publisher Kathryn Brown, Managing Editor Daniel Wattenburger, and Opinion Page Editor Tim Trainor. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the East Oregonian.

OTHER VIEWS

Regulating marijuana edibles should be top rule-making priority

The (Corvallis) Gazette-Times

Regulators with the state of Oregon are proposing a very cautious set of rules to govern what’s certain to be a brisk market in marijuana edibles — cookies, candies, drinks and a surprising variety of other items that can swallowed instead of inhaled.

It’s the right call. Experiences in Colorado and Washington state, two states that legalized the use of recreational marijuana before Oregon, suggest that edibles deserve extra amounts of caution. Oregon is wise to be acting accordingly.

Colorado officials were surprised by the popularity of edibles in that state; one analysis suggests that edibles accounted for roughly a third of recreational marijuana sales there last year.

That went hand-in-hand with a surge in the number of calls to poison hotlines and visits to emergency rooms prompted in part by people who had unknowingly ingested considerably more THC, the active ingredient in marijuana, than they had thought.

One of the key issues here involves inexperienced users, who may not understand that one pot-infused marijuana chocolate bar, for example, could contain 10 or so servings — and so it would be a bad idea for one person to swallow the entire bar in one sitting. It makes matters worse that ingested pot doesn’t take effect as quickly as inhaled pot — and so an impatient inexperienced user might decide to take a second or third helping, with unintended results.

Similarly, marijuana smokers who haven’t lit up in years need to remember that today’s marijuana is considerably more potent than it used to be; keep in mind that Colorado slogan, “Start low. Go slow.”

The Oregon rules about edibles go

to lengths to ensure that the products clearly designate how much represents one serving: So, for example, that chocolate bar sold on the recreational market would be made up of 5 milligram servings — and the bar would be clearly marked to designate the size of a single serving. The entire bar could have no more than 50 milligrams of THC — 10 servings in all.

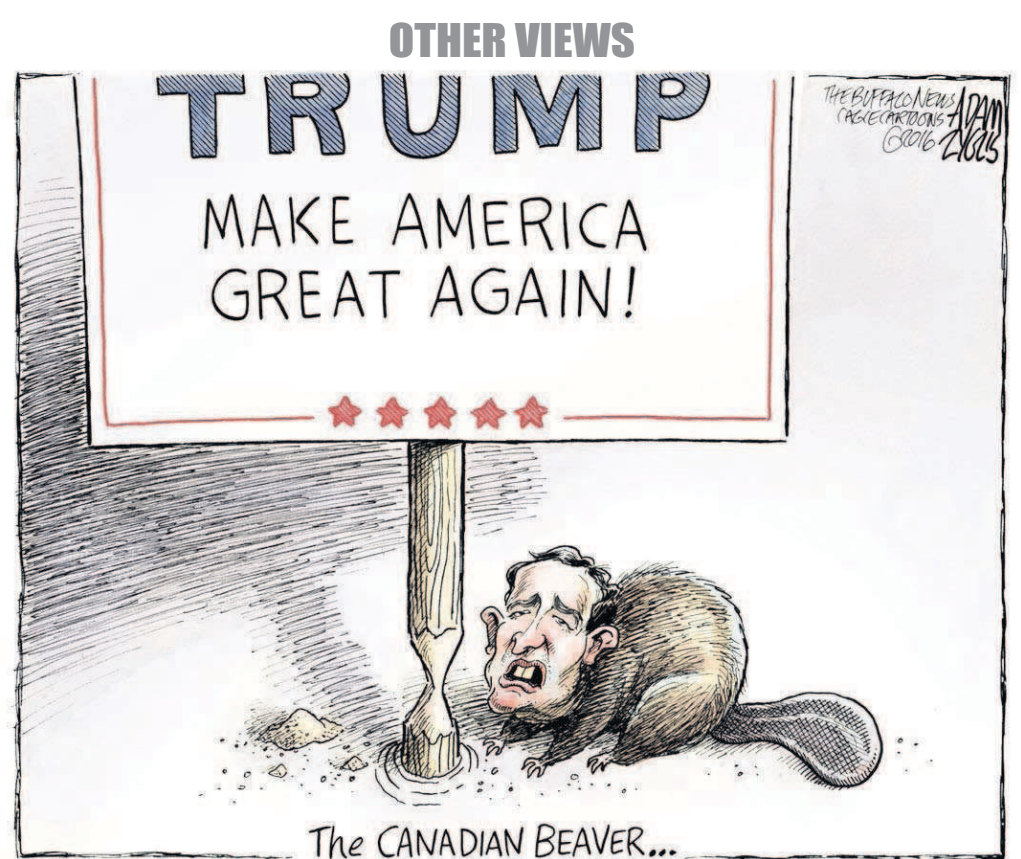
Products where it’s more difficult to identify or designate a single serving size would be limited to a total of 10 milligrams.

The other important issue at stake here is being as sure as possible that edibles don’t fall into the hands of children, who are used to devouring a single candy bar or cookie in one sitting — and who might not be able to read warnings on the packaging (or who may not care). The Oregon rules require that edibles be sold in child-resistant packaging. That packaging cannot feature cartoons or superheroes. State officials also plan to require that marijuana products bear a universal warning sign — a picture of a marijuana leaf next to an exclamation mark.

These restrictions all seem reasonable, especially when you consider that the number of cases reported to the Rocky Mountain Poison Center regarding young children ingesting marijuana increased from five in 2013 to 22 last year, according to a story in *The Oregonian* newspaper.

Arguments from marijuana proponents that the rules are overly restrictive and could needlessly constrain the state’s growing number of marijuana entrepreneurs just don’t hold much water.

The popularity of edible marijuana products caught Colorado off-guard. In Oregon, we have no such excuse. Shame of us if we can’t learn from the Colorado experience.



Trump’s loss in Iowa could point to bigger problems

WEST DES MOINES, Iowa — Donald Trump’s supporters showed up at the Sheraton Monday night fully expecting their man to win the Iowa caucuses. And why shouldn’t they? Trump had held a lead of varying sizes in 13 of the last 13 polls listed in the RealClearPolitics average of Iowa polls. How could that not win?

Months ago, before Trump took the lead in Iowa, a number of analysts argued that he wasn’t a “good fit” for the state’s Republican electorate, made up heavily of voters who describe themselves as born-again evangelical Christians. Then Trump took the lead and — in the polls at least — fought off challenges from Ben Carson and eventual winner Ted Cruz. So analysts thought Trump might not be so bad a fit after all.

But on caucus night, some of Trump’s supporters returned to the old “bad fit” theory to explain Trump’s surprise loss.

“It was the evangelicals,” said Dick Stoffer of West Des Moines. “They’ve done it before — they did it four years before with Santorum, they did it with Huckabee before that.”

“The evangelicals,” said Carol Anne Tracy of West Des Moines. “We’ve got a lot of evangelicals, and I just don’t think they felt that (Trump) praised God enough.”

“It’s happened before — the guy with the biggest Bible wins Iowa,” said Ken Crow, a Tea Party activist from Winterset.

The caucus results — Trump soundly beaten by Cruz, finishing barely ahead of Marco Rubio — seemed to confirm another nagging suspicion about the Trump campaign: that it had not paid sufficient attention to turning out its voters.

Most of the people at the Trump event had attended caucuses earlier in the evening. At those caucuses, the presiding officer asked whether there was a representative from each campaign present to speak, and, if not, whether anyone attending would like to speak on a particular candidate’s behalf. At the caucus I attended, in Pleasant Hill, a suburb just east of Des Moines, there was no one to speak for Trump — no representative of the campaign — and no voter willing to stand up and speak on his behalf. (The precinct ended in a Cruz landslide: 110 votes for the Texas senator, versus 36 for Trump and 34 for Rubio.)

At the Sheraton, some Trump supporters had similar stories.

“We were at a caucus and Trump didn’t even have anyone there to speak for him,” one man told me.

“That’s insane,” added a man nearby.

“I was at a caucus, and no one spoke for him there, either,” added someone else.

I asked everyone I talked to at the Sheraton whether they felt Trump had made any mistakes in the campaign, like deciding not to attend last Thursday’s Republican debate. Most felt Trump had made the right call; they weren’t in the mood to second-guess their candidate. But in light of the caucus results, the debate decision looms as a critical error in judgment for Trump.



BYRON YORK
Comment

Some argue Trump did not pay sufficient attention to turning out his voters.

In the days leading up to the voting, when I talked to voters on the fence between candidates — people who could possibly be persuaded to support Trump — one thing became clear: everybody watched the debate. It was the only debate held in Iowa, and it took place in the final days of the campaign, when voters who had been reluctant to pay attention months earlier had finally become interested and involved. They all tuned in. And Trump wasn’t there.

“That was the one thing that I thought was a clear mistake,” Republican blogger Craig Robinson, a former political director of the state GOP, said in a phone conversation Monday afternoon. With that one decision, Trump undermined a lot of the work he had done in the previous months.

The debate decision showed that Trump’s political instincts could be wrong. But the caucus loss could point to even more serious problems ahead for Trump.

A lot of people like Trump and agree with what he has to say. They cheer him on. But as the time to vote approaches, they apply a seriousness test, a test of whether they would trust him in a position of grave responsibility. The difference between Trump’s high pre-caucus polls and his underwhelming support in the actual caucus could indicate that voters who had supported him for months beforehand began to develop doubts as the time neared to actually cast a ballot. Would it be safe and smart to vote for this guy?

Just as fundamentally, Trump’s Iowa loss could cast doubt on his unconventional tactics in other states. Trump’s strategy is based on a big bet: that because voters are tired of conventional politicians, then they will also be resistant to conventional political appeals. Iowa proved just the opposite. Ted Cruz won a smashing victory by doing things the old-fashioned way, visiting all of Iowa’s 99 counties, pressing the flesh in gatherings of 100, 150 people, and tailoring his pitch to appeal to concerned evangelicals. That — plus a highly sophisticated data operation — won the day for Cruz. Trump tried something different, and it didn’t work.

So Trump now heads to New Hampshire, where, unlike Iowa, his lead in the polls is enormous — more than 20 points. Will that lead go away on election day, too?

Trump’s first encounter with the voters should probably teach him several things. One, never suggest that you’ve got their support in the bag. Two, show up at the biggest events. And three, do everything you can to turn out your voters.

All that will be important. But even more critical will be questions about Trump’s judgment and temperament. If Iowans who once supported him did in fact retreat when it came time to enter the voting booth — if they did in fact worry that he is just not serious enough to become president — Trump has a problem that might not be possible to solve.

■

Byron York is chief political correspondent for *The Washington Examiner*.

YOUR VIEWS

Don’t recall councilor Plute, run for a seat on the council

Just say no to signing the petition to recall Al Plute.

Pendleton has greatly benefited by his decision to move his family to town and immediately immerse himself in our community.

Examples include his significant investment to rehabilitate the derelict Temple Hotel, the Brown and Bowman Buildings, which have brought jobs and much needed economic development to Pendleton. He has served on the planning commission, his church, and is in his second term as city councilman.

Sure, he is an instigator for change and not afraid to challenge the present state of affairs. His diversity of opinion is a big asset for positive change in our community. I value his input and will miss serving with him as my term expires at the end of this year.

A recall attempt sends exactly the wrong message to other entrepreneurial business people who might otherwise choose to come here. Mr. Plute has done nothing to justify his removal from office. Don’t waste the taxpayer’s money for an unjustified special election.

Want to do something positive? Several city council seats as well as the mayor position are open for citizens willing and interested in effecting positive change for our community. Applications for election must be filed by March 8, and letters of interest for the vacant At Large seat are being accepted at city hall until Feb. 15.

I am happy to answer questions from anyone interested and needing more information about what is involved, or call the city recorder at city hall. My contact information can be found on the city web page.

Chuck Wood
Pendleton city councilor