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OUR VIEW



AP Photo/John Locher

Massachusetts delegates Patricia Saint Aubin and Amy Carnevale dance during the second day session of the Republican National Convention in Cleveland on Tuesday.

Conventional wisdom

A convention is a four-day infomercial for a political party. It's a pep rally, a lecture series, a campaign stop and a coronation.

It's at times fantastic and fascinating. Yet at times it oscillates between dreary and unhinged.

The Republicans had the first go at it in this quadrennial, convening in Cleveland. The new king of the party, Donald Trump, plans to close out the event Thursday with a speech.

The party did the real work of the convention on Tuesday — scrubbing the “presumptive” prefix from Trump and officially naming him the Republican nominee in the November election. There were a few small insurrections that tried to throw a wrench in those plans, but they did not amount to much.

Some Republicans tried to mount a rules change that would have unbound delegates, meaning they could support whoever they wished and would not be forced to represent the results of their state's primary. But the move failed to gather momentum and faltered.

In another skirmish, Republicans from Alaska were incensed when their delegates — who were split between Trump, Ted Cruz and Marco Rubio — were tallied completely for Trump.

One reason the skirmishes remained small was because of earlier backroom rules fights that closed the door on the “Never Trump” factions.

Those rules committees have helped pave the way for a number of U.S. presidents, and dumped “presumptive” nominees who had garnered more primary votes. In 1952, Robert Taft entered the convention as the GOP favorite, but late-entering Dwight Eisenhower supporters used an early rules committee hearing to test the waters for an overthrow. The waters proved warm, the GOP traded out Taft for

Eisenhower, and Ike went on to serve two terms as president.

There were a few other noticeable moments of disagreement and discord in the 2016 edition, but conventions are for creating an environment and a narrative to make a nominee look presidential.

There has been little political drama in the GOP convention, but plenty of the personal kind. Melania Trump lifted portions of her speech from Michelle Obama, but what was even more damaging was her admission that she “always liked” the current First Lady. You could almost hear the shudder echo through the arena when that went public. Then there was the long line of Trump detractors who have since climbed aboard the bandwagon. Rick Perry once called Trump a “cancer,” yet endorsed him.

Not everyone got in line — there are no Bushes in the Buckeye State, and Governor John Kasich has made himself scarce. Ted Cruz could barely bring himself to utter Trump's name and very clearly did not disappoint. Barbara Bush said in an interview Tuesday: “I don't know how women can vote for Trump.”

Conventions, by their nature, are not places for balanced debates. Republicans — and their nominee — get four days to make their best argument about the future of the country. Next week, Democrats get their opportunity.

But we can learn things from conventions, mostly about how a political party defines itself. This year, both parties are defining themselves mostly in opposition to the other: Republicans are anti-Hillary and Democrats anti-Trump.

Which is a reminder that conventions are extravagant infomercials. You must watch with a critical eye and realize that, like every As Seen On TV pitch, the problems are not that bad and the solutions are not that easy.

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



Ted speaks at Trump show

CLEVELAND — One of the last times you saw Ted Cruz, flames were shooting from his head and spittle was flying from his mouth — metaphorically, at least — as he branded Donald Trump “a pathological liar,” “a serial philanderer,” “utterly amoral” and a “narcissist” on a level this country had seldom seen. It was the day of Indiana's Republican primary, Trump had just insinuated a connection between Cruz's father and the assassination of John F. Kennedy, and Cruz announced that he must at long last tell the world “what I really think” of Trump.

But when you saw the Texas senator on the convention stage here on Wednesday night, that contempt and candor was absent. He may not exactly have praised Trump, but he swallowed whatever misgivings he still feels, and his presence alone was taken by some viewers as a gesture of implicit, tentative support.

It is also an example of what he always says he can't stand about other politicians and what voters loathe as well: the elasticity of their convictions, the urgency of their self-interest and the alacrity with which they take an eraser to their past words.

There's a lot of erasing going on these days, and Trump is a big reason. For many Republicans, rallying round him means conveniently forgetting how much they disagreed with or even detested him before, a breach much wider than the one that typically exists between opponents within a political party.

Mike Pence had to do a memory purge so complete it may well constitute a lobotomy. Once upon a time he deemed Trump's proposal to ban all Muslims from entering the United States “offensive and unconstitutional,” but Trump's slight tweak to that — a focus on immigrants from Muslim-heavy countries that seem to be fertile for terrorists — is something Pence now praises. People say the vice presidency is a miserable job, but what misery politicians go through in pursuit of it.

Pence is also among the large crowd of lawmakers whom Trump savages for having supported the invasion of Iraq. He's an advocate of the trade deals that Trump mocks. And in that Indiana primary? Pence endorsed Cruz. But now he's all aboard and all about the good ship Trump, because it has the plusher staterooms and is sailing toward the snazzier port.

I shouldn't beat up on Pence. Whatever reservations he expressed about Trump were

mild next to those mentioned by Rick Perry, who called Trump “a barking carnival act” and “a cancer” before endorsing him and showing up in support of him here.

And it's not just Trump who brings out the squish in politicians. Their spines jellyify in all sorts of situations.

Remember Marco Rubio's insistence that he'd be leaving the Senate after 2016? In May he gave his latest guarantee, tweeting: “I have only said like 10,000 times I will be a private citizen in January.”

Rubio wasn't just resolute; he was flabbergasted that anyone could doubt his resoluteness. As it turns out, though, a vow doesn't become an ironclad guarantee until it's made 20,000 times. In June, he announced his candidacy for re-election.

Pranksters write in disappearing ink; politicians speak in it. And that certainly includes Democrats — Evan Bayh, for one. When he left the Senate six years ago, he did so in an indignant, operationally aggrieved fashion, describing it as hopelessly partisan and corrupted by money and outside influences. He then joined the outside influencers, going to work for a lobbying and law firm. But he apparently missed all that partisanship and corruption, because now he wants back in. The negative ads write themselves.

Cruz isn't up for re-election to the Senate until 2018, but what's on his mind is 2020. He clearly began plotting his comeback the moment he exited the Republican primaries. His convention speech will be a part of it and warrants careful study as a road map to where he thinks the post-Trump GOP is headed.

He has even repaired his pride (to the extent that it ever needs repair) and reasserted his dominance by coming up with a conspiracy theory for how the Republican nomination was actually stolen from him — by the news media! As he explained to Politico's Glenn Thrush: “I think many of the mainstream media players are liberal Democrats. They intend to vote for Hillary. They believed Donald was the easiest candidate for Hillary to beat. And I think many of them wanted him to win the nomination. I don't think it was innocent decision-making behind this.”

I take back what I wrote earlier about his fickleness. He is 100 percent constant — in his adoration and exaltation of Ted Cruz.

Frank Bruni, an Op-Ed columnist for The New York Times since June 2011, joined the paper in 1995.



FRANK BRUNI
Comment

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OTHER VIEWS

Building homes in Pendleton could bring jobs

Completion of an up-to-date study of Pendleton housing is good news. Although housing construction has been on the upswing, many of us in town have been worrying about considerable numbers of people who work in Pendleton but can't find housing here. Many have long commutes and others have settled elsewhere.

No point in complaining about declines in school enrollment or fewer shopping opportunities if we in Pendleton fail to provide enough apartments, single family houses, town houses, renovated old houses or other units for people to live in.

Same goes for new business investment or jobs. If you have low housing vacancy rates, as Pendleton has, it is tougher to attract businesses or their employees.

For those who prefer smaller communities, the Pendleton area can't be beat for livability. The Pendleton personality, diversity and recreation make this a special place.

But I wonder if some of us are so satisfied that we have failed to keep up with the times: The need to refurbish old housing and changes in demographics, for examples.

You can argue that new or renovated housing should wait for expanded business in town. But it seems to me that it's easier to



MIKE FORRESTER
Comment

attract business investment when you have decent housing than to persuade yourself that new business will come without sufficient housing.

Until now, Pendleton has lacked a comprehensive assessment of its housing. A Tucson, Arizona, company, Sabino Community Development Resources, did a

Pendleton housing study in 2011, but a Sabino official admitted to John Turner that his firm's recommendations in the wake of the Great Recession were too conservative. Turner, who is mayor-elect, chairs the Pendleton Housing Committee. He and his committee just submitted to city council a 2016 report from Sabino on housing along with comments from the Pendleton Housing Committee.

The new Sabino report contains new information on Pendleton's housing situation: sizes of the various classes of housing inventories, how incomes influence decisions

on renting and buying housing units. As Pendleton tries to meet housing needs, the city will now have a 50-page report to hand to builders, lenders and others.

The report also suggests to the city a few Pendleton housing priorities based on market needs

I'd like to make a suggestion here: that the city try to find a person from the housing industry — maybe retired — to do part-time contract work overseeing efforts to expand the housing inventory.

There are a few components here — construction companies, subcontractors, Realtors, lenders, city planning and zoning, state and federal programs — that try to encourage certain types of housing. Some of the players are in the private sector, some in

government. Seems to me that a person with some of that experience plus ability to work with others could be a definite plus for housing in Pendleton. He or she could be a liaison among the parties. Even working

No point in complaining about declining school enrollment or shuttered business if we fail to provide enough places for people to live.

just one day a week could help.

The alternative is to assign city staff, including the city manager, to tend to bridging gaps among the various parties. I think such an arrangement sometimes works out better on paper than on the ground. Because of the importance of housing to this town and because of the complex process, the right part-time overseer could help.

The new Sabino report helps pave the way to make more housing headway.

Mike Forrester is a member of the EO Media Group board of directors and former editor of the East Oregonian. He lives in Pendleton.

LETTERS POLICY

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