



Free Press
Viewpoint

Have conventions
outlived any value?

Political conventions in the United States have become an expensive and useless redundancy, and the two political parties should consider ending the practice completely.

Consider the 2012 election. Were there any surprises at the Republican National Convention? Mitt Romney secured the nomination months ago when most of his competitors withdrew. Ron Paul, even though he has very vocal supporters, was never a threat despite not withdrawing from the race.

The choice of Rep. Paul Ryan for the vice presidential nomination was announced weeks before the convention. The speeches were nothing the American people – or rather the 30.3 million watching the convention – hadn’t heard before: a condemnation of everything the president and the Democratic Party has done in the past 3 1/2 years.

Even the delays due to Hurricane Isaac were predictable. The Democratic National Convention is equally boring. There hasn’t been anyone crazy enough to challenge a sitting president in the primary since 1980 when Ted Kennedy challenged Jimmy Carter. He didn’t win, but then again neither did Carter. President Obama had a smoother road.

So, did anything surprising happen at the Democratic convention? The Democrats touted the president’s record and bashed Republicans. Turnabout is fair play after all.

The Democratic National Convention of 2008 was very nearly exciting. The battle between Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton came down to the wire, but a brokered convention – the term given to a convention where there is no presumptive nominee beforehand – was avoided when Clinton rolled over and threw support to Obama. It was a shame too, because it would have been incredible to see a floor fight instead of well-rehearsed pageantry.

The only good things about the conventions these days are how much money they generate for businesses in the host cities. Charlotte is expected to rake in \$150 million from something like 35,000 visitors. Before the Republican National Convention, CNN had a headline story about how Tampa strip clubs were expecting a huge boom.

They also serve as a good venue for protests, not that anything besides a few arrests ever comes from it.

Conventions used to be exciting. Until 1936 almost every convention was brokered. In 1924, the Democratic Convention went to 102 ballots, being so divided between prohibition advocates and opposers that a compromise candidate had to be found.

But those days are long behind us. These days it is all carefully planned speeches and boring balloon drops. With almost every candidate speech leading up to the convention available on the Internet, covered by 24-hour cable news and picked to death by pundits, it isn’t hard to find out where the candidates stand. The parties will continue to insist on spending millions of dollars on four-day infomercials. Why? Because of the 4- to 6-point bump they get in the polls.

But that bump is temporary. By the time the election rolls around, does anybody remember what was said at the conventions? Politics is “what have you done for me lately.”

So couldn’t the money used to put on these conventions be better spent elsewhere? Or perhaps it would be better if it were never raised at all, so donors could keep a little bit more of their money rather than see it squandered on something which has only negligible impact.

—Kevin Bottrell, Goodland Star-News

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Sharon Friedlander - Publisher
sfriedlander @ nwkansas.com

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Kayla Cornett - Sports Reporter
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Does the end really justify the means?

One down and another one to go!

These political conventions are rousing pep rallies.

I subscribe to *Wordsmith* by Anu Garg, and the word for Friday, “concomitant,” is quite appropriate for both major party conventions.

These usage examples say an awful lot about the voting public, candidates and campaign managers:

- “A harmless hilarity and a buoyant cheerfulness are not infrequent concomitants of genius; and we are never more deceived than when we mistake gravity for greatness, solemnity for science and pomposity for erudition.” – Charles Caleb Colton, “Lacon: or Many Things in Few Words,” Longmans; 1837

- “The things we admire in men: kindness and generosity, openness, honesty, understanding and feeling, are the concomitants of failure in our system. And those traits we detest, sharpness, greed, acquisitiveness, meanness, egotism and self-interest, are the traits of success. And while men admire the quality of the first they love the produce of the second.” – Novelist and Nobel laureate John Steinbeck (1902-1968)

“And while men admire the quality of the first they love the produce of the second.” In other words, how you play isn’t as important as winning. The end justifies the means. We talk better morals than we practice.



Ken Poland

• Ken’s World

I listened to a few of the speeches from the Republican convention. They all concentrated on embellishing kindness, generosity, openness, honesty, understanding and emotional feelings of the slate of candidates and platform of their party.

They also pointed out how they, and you, should detest all those negatives that fit the other party’s program. (Some of us have a different opinion on which platform fits that negative list.)

They blame Obama for all the ills of society today. They chastise Obama for pointing out the failures of the Bush administration.

Look at facts. The economy was strong and we had surplus revenue that was reducing the national debt at the end of the eight years of Clinton’s reign. We were not extensively involved in military action or conquest.

It took far less than eight years for all that to disappear. The upper echelon of wealthy folks continued to build their net worth and increase their net income while the middle and lower group lost substantial amounts of their net worth and income. Gains of the few were

made on the losses of the many.

The Bush tax cuts and deregulation did not invigorate the economy, nor did they produce jobs. How do the Republicans intend to revive the economy? More of the same!

Get the government out of the regulation business. Let the market determine ethics and morality when it comes to business. But let’s legislate ethics and morality in the private lives of all our citizens.

The religious institutions don’t seem to be controlling their people, so let’s make it a government mandate or restriction. You are free to make your own decision on ethics concerning profit-making business endeavors. But you will adhere to my theology when it comes to your personal behavior and practices.

We have the best health care specialists and facilities in the world, if you can’t afford them.

Let the insurance companies determine what your health needs are. Surely profit isn’t going to have any influence on what they will cover and what they won’t.

If it is working, don’t change it. If it isn’t working, then maybe you should make some changes.

The Republicans have done a pretty good job of preventing any changes. Just say no. That was their promise from the get go after the last presidential election. Their idea of compromise is simply, do it our way or no way. Party comes first and nation comes second. Ideology first and reality second.

Better berries a matter of viewpoint

My children and I had been busy picking raspberries, enduring the heat of the sun. We finally felt we had enough to fill all of the orders so, sweaty and thirsty, we retreated to the cool of the house. We filled the flats and found out that we did have enough with very little to spare. We happily sat down for a well-deserved break. That was when the phone rang.

When I answered it, I heard a lady’s voice on the other end. “Is this the place that sells raspberries?”

I told her it was, so she continued. “How much do you charge for a flat of raspberries?” “We charge \$24. Our flats consist of 12 very full pints, not half pints.”

“That sounds good,” the lady said. “However, I only buy the best quality, freshest raspberries.”

I told her we picked them just before people bought them so they would be nice and fresh. I told her it would take about an hour to fill a flat for her. She said she wanted one and would be out, so I headed back out into the sun to pick, letting my children take a break.

I had barely come in with the raspberries when the lady showed up. My children helped me quickly put them into a flat, and even heaped them up. The berries were beautiful.

But when the lady looked at them, she started to complain. “I saw a stem in those when you poured them.”

“Well, yes,” I answered, “there might be a few stems, but there shouldn’t be too many.” “I don’t want any with stems in them.”

I told her we could sort through them and try to take out the one or two stems, but I was afraid that would mash them. “It would be easier and better for them if you just did it as you

Other
Opinions

• Daris Howard
Life’s Outtakes

wash them,” I said.

“I’m afraid these berries don’t meet my high standards,” the lady huffed. “I knew better than to come to some little berry farm to buy raspberries. I have almost always purchased them at a commercial garden stand, and I guess I’ve learned my lesson.” With that she turned and left.

As soon as she was gone, I turned to my wife. “Is there someone else that we can sell these to, or should we just use them ourselves? They’ll be too ripe by tomorrow.”

As we were discussing it, the phone rang. It was the owner of a local, small, commercial produce stand. “Would you guys happen to have a flat of raspberries I could buy right now? I’m out of the ones you sold me yesterday, and I have a customer here.”

I told him we had just picked an extra flat, and I would bring it right over. We sold them to him for only \$18, so we preferred to sell them on our own. But it was better than nothing, and we already had more than we could use for ourselves.

When I arrived at his stand, I pulled around back. He took the berries from me, and carried them out to the front to sell them. I could hear him tell the person that it would be \$36. I

sighed, wishing I was making that much.

I visited with an employee for a moment, and then headed back to my car. That was when I ran into the lady that had come to our house, and she was carrying the very flat of raspberries I had just brought. She held them up. “Now, this is the kind of raspberries I am willing to buy,” she said smugly.

“I suppose, then,” I said, “it is good that I brought them over here for you.”

She looked at me, stunned. “These are yours?”

“Well, they were,” I answered. “But when you didn’t buy them, I brought them over here so the owner of this produce stand could sell them to you.”

Capitalism is a strange thing. Maybe if I had charged her the \$36 she would have felt they were better berries and bought them from me.

Daris Howard, award-winning, syndicated columnist, playwright, and author, can be contacted at daris@darishoward.com; or visit his website at www.darishoward.com.

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