



Unbound Delegates in 2016: why does it matter?

Last week, the Colorado Republican Party State Executive Committee voted against holding a straw poll at Colorado's caucuses in 2016. Colorado Republican delegates will be unbound at the Republican National Convention in Cleveland. What's the big deal about a straw poll?

First, some background on the Colorado straw poll:

- The Colorado GOP held exactly 3 straw polls: 2008, 2010, 2012.
- The poll was a PR opportunity and a fundraiser for the Party - nothing more, nothing less. Candidates had to pay to play -- \$5,000 or more -- to be on the poll.

It has been argued that straw polls increase caucus turnout. The real question is whether or not a straw poll increases PARTICIPATION in electing delegates to the national convention. There is a lot of hype around marking a faux ballot at caucus, but the truth is it makes no difference in candidate selection. The winner of Colorado's 2008 straw poll? Mitt Romney. Colorado's winner in 2012? Rick Santorum. Neither was nominated at the national convention. The straw poll results were irrelevant.

There was a well-documented effort to change RNC Rules at the 2012 Republican National Convention. A pattern emerged: control the nomination process, control the outcome.

The nomination process has different components

- Republican National Committee (RNC) Rules
- Republican state bylaws
- State statutes

Republican National Committee strategy was developed to

- manipulate the process of electing delegates through the RNC Rules
- convert as many caucus states to primary states legislatively
- control the remaining caucus states with a binding straw poll

The goal: bind a majority of delegates at the 2016 convention.

Why are bound delegates a lynchpin to the nomination outcome? A candidate must be nominated with a majority of delegates in eight (8) states. Then, a majority of delegates is required to WIN the nomination (approximately 1,236 votes needed from 2,470 delegates).

New RNC Rules restrict how delegates nominate. Bound delegates may only nominate the candidate to which they are bound; unbound delegates may nominate any candidate of their choosing. A very significant change for 2016.

Could a majority of delegates be bound to a grassroots-favored candidate, not an establishment-chosen candidate? Not easily. A majority of states hold a presidential primary. In a primary, national delegates are bound and allocated to results of the state's primary. The candidate with the loudest media voice and the most money has the advantage.

In caucus states, caucus attendees directly participate in election of delegates. They are only bound if the caucus holds a preference poll. Depending on state law or state party rules, delegates may voluntarily pledge to a candidate, but are not required to do so.

RNC Rules have no mechanism for releasing a bound delegate, for any reason. Rule 16(a)(2) clearly states, in part:

The Secretary of the Convention shall faithfully announce and record each delegate's vote in accordance with the delegate's obligation under these rules, state law or state party rule.

Democrats learned decades ago binding delegates controls their nomination outcome. The Republican Party has emulated their Democratic counterparts with a slow change in the Rules of the Republican Party beginning in 1964 and culminating in 2012.

The full effect of these Rules changes will be felt at the Convention in 2016. Delegates must understand their rights, roles, and responsibilities. Delegates must be willing to be delegates to a convention, not subjects to a coronation!

In a vigorous primary field of candidates, delegates must re-act to changing conditions, vote according to conscience, and represent constituencies. Only unbound delegates do that well. Bound delegates do as they are told, by those who seek to transfer the act of individual voting via voting blocs for desired outcomes.

Those who make the rules, enforce the rules, interpret the rules...rule.

The fate of the Republican nomination rests with those who educate themselves, engage in the process, and “play the game” hard and well.

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A resource for 2016 delegates and a more in-depth history of the Rules of the Republican Party is available from Curly Haughland, RNC National Committeeman for North Dakota, and member of the RNC Standing Rules Committee. Click here for Chapter 1:

https://www.dropbox.com/s/eya8uaz26qookgq/Chapter%20%23%201%20Primary%20or%20Convention%20Who%20Decides%20Haughland_July%2030%202015.pdf?dl=0

See the Rules of the Republican Party here:

https://s3.amazonaws.com/prod-static-ngop-pbl/docs/Rules_of_the_Republican+Party_FINAL_S14090314.pdf