

Mary Souza's Newsletter

June 16, 2014

Historic Convention!

Dear Newsletter Readers,

It has been a whirlwind since the primary election late last month. Our son graduated from UW Law the first weekend in June, so we had a big family celebration there with relatives who came from all over the country. It makes me smile just to think about all the fun we had together.

This past weekend I spent three days at the Idaho Republican Convention in Moscow. It was my first convention. In talking with friends since my return, I realize that many people don't understand the way conventions work, which also means that most won't recognize the unusual nature of this year's GOP convention. It was historic, actually, in a very odd sort of way.

Here's the setup...please jump ahead if you know all of this already:

Everyone lives in a voting precinct, which is an area lined out on a map and given a number. We live in Precinct #44. There are about 70 precincts in Kootenai County. Every precinct votes on their Precinct Chairperson, which you probably noticed on your ballot during this last primary election.

After the primary election, all the newly elected or re-elected Precinct Chairs meet and nominate delegates to go to the state convention. There are 40 some spots for delegates from Kootenai County and then many more people are needed as alternates, in case a delegate cannot attend. The rules are that each delegate and alternate must be individually nominated and voted on by the Precinct Chairs. Delegates and alternates do not have to be Precinct Chairs or elected officials themselves, they can be just regular citizens who are interested in attending the convention.

Ok, so after the delegates and alternates are chosen, the list of names is sent to the state GOP, where the party chairman assigns a portion of the delegates to committees for the convention. There are four committees: Rules, Resolutions, Platform and Credentials, each with about 30 members. Each committee works for 3 hours or so on their assigned task, which took place on Friday. The Credentials committee is usually uneventful, but this time it was the center of all the controversy.

Now that you know a bit about how delegates should be selected, you should know that there were formal, written complaints filed with the Credentials committee, accusing three different counties of choosing their delegates through improper procedures.

(One more bit of important background info is that the current GOP party chair did not support Butch Otter's re-election; they are not close allies. Gov. Otter himself made this public to all when he complained in his infamous "debate" against Russ Fulcher and the two

comical characters Butch insisted be allowed. He said he is the only Republican Governor who didn't get his pick for Party Chairman.)

The complaint against Ada county (Boise) was that instead of nominating and voting on each delegate, they had a pre-determined list, or "slate", and voted on it as a whole, then closed any possible nomination of anyone else. Several Credentials committee members told me the complaint alleged that no one who supported Russ Fulcher for Governor in the primaries, including Russ himself, was on the list of delegates. They also told me that no one from Ada county denied the complaint.

In Bannock county the complaint had to do with choosing a pre-selected slate as well, and the spouses of the slated delegates were the only alternates, which made it very controlled and cozy. One of their leaders got up to complain to the whole convention group, saying "We've been doing it this way for 15 years!"

To be fair, there were also complaints that the committees had been "stacked" with conservative delegates by the current party Chairman, and that Ada county didn't get their proportional share of delegates on committees. But those complaints were never written and submitted to the Credentials committee, so they were not heard.

Credentials met for about twice as long as the other committees, and still needed more time to hash things out. In the end, they recommended that the delegates of all three counties, Ada, Bannock and Power, should not be certified, which means those delegates could not vote on any convention decisions.

That was a bold and historic decision. It was THE focus of all talk and conjecture in the convention hall. But the whole convention body still had to approve the reports of the committees before any of the recommendations would take effect.

The actual full convention day was Saturday, and the whole thing started at 9:30am. Right off the bat, some Ada County folks began making motions and asking US Rep. Raul Labrador, who was the Convention Chair, (not the party chairman), questions and "points of order". Parliamentary procedure and Roberts Rules of Order were cited constantly, and there were lots and lots of "5 min recesses" for research. By lunchtime, with 750 people sitting in their chairs for almost 3 hours, absolutely NOTHING on the agenda had been accomplished. We broke for lunch. Then from 1:30-3:00 it was pretty much more of the same. More motions and more procedural twists and turns. The convention was scheduled to adjourn at 3:15 unless a 2/3rds majority of the delegates voted to extend the time. The vote to continue failed, so the whole convention shut down. Not one agenda item was accomplished.

All the platform changes my committee worked on Friday were useless. The rules and resolutions committee reports were tossed aside as well. And, in the end, it didn't really matter whether the delegates from Ada, Bannock and Power counties were certified or not, because all of our time was wasted with procedural questions, and then the whole convention adjourned.

Why does it matter? Well, for one thing, it has never happened, nor been heard of, in the experience of even the most mature delegates I asked, so it was historic. Secondly, it leaves in place all of the status quo. The party Chairman, Vice Chair, etc. are all the same. The platform, rules and resolutions will also remain unchanged for the next two years, with no updates.

But the worst part, in my opinion, is that the party is being divided by people who don't want to play the game honestly. They are using sly methods to try to get their way. And the much-touted "party unity" still remains a hollow cry. Until everyone starts behaving like responsible adults and stops trying to game the system, party "unity" will be unattainable.

All in all, though, my first convention experience was very positive, in spite of the controversies. I met so many very nice and welcoming people, and a number of them were members of the House and Senate. It was an interesting mix, being part of the unusual convention and looking ahead to the legislature, but I welcome advice from all sides and hope for a straightforward, respectful exchange of ideas.

And now that you understand the state convention process a bit better, dear Readers, maybe you'll get more involved and put your name up for delegate or alternate consideration in two years at the next one!

Hope you have a great rest of the week. My radio show this Wednesday at Noon will be a vacation from politics. I'll be talking with my cousin-in-law, Kaipo Ho, (pictured above) who is visiting from Hawaii. Kaipo is a fascinating guy who is a Kahu in the Hawaiian culture (not a religion.) We'll discuss that plus his business travels all over the world as a consultant for big hotels and businesses on the cultural aspects of their customer service. Tune in this Wednesday from Noon – 1:00 on your computer or smart phone at HeadsUpRadio.com We might even have some Hawaiian music too!

--Mary