

## ADDENDUM

George Hammond managed to find, in some remote spot in the ether, the paper we shall be discussing. For this, in all humility, I thank him. I delivered it before this club in 2006 and had not read it again since George discovered it.

Some aspects of the paper are inevitably dated, but I believe a fair amount remains relevant. It advanced the idea that the nation's means of selecting candidates for the presidency were wanting. They are wanting still, if anything probably more so.

My paper placed considerable blame for the election of so many flawed and second rate candidates on the primaries. Primaries attract atypical voters, usually those whose views fall toward their party's ideological far end. In addition, the states holding the influential early primaries - Iowa, NH, and South Carolina - are not typical of the national electorate. I spent some time, therefore, suggesting alternative arrangements by which primaries could be held.

There is a retort which I am told is common in Great Britain when proposals for reform are put forward. It goes something like this: "Reform? Reform? My dear fellow, aren't things muddled enough already?" This is an attitude worth keeping in the back of one's mind as I move forward with additional, somewhat altered, thoughts on the subject.

In days gone by political parties held a central role in the nominating process. On the whole they produced far better candidates than have emerged through the primaries. I know of no good reason why they should not be returned to something similar to their earlier role. Both major parties would benefit from once again promoting candidates

of recognized distinction. Why not then have them actively participate in the selection process once again?

Primaries are sufficiently ingrained that removing them entirely at this stage would be near impossible. There are, however, intermediate or compromise methods which would bolster the parties role. I believe, furthermore, that these could be instituted without undue disruption or impenetrable difficulties. There are a variety of ways in which this could be accomplished.

Each of the two major parties could, for example, create a committee composed of a limited number of senior party figures such as state chairmen or members of Congress. Their precise makeup would likely stir a bit of controversy and require a degree of bargaining and negotiation. But once chosen, the committee would, through discussion and voting, select three or four nominees. The latter would constitute the party's formal choice, blessed to run in the primaries and take part in debates.

The question of the qualifications an individual would need to qualify as a nominee would include extensive experience in government or a major private institution. One possibility would require nominees to have served in one or more of the following: a state governor; a Senator for at least two terms; a member of the House for at least six terms; in a presidential Cabinet for at least two years; or have reached flag rank in the military. A broader option would include mayors of large cities, Federal court judges, and distinguished heads of significant private institutions.

Only the Democratic and Republican parties hold major primaries. As they are *party* primaries the parties should have the right to limit participation to candidates approved and certified in the manner suggested above. The gangs of twenty or more self-nominated upstarts who in recent years have taken part would be prevented from jumping

on the bandwagon. A great deal of squealing and some litigation would possibly result. But eliminating this farcical circus would in and of itself be a salutary development.

I am not so naive as to believe that the conversation we shall be having will convince anyone of anything or stimulate any material change. I am nonetheless surprised and disappointed that so few discussions of a similar kind are to be found in newspaper editorials, magazine articles, on television or in other public forums. Yet the problem, I am entirely convinced, is a real one. But at the moment little expectation exists that something will soon be done about it.

Frank Seidner    November, 2020