

Primary mulligans

by The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

The argument against Florida and Michigan "do-over" primary elections is that those states knew the rules: Jumping ahead without party sanction in the primary schedule would mean no delegates from those states would be seated at the Democratic National Convention.

The argument for seating the states' delegates anyway, without new elections, is that - patriotic music in the background breaking in robustly here - the people have spoken. They voted. It would be undemocratic to silence these voices. Both arguments are beyond thin. At stake is the perceived legitimacy of the Democratic nominee. The states' voters should not be penalized, with no voice at the convention, for the actions of limelight-seeking political leaders - those who made the decision to jump ahead. The Democratic National Committee stripped those states of all their delegates, while the Republican National Convention stripped half of them.

Since the candidates adhered to pledges not to campaign in Michigan and Florida, those elections were to elections what Cheez Whiz is to Wisconsin's finest. Seating the delegates anyway would benefit Hillary Clinton, since she won these faux elections. And while it may look like a level playing field since no one campaigned in those states, Barack Obama wasn't even on the ballot in Michigan. The solution is clearly another election.

Clinton told this Editorial Board while campaigning in Wisconsin's primary last month that she favored seating the two states' delegates, chosen from the initial election. It appears now that her campaign is not inalterably opposed to new primaries. Obama's camp wants the delegates split 50-50 or some other way but hasn't said it is opposed to a new primary, either.

The last thing either candidate or the party should want is a convention brokered by so-called super delegates, who might make a decision irrespective of the popular votes in the primaries. The potential for a fractured party is too great. And the uncompetitive general election that might follow doesn't suit loyalists from either party.

Over the weekend, DNC Chairman Howard Dean seemed to favor mail-in balloting as the best and most expedient way to achieve new elections, though he maintained his position that the national party wouldn't pay for this. The states are unwilling to pay for them, either.

One solution, then, is for the state parties to solicit funds and pay for the new primaries. In any case, Florida and Michigan must have re-votes, however it's paid for.

Lesson learned: Folks who try to jump in front of others in line can mess it up for a lot of people.

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