

Today's topic: GOP convention opens

# Lights! Camera! Action? Yes, but with muffled voices

## Our view:

A last bit of suspense (and reform) dies. And other convention notes.

Here it is, the first day of the Republican National Convention, and already the only remaining bit of real suspense has been removed. A merit-rich proposal to reform the GOP primary calendar was scuttled late last week by the Bush campaign. This means no reform can be in place before 2008 at the soonest.

The primary system in both political parties plainly needs fixing. With large states pushing their primaries nearer the beginning of the schedule, underdog candidates with scant resources with which to pay for extensive media campaigns in multiple states are left behind, gasping for money and traction as establishment candidates pull away.

This year, Texas Gov. George W. Bush won the GOP nomination before two-thirds of the states had voted. Vice President Gore disposed of his competition just as swiftly. The result is that extended political debate is stifled and voter interest is discouraged.

To its credit, the Republican National Committee recognized the problem months ago. Its solution: A four-stage primary schedule featuring the smallest states first, in February, and the largest ones last, in May. The idea was to keep more candidates competitive longer without nullifying the importance of the later primaries.

Some larger states don't like the idea of being pushed back and threatened a loud floor fight if it came up. This in turn threatened to crack the facade of unity the Bush campaign desires. Adopting the reform also would make it easier to challenge Bush in four years, should he win this fall.

So after a few well-chosen words from officials, the reform handily died in committee. Because party rules require a convention decision, it is now impossible to enact reforms for the 2004 race. At the start of a convention celebrating leadership and opportunity, the GOP has missed a golden moment for both.

**United they stand?** The desire to appear unified goes well beyond avoiding a floor vote on primary reforms. Viewers won't, for example, see anything like the bruising dissent Pat Buchanan delivered at the 1992 convention. In his place, viewers and delegates will experience an uncommonly orderly convention built around encompassing daily issues: opportunity today; strength and security on Tuesday; prosperity on Wednesday; and the presidency on Thursday.

There's a method to this mildness. While Buchanan was riling up the Republicans, the 1992 Democrats were muffling anti-abortion Pennsylvania Gov. Robert Casey. Those moments have come to exemplify a broader belief that to win, a party has to stifle dissent wherever possible.

Planners are subtler these days, but tight controls are still evident. There will be no angry abortion rhetoric, for instance. The platform voted on last week is as fiercely opposed to abortion rights as ever, but the fight has been tamped down. And to mitigate the



By J. Scott Applewhite, AP

**Clear view:** Worker cleans Republican National Convention's giant TV screen Sunday.

blunt views of party war horses, the speakers' list is heavy with soft-focus personalities. A single mom from Arkansas will speak about tax relief.

With public interest low and economic times good, the GOP can hardly expect to lure voters with angry jabs at the status quo. Or by promoting its least-popular positions. Presenting a front of warm fuzzies may be a smart tactic, but it doesn't mean divisions don't exist, only that voters don't get a chance to judge them.

In Philadelphia and in Los Angeles, where the Democrats similarly muzzling their liberal wing, claims of inclusiveness look more like demands for conformity. Which is the wrong message. The purpose of a big tent is just not to cover all comers, but to accommodate all kinds.

**Just keep smiling.** Philadelphia itself has a rare chance to shine this week, and in that spirit it has renovated historic Chestnut Street with fresh paint, fresh flowers and festive bunting. Still, the city has a hard reputation at risk of getting harder.

Video footage of police officers beating a wounded carjacking suspect almost three weeks ago was just the latest in a string of questionable episodes involving Philadelphia law enforcement dating back 20 years. And with 20,000 protesters expected, the possibility for additional police missteps is high.

As is normal with modern conventions, the city has set aside an area that protesters can reserve for one-hour allotments to make their case. But the space is far from the convention entrance, almost out of sight and earshot. Thus many activists are avoiding it, promising instead to conduct running protests that will sorely test police patience. Like the GOP, the city wants to put on a welcoming face. Can its 7,000 police do the same?

**Mr. Chairman.** The Great State of Confusion, home of the flying befuddlement, understands that the ceremonial roll call of the states, when they cast their delegate votes in a blizzard of hyperbole, is sometimes tedious and prone to run-on sentences, even though it provides many opportunities for learning which states produce "edible dried leaves" and which one has Republicans who are "finer than fine lobsters." But Mr. Chairman, is it really necessary to break the roll call out over three nights rather than run it out in one fell swoop, as is planned for Philadelphia? Mr. Chairman, the Great State of Confusion casts its one lonely vote for the traditional one-night roll call.

That thing is a classic!



By Michael Ramirez, Los Angeles

## Letters

# Sludge claims waste time, money

As a contractor thoroughly familiar with the beneficial reuse of municipal biosolids, I would like to respond to USA TODAY's Life-section Cover Story, "CDC sounds an alarm on the risks of sludge" (July 13).

In more than 15 years of treating, hauling and applying biosolids to land throughout Ohio, my company knows of no resulting health problems experienced by our employees or customers, or by the workers in any municipal wastewater treatment plants we serve.

In fact, our workers who have been exposed to untreated biosolids at treatment plants never have experienced related

health problems.

USA TODAY's article cites no direct evidence to contradict our experiences, and it quotes more than one source saying there never have been confirmed health problems associated with biosolids.

Regulations from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency — when correctly followed — help produce a completely safe product.

USA TODAY's report also makes mention of two mothers whose sons died of unknown causes and suggests that sludge might be to blame. How many mothers have sons who have become sick or died as a direct result of exposure

to commercial fertilizers, a there being a resulting cal materials?

As I see it, a ban on tre unwarranted, and a mand only a more expensive tr require municipalities to p added expense to their cu

Regulatory agencies sho time enforcing current reg than creating new legislat jerk reaction to unfou claims.

Michael R. B  
 Bi

## Bush has proud family heritage

George W. Bush has been criticized for having a former president as a father and for perhaps seeking his father's advice ("VP pick brings up father's shadow," News, Wednesday).

Seeking a father's advice is a bad thing? Seeking the advice of a former president is a no-no? Apparently, the Democrats, who continually portray this strength as a weakness, fear George W's famous name and honorable father.

Americans should disregard the hype, and the Republican Party should loudly proclaim the benefits of having a candidate with a presidential heritage.

Kenneth M. Shomo  
 St. Louis, Mo.

## Resign, Clinton

There's one surefire way for the Democrats to win the presidential race in November, and that would be for Bill Clinton to resign immediately and let Al Gore finish his term ("Gore narrows list of VP candidates," News, Wednesday).

Such a boost would erase the taint in the minds of voters disgusted by Clinton's personal faults, help separate Gore as his own thinker and prove he's more worthy of the office than George W. Bush.

Dawna Kaufmann  
 Los Angeles, Calif.

## Israel will not be used

What a relief. No agreement to cheat Israel out of more land ("Fears of violence heighten after collapse of peace talks," News, Wednesday).

Take that, President Clinton and Vice President Gore. Your legacies forever will remain that of corruption, lies and money laundering. Israel will not be your whipping boy anymore.

I think Clinton made Jerusalem his pawn and tried to extort Israel into securing his place in history. But he has interfered with Israeli politics for the last time.

Ari-Ben Kirschbaum  
 Forest Hills, N.Y.

## Dividing Jerusalem is wrong

I applaud the United States' heroic efforts in pursuing a binding Middle East peace. I am disturbed, however, by the news that the position of the United States is either to accept Jerusalem as the "undivided capital of Israel" or to have certain "Arab areas under the adminis-



**Fatal flight:** The scene after the crash of an Air France Concorde route to New York is seen from the air in Gonesse, a Paris suburb

# Jetliner tragedy hits hon

The tragic crash of Air France's Concorde leaves me with a distressed feeling that's not dissimilar to the way I felt when Princess Diana died ("The horror hits you," News, Wednesday).

Both events were distressing, in part, because they were reminders of the horrors that can happen to me.

When an overloaded passenger boat sinks in the Philippines, we shake our heads in pity, but few of us actually can identify with such misfortune.

Besides being so far removed from our everyday lives, it seems most unlikely that we would ever travel on such a distressed craft.

But, relative to the Concorde, most airplanes seem like distressed crafts. Surely, the majority of the world's commercial airliners can't be maintained as well or coddled as much by their owners as supersonic Concorde.

We are particularly touched by such a trickle-down tragedy because it lays bare our own vulnerabilities. That's why it's always especially alarming when the rich get hurt.

One of the benefits of money is that it buys a measure of safety. Rich people, in my view, are less exposed to harm than others. But the sobering lesson that the Concorde teaches is that there is no escaping tragedy in its en-

tirety, no matter how ric

## Concorde isn't a 'rel'

Just because not every ticket to fly on I doesn't mean that it is a ic" that should be forl ("World's most alluring futuristic relic," Cover, Wednesday).

I have traveled interna Concorde, and it is anoth pared to the big, slow, lur cars that airliners pass o jetliners."

Although the Concor mode of transportation quently, I dread the ti choice is no longer avail corde truly is a beautif not just to be observed, t rieved.

What is really sad is l last Concorde indeed ha people will cheer that markable achievement technology has been br Earth. Another step forv

# The Napster question