

20 Mar. 2012 Posted by Mr. Curmudgeon in [Mr. Curmudgeon](#) [1]

[Why GOP Elites Fear a Brokered Convention](#) [2]



[3]

Armies of GOP establishment-friendly commentators tell us the Republican primary process is ugly and self-destructive. Further, they insist should Romney prove incapable of gathering the necessary delegates to secure a first-ballot nomination, horror of horrors, it will result in a tumultuous brokered convention.

“The big change in American politics over the past two decades has been the decline of followership,” writes David Frum, the voice of the Republican establishment at *CNN.com*. “Party members expect the party to serve them – one major reason that both parties have drifted to the ideological extremes since the 1970s.

“That expectation would only be intensified and concentrated in a party convention with *Fox News* and talk radio whipping and riling the delegates into angry emotionalism.

“A decision-making convention in modern times won’t submit to the edicts of smoke-filled rooms. The delegates will want their own way.”

Does Frum strike you as a bit, well, elitist?

Isn’t the point of staging a convention so that delegates can vote to get “their own way”? If there is no clear winner in a first ballot, state delegations and grassroots activists will meet in smoke-filled rooms to wheel-and-deal for a candidate that meets their ideological criteria and is thought to have the best chance of defeating President Obama this November.

Abraham Lincoln emerged from the 1860 Republican convention in Chicago as the GOP’s Presidential nominee after three hard-fought ballots. That brokered convention eventually defeated a lawless rebellion, erased the stain of slavery from our Constitution and reassembled our union of states; not bad for a bunch of cigar-chomping guys in stovepipe hats – with a noisy anti-slavery wing referred to as “radical.” Viewing all men as created equal was decidedly “outside the mainstream” in its day.

So, why are Republican establishmentarians so frightened of a brokered convention?

In his forward to Craig Shirley’s book *Reagan’s Revolution: the Untold Story of the Campaign that started it all*, Fred Barnes, executive editor of the *Weekly Standard*, recalls the time when a defeated Ronald Reagan rose to address the delegates at the 1976 GOP convention (the Republican Party’s last brokered conclave) at the Kemper Arena in Kansas City:

“[Gerald] Ford and his allies expected Reagan to look like a loser, a humiliated foe. He didn’t once he began speaking.

“I now know from Craig Shirley that Reagan spoke without notes. But it didn’t seem like that was the case at the time. I thought Reagan, because he was so clear in what he was saying, must be reciting the text of what would have been his acceptance speech had he won the nomination.

“The audience – fifteen thousand people or so – was rapt. Some were weeping. Nobody got up. The arena was still. And Reagan was eloquent. It was obvious the delegates were his, the Reaganites and the Ford delegates. The Ford people were locked into backing an incumbent President of their party. But their hearts were with Reagan. In the time it took Reagan to

speak, the Republican Party escaped the clutches of its moderate establishment and fell into Reagan's lap. He lost the nomination, but won the party – and ultimately the Presidency, the country, and the world.”

In light of all the above, it's clear why establishmentarians are fearful. When the *Fox Business Network's* Eric Bolling recently asked Gov. Sarah Palin, “If it does get to that [a brokered convention], and someone said, ‘Governor, would you be interested,’ would you be interested?”

“If that is the case, all bets are off as to who it [the nominee] will be ... I would do whatever I could to help,” replied Palin.

Like Reagan, Palin would likely lose in a convention battle ... but she would have some transformative words to say to the assembled delegates. And her words might rescue the Republican Party from “the clutches of its moderate establishment” and place it, perhaps, in the lap of the Tea Party.

Tags: [GOP](#) [4]

[Convention](#) [5]

[Reagan](#) [6]

[Sarah Palin](#) [7]

1

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[4] <http://www.inthepublicsquare.com/taxonomy/term/51>

[5] <http://www.inthepublicsquare.com/taxonomy/term/80>

[6] <http://www.inthepublicsquare.com/taxonomy/term/81>

[7] <http://www.inthepublicsquare.com/taxonomy/term/82>