

How To Use The System -- And Win by

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Original title: Monkeywrenching The Republicans

Most of you have read "The End of Activism" and know that I oppose conventional "activism," where one sends a donation to some lobbying organization in the vain hope that it will protect one's rights. You've read my condemnations of both the National Rifle Association and the Utah Shooting Sports Council for their shameful support of ever more gun control. So you might be surprised to learn that I spent a Saturday last month at the Utah State Republican Convention--especially since I'm not a delegate, nor even a registered Republican.

Utah is essentially a one-party state, so people of all political persuasions take an interest in the Republican convention. Two of the first people I ran into this year were Democratic candidates for mayor of Salt Lake City. And last year's convention attracted quite a bit of attention. A Libertarian "fusion" candidate was escorted out of the building by armed Sheriff's deputies and denied the opportunity to speak, and several conservative Republican activists were arrested for distributing literature to delegates. There were also numerous complaints about Republican Party Chair Rob Bishop's chairing of the convention, which many people considered unfair and in violation of Robert's Rules of Order. And I'd heard rumors that the rank-and-file Republicans were unhappy with their elected officials' support for gun control. So this year's convention promised to be interesting.

Apparently the negative publicity resulting from the 1998 convention encouraged party officials to be more tolerant this year. Upon arriving Saturday, I was handed quite a bit of literature from both organizations and individuals. There were bylaws proposals, resolutions, campaign literature, and please for assistance on all manner of issues.

Most notable was an official-looking (but not official) booklet titled "1999 Republican Delegate Convention Guide," which listed Arnold Gaunt and Bruce Anderson as contacts. (I should mention that I know Mr. Gaunt from his work on both firearms rights and asset forfeiture, and that I met Mr. Anderson at a firearms meeting earlier this year.) The introduction to the guide stated: "The principles and ideals expressed in this Guide are based on the self-evident truths of the Declaration of Independence, The U.S. Constitution and its Bill of Rights, the Utah Republican Party Platform, lower taxes, and more individual freedom. We hope you share these beliefs, but respect your right to disagree." This sounded promising.

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The guide consisted of three sections. The first, "Your Rights as a Convention Delegate" addressed the issue of alleged abuses of power by the chair and listed common abuses of Robert's Rules, provided citations, and showed delegates with the proper response should they have questions for, or disagreement with, the chair. The second section was a proposed Constitutional Amendment that proposed a change in the method of delegate selection for the Republican National Convention. The third section provided carefully-documented arguments in favor of two resolutions relating to gun control. (The resolutions were mailed to delegates in the official delegate package and were not included in the guide.) On the back cover was the Bill of Rights.

Resolution 1 called for Utah's congressional delegation to oppose gun control legislation by all means necessary, and the guide contained a detailed and scathing analysis of Sen. Orrin Hatch's S. 254, the Juvenile Crime Bill, which had just passed the Senate. Resolution 2 requested that Gov. Leavitt refrain from calling a special session of the legislature to enact gun control legislation, although he had previously announced that he intended to call such a special session. The guide backed this with a detailed critique of the governor's gun control proposals, and provided alternative suggestions.

This all sounds terribly boring, doesn't it? Why would anyone spend a Saturday discussing the details of bylaws and amendments? Who cares about the minutiae of Robert's Rules? What good are resolutions? After all, isn't writing to legislators good enough-- especially since it rarely accomplishes anything? Wouldn't it have been more fun to stage a demonstration, or burn Congressmen in effigy?

That's what I thought too, and that's why I'm writing this column. In the face of the tidal wave of new and more tyrannical legislation, more and more people are despairing of having any influence on government. Some are talking about dropping out of society; others are talking about armed insurrection. But it turns out that sometimes playing by the rules and working within the system is remarkably effective. Doing so, and especially knowing how to do so effectively, can be a valuable tool, and should not be overlooked.

Back to the convention. The first thing I noticed was that party chair Rob Bishop did not chair the convention, as he did last year. I don't know whether this was his personal choice, or whether it was in response to the complaints about the previous convention. But Nolan Karras, who served as chair, did an exemplary job of following Robert's Rules scrupulously, and quite a few people who had attended the previous convention commented on the improvement.

While this superficially appeared to make the section of the guide on Robert's Rules moot, the truth is that it was quite effective. Because the delegates better understood the rules, they better understood what was going on at the convention. And because the rules were followed carefully, the chair fulfilled his obligation to make sure that each delegate knew exactly what was being discussed or voted upon at any given time. Even I was able to follow the proceedings without difficulty.

The first order of business was considering amendments to convention rules and then approving those rules. There was some initial sparring between the chair and the delegates that resulted in a challenge to the chair's ability to accurately judge voice votes and a rather lengthy head count of those voting for and against an amendment. It appeared to me that the delegates were establishing that they would not tolerate any questionable activities on the part of the chair, and were willing to force head counts if necessary.

The next part of the convention was devoted to speeches by Utah's elected officials at the state and federal level, all of whom are Republicans. (It *is* a one party state, as I said!) The governor, lieutenant governor, and each member of the Congressional delegation spoke. While one might expect that these officials would find their strongest support at the Utah State Republican Convention, such was not the case, especially for Gov. Leavitt and Sen. Hatch. In fact, the *Deseret News* reported that "The haze of gunsmoke hung over the Republican State Convention Saturday."

Although most of the delegates gave Gov. Leavitt a standing ovation, many remained seated, and a few even walked out. Leavitt seemed intent on presenting himself as a prime candidate for national office, and it's rumored that he's actively seeking the vice presidential spot in George W. Bush's campaign. Leavitt apparently believes that endorsing politically correct gun control is necessary to his higher aspirations.

He suggested that Republicans should acknowledge the necessity of "reasonable" gun control, and was booed. He passionately pronounced: "This is one Republican parent that doesn't want to send my children to a school that is protected simply by arming the teachers", and was met with shouts of "I do! I do!" After numerous attempts to sell his gun control agenda, all of which were loudly shouted down, he gave up and abruptly changed the subject. Gov. Leavitt is so out of touch with reality that it was later reported that he was surprised by this reaction.

Senator Hatch devoted most of his speech to defending S. 254, apparently in response to the

pending resolution. He tried to pretend that his bill was a necessary response to Democratic calls for more gun control, although it's essentially the same tyrannical bill he's been trying to get passed for years, with a few Democratic gun control amendments tacked on at his request. He condescendingly accused us of not appreciating how hard he's working to protect us from "Democrats". He resorted to the "you're too stupid to understand the realities of Washington politics" argument. He claimed that "all but 1% of the bill" was "solidly Republican". Unfortunately for him, the delegates had an analysis of S. 254 in their hands, and most of the people around me referred to it as he spoke. (Has anyone besides me noticed that S. 254 was originally labeled the Juvenile Justice Bill and is now more commonly called the Juvenile Crime Bill? Is this because the current version is a crime, and certainly doesn't promote justice?)

Hatch also tried to portray himself as a supporter of the Second Amendment by offering that he had once carried a concealed firearm as a Deputy U.S. Marshal. While I suspect that this reference was lost on the majority of delegates, at least a few of the ones I spoke with understood what that really meant. Hatch was actually saying that he, like many other Congresspeople including the notorious Dianne Feinstein, had circumvented state and federal firearms laws by being sworn as a Deputy U.S. Marshal. As deputies, these politicians are exempt from background checks, fingerprinting, training requirements, restrictions on concealed carry, and all the other bureaucratic nonsense they inflict on the rest of us. Hatch was admitting that, as a senator, he is "above the law" and needn't follow the same laws as the "ordinary citizens" he seeks to disarm.

Rather than an exuberant send-off for his (at the time) not yet announced presidential bid, to which much reference was made, Hatch received a muted, if not openly hostile, reaction.

Following the speeches, there was consideration of constitutional amendments and resolutions. There were quite a number of these. A resolution of non-support for "President Clinton's unconstitutional attack on the peoples of Kosovo" was enthusiastically passed. So was a commendation for Rep. Chris Cannon for his work as a House Manager during the impeachment trial. Other resolutions dealt with light rail, abortion, and primaries. But the two resolutions that attracted the most attention were the two dealing with gun control.

Resolution 1 concluded: "Resolved, That the Utah Republican Party requests that Utah's US Senators and Representatives uphold their oath of office by voting against all proposals and legislation that compromise or subvert the Second Amendment, and utilize whatever means are necessary, including the filibuster, to prevent their passage, so as to protect the inherent rights of Utahns and Americans."

This was a fairly strong and pointed condemnation of not only Sen. Hatch, sponsor of the abominable Juvenile Crime Bill, but also of Sen. Bennett, who voted for it. Remember that less than an hour before the resolution was considered, Hatch had spent most of his speech defending his bill. He had also provided a free breakfast for all delegates, which I believe he does every year. But he wasn't able to win enough support to stop passage of the resolution, by what seemed to me to be a sizeable majority. (It was a voice vote, so no numbers are available. But the room echoed with loudly shouted votes.)

Resolution 2 concluded: "Resolved, That the Utah Republican Party requests Governor Leavitt exercise prudence, responsibility, and restraint by not calling a special session of the Legislature for the purpose of enacting laws that infringe on the right of self-defense."

This resolution also passed by a large margin, at least based on the volume of voice votes. Combined with the previous loud heckling of Gov. Leavitt, it sent a rather strong message to the governor that he does not have the support of his own party, and that he will not be able to railroad his gun control agenda through the legislature as easily as he expected. (One can hope that this lack of support will deter his quest for higher office, but that's probably too much to hope for!)

"But what was actually accomplished with all this?" you may ask. After all, resolutions are non-binding. Orrin Hatch is still running for President and still pushing his horror of a bill. Gov. Leavitt still supports civilian disarmament, and in fact has become more militant about doing so since the convention.

A closer examination, however, reveals that some real progress has been made. Gov. Leavitt has stopped saying he will call a special "gun control" session of the legislature no matter what, and is now saying he'll call a special session "if there's consensus". The Speaker of the House, Marty Stephens, has gone on record as saying that he doesn't believe a special session is needed, and that he will hold bills in the Rules committee to force a vote to release them.

Obviously this is not solely the result of the convention. Utah's gun owners have been calling legislators, holding meetings, deluging newspapers with letters, attending interim sessions of the legislature, and otherwise mobilizing to preserve their rights. But Utah's Republicans can no longer pretend they have their party's support, nor that delegates support their liberal-socialist

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agenda. Whether the Republican delegates will take the next step and actually discipline elected officials for ignoring resolutions remains to be seen.

I certainly don't pretend that learning Robert's Rules, attending conventions and passing resolutions are going to return us to a limited, Constitutional government. They're not going to end corruption nor eliminate abuses of power. But working within the system is not particularly difficult, requires little money, and the tools are available to everyone. And I was surprised at how effective these tools can be when they're properly understood and skillfully used.

What I saw at the Republican Convention was not just the usual corruption and pandering that have turned off most thinking adults, but activism of the very best kind. Arnold Gaunt, Bruce Anderson, Neil Sagers (co-sponsor of one of the resolutions), and others didn't wait for someone else to tell them what to do, or to do it for them. They learned the system, mastered the rules and, acting as individuals, used what they'd learned to effect some concrete changes.

These techniques can work for members of any political party; I'm not suggesting that you rush out and become a Republican. There are disaffected members of all political parties, and I suspect that these techniques might work even better in smaller "third" parties. So if you do belong to a political party, learn how it works, and under what rules it operates. Consider becoming a delegate so that you can influence your party's platform and policies. Learn who makes the rules, how they do it, and how you can propose specific items you believe are important.

You can also use these ideas even if you choose not to belong to a specific party or get involved in party politics. Most political, lobbying, and charitable organizations have very similar rules and organizing principles.

So if you'd like to see some positive changes in a party or organization to which you belong, first learn the mission statement, platform, rules and organizational structure. It also helps to learn the culture of the organization and the personalities involved. Then decide on a limited number of goals or objectives; you can't change everything instantly. You're most likely to be successful if the organization's actual policies and behavior are in conflict with its stated mission and platform. (In this case the Republicans were violating their stated position of opposition to gun control, but it could just as easily be Libertarians who accept tax money.)

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Once you've chosen your goals, be prepared to carefully document the reasons others should support your proposals. Most people become actively involved in an organization because they care about an issue or issues, and they're generally receptive to new information. Education of your target audience is critical. Education about issues is not enough. You must also educate people to understand that *they* have the power and responsibility to control the organization; they're not just there to "rubber stamp" what "leadership" tells them to do. If you give people the tools they need to promote change, and provide some leadership, you're likely to be successful.

Is there something that you would like to see changed within a party or organization? If so, give this a try!

If you'd like to learn more, check out *Robert's Rules in Plain English* by Doris P. Zimmerman, Harper Perennial, 1997.

Happy Independence Day to all of you!

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