

Elephants and Donkeys by Kathleen Klenetsky

Open convention—or brokered convention

The gaping hole in the Democratic presidential field has given rise to talk about an open convention. Several party influentials, along with various media and think tank pundits, have recently proposed that, in view of the lack of suitable candidates to offer themselves thus far, the Democrats let the party convention, not the primaries, choose their presidential nominee.

Among those promoting the idea is John White, who served as party chairman under Jimmy Carter. Now a Washington consultant, White held a briefing for reporters Aug. 29, where he asserted that the party needs a candidate of “national stature,” and that the only way it could get one would be via an open convention.

White called the current field of potential Democratic candidates “really interesting people” with “unusual abilities,” but added dismissively: “They’re not at this point national candidates.”

White urged the Democratic governors of states with large electoral blocs to run in the primaries as “favorite sons.” Theoretically, this would tie up sufficient numbers of delegates so that no candidate would be able to come into the convention commanding enough votes to win the nomination. This would allow the convention to designate someone who did not run in the primaries at all to be the party’s compromise nominee.

White’s call has been seconded by, among others, *New York Times* columnist Tom Wicker, who wrote Sept. 3 that “the rare spectacle of a contested, hard-fought convention might produce high television ratings and a surge of enthusiasm for the ultimate victor.”

But are White et al. calling for a

true open convention, which would conduct a serious debate about policy issues and then choose the candidate most capable of presenting a real alternative to George Bush?

Or are they worried that the appalling dearth of Democratic presidential material will create an opening for a maverick candidate, such as Lyndon LaRouche, whose appeal to Democratic voters will increase exponentially as the economy continues to collapse and the “official” Democrats demonstrate that they have no idea what to do?

It is instructive that White stated outright that he would like to see the “open convention” tap either Sen. Lloyd Bentsen (Tex.) or New York Gov. Mario Cuomo as the party’s nominee. It would appear that at least some proponents of an open convention are actually talking about a brokered convention, i.e., one where the party’s potentates huddle in the proverbial smoke-filled room and anoint another dodo to be their presidential standard-bearer.

But opting for an open convention—even if the intent is to conduct a brokered convention—poses dangers for the party leadership. By next summer, the revolutionary ferment sweeping eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union might well be hitting the U.S., upsetting whatever apple-carts the Democrats’ putative kingmakers think they’ve set up. Under those circumstances, John White may get the surprise of his life: the first truly open convention in a long, long time.

Beware! Moonbeam’s back

Meanwhile, the Democratic presidential field looks like it’s about to receive a post-Labor Day infusion—although

the individuals slated to announce their candidacies will hardly fill the party’s so-called “stature gap.” In fact, they’re sure to make the “seven dwarfs” of 1988 look gigantic.

Among those now making noises about running is Jerry Brown, the erstwhile California governor who was such a fruitcake that he got nicknamed “Governor Moonbeam.” Brown, who spent time recently in Japan studying Zen Buddhism, sent out a 5,000-word letter in early September asking for support in mounting “an insurgent campaign against the entrenched leadership.”

Brown isn’t the only weirdo moving in that direction. Sen. Bob Kerrey of Nebraska may also soon throw his hat in the ring.

A protégé of billionaire investor Warren Buffett, Kerrey served as Nebraska’s governor from 1983-87, during which time he allowed a sexual abuse ring tied the failed Franklin Credit Union to flourish.

Bachelor Kerrey countered the strong rumors about his sexual preferences by striking up a highly publicized liaison with actress Deborah Winger, much as New York Mayor Ed Koch did with former Miss America Bess Myerson.

Kerrey has said that the major reason Buffett has backed him is “my strong stand on population control.”

And if that’s not bad enough, public television celebrity Bill Moyers’s name is being bandied about. Moyers—a former aide to President Lyndon Johnson—gave an interview to the Sept. 1 *Washington Post* which sounded an awful lot like a campaign statement. Among other things, he denounced George Bush as “the most deeply unprincipled man in American politics today. . . . I have watched him for almost 30 years and have never known him to take a stand except for political expediency.”