

National Committeeman Morton Blackwell's Report to Virginia's State Central Committee

Dear Fellow State Central Committee Members and other Virginia Republican leaders:

Because last Saturday's State Central Committee meeting in Richmond had already lasted close to seven hours, I chose not to make my scheduled National Committeeman's report at that time. I promised to send the SCC members my report by email. Here it is. Because it's written, I include considerably more details than I would have had time to share with you at our State Central Committee meeting.

You almost certainly know that fundraising by the Republican National Committee continues to far exceed what the Democratic National Committee is raising.

A leaked-or-hacked email scandal showed that the DNC itself was spending party resources to help Hillary Clinton win the Democrat nomination against rival Bernie Sanders. That scandal resulted in the firing of the DNC national chairwoman and several other top DNC officials. This top-down abuse will no doubt make fundraising more difficult for them during the fall election campaign. On the other hand, no one doubts the ability of Hillary Clinton and Gov. Terry McAuliffe to raise a lot of money.

Since Virginia is correctly viewed as a must-win state in November, the RNC has targeted Virginia for what shall probably be for us record amounts of financial resources, numbers of local campaign headquarters, and numbers of paid staff.

As the Republican National Convention began last month in Cleveland, everyone knew that Donald Trump had won a majority of the delegate votes and would be our nominee. The business of the delegates focused on the 2016 Party Platform and proposed amendments to The Rules of the Republican Party.

As you heard earlier from our new Virginia Republican National Committeewoman Cynthia Dunbar, one of Virginia's two members of the Platform Committee, our 2016 Party Platform was solidly conservative, perhaps the most conservative platform ever adopted by a Republican National Convention.

With Anne Gentry, I represented Virginia on the 2016 Convention Rules Committee.

Having attended meetings of the national Convention Rules Committee since 1972 and having represented Virginia at the national Convention Rules Committee meetings since 1988, I have focused on preserving and prudently increasing the ways in which power in our party can flow from the bottom up and resisted changes that would centralize power in the national party and that would increase the flow of power from the top down.

The field of candidates for our 2016 presidential nomination contained many serious candidates who were more conservative than anyone we have nominated for President since Ronald Reagan. Probably for that reason, the 2016 Convention Rules Committee included a greater number of grassroots conservatives than at any convention since Reagan was our candidate.

At the 2012 national convention, debate centered on consideration of rules amendments pushed by the Romney campaign. None of those changes affected Romney's inevitable nomination, but virtually all were designed to centralize power in the national Republican Party.

In 2012, grassroots-oriented conservatives like me were greatly outnumbered by committee members who supported whatever our presumptive nominee's campaign wanted. The Rules Committee passed a host of centralizing rules changes, but the naked power grabs outraged a great many of the convention delegates. There was a huge uproar when the Rules Committee report came up for consideration by the full convention. For that reason, hundreds of delegates went home furious at the Romney campaign.

Business at the 2016 national Convention Rules Committee meeting was very different. Unlike in 2012, debate there centered largely on decentralizing amendments proposed by a reform coalition of grassroots conservatives.

As you can see in [the detailed report](#) written by Virginia Delegation chairman Ken Cuccinelli, most of the decentralizing proposals were voted down.

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Reform proposals would have fared better if the party establishment, always in favor of centralizing power in the party, had not successfully spread the false story that our reform coalition secretly intended to pass a rules change to unbind all delegates whose votes were bound as a result of party primaries.

That was not true, but the story frightened most Trump supporters and turned them against reforms they would otherwise be expected to support.

In the spring and early summer, I personally gave at least 70 media interviews in which I strongly opposed any effort to change the rules regarding the nomination process at the 2016 national convention.

After a significant number of the states had held their primaries or state conventions, I said that there were only two ways to change the rules regarding the convention's nominating process. Those two ways, I said, were by consensus among the major players who led big voting blocs at the convention (Donald Trump, Ted Cruz, and Reince Priebus) or after a fierce battle at the convention that would disastrously split our party.

Events at the Convention Rules Committee proved me right. A lot of smoke had been generated regarding a rules change to unbind the bound delegates. But such a change was never possible. The proposed rule to unbind the delegates received only 12 of the 112 votes on the Convention Rules Committee.

The proposals offered by our reform coalition on the 2016 Convention Rules Committee were largely shot down, but the Convention Rules Committee and the national convention made some good rules changes and some bad ones.

Three good rules changes that passed:

1. The Romney campaign had changed the 2012 rules to require, for being eligible for a nomination speech at the convention, that a candidate had to demonstrate support of the majority of the delegates from at least eight states' delegations. The previous rule, adopted in 2008, required the support of only a plurality of the delegates from five states.

The 2016 convention dropped the 2012 rule and adopted the 2008 rule for the 2020 national convention.

2. The Romney campaign had changed the rules in 2012 and required that no votes could be counted on the ballot for our presidential nomination unless the candidate voted for had demonstrated support of a majority of the delegates in at least eight state delegations.

So at the 2012 convention, during the roll call of the states, each state delegation chairman called out the number of delegate-votes each candidate had won in that state, but the convention secretary repeated only the number of delegate votes cast from that state for Romney. And on the final tally of the vote after the roll call of states, only the votes cast for Romney were counted and announced.

Hundreds of duly elected delegates at the 2012 national convention who cast their votes properly as required by their state party rules went home furious because their legitimate votes weren't even counted.

Delegates had never been disenfranchised like that before in the history of Republican National Conventions.

Our Virginia delegation to the 2012 national convention was outraged, including many of us who worked hard for Romney and contributed generously to his campaign. Pat Mullins, our state party chairman in 2012, said then that this abuse probably cost Romney 100,000 votes in Virginia.

Those who have followed national rules matters since 2012 and those interested enough to review [my postings](#) on RedState.com know that I fought vigorously for the past four years to undo this awful rule from 2012.

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And I won this battle in Cleveland.

As the rules now stand, during the presidential nomination roll call at the 2020 national convention, because of amendments I introduced and got passed:

- a. each state delegation chairman will announce the number of delegate-votes won by each candidate under state party rules and state law,
 - b. the convention secretary will repeat those vote totals for the state, and
 - c. all votes cast by delegates who vote according to their state party rules and state law will be included in the final tally of votes for each person who received votes on that ballot.
3. Anne Gentry, my colleague from Virginia on the Convention Rules Committee in both 2012 and 2016, introduced and got passed a national rules change that solves a problem that affected Virginia this year.

The national rules had provided that contests regarding the conduct of congressional district conventions could be appealed first to that state's state party convention.

But this year in Virginia we had many congressional district conventions after our state convention.

Thanks to Anne's successful rules-change proposal, when a contest arises from a congressional district convention that occurs after the statewide convention, the state party committee may hear and resolve the contest, pending a future appeal to the national convention's Credentials Committee.

Two bad changes enacted this year:

1. Since 1992, the national Rules of the Republican Party provided that any resolution proposed by an RNC member would be considered for passage by the entire RNC if that resolution had the support of at least ten RNC members from at least ten states. This rule was used often to pass many good resolutions.

This rule sometimes resulted in consideration and passage by the RNC of conservative resolutions that made uncomfortable some people in the party establishment.

So in this cycle, the establishment changed the rule and raised the threshold. Now a resolution arising from the conservative grassroots is not automatically in order unless it has the support of at least two members from at least ten states. That doubles the number of supporters required, but in reality the change makes it much, much harder to have a resolution considered by the RNC if the party establishment would rather not vote on it.

Of course, any proposed resolution is subject to a motion to table it without debate, and the RNC chairman has always had a majority, generally a super-majority, of the RNC members ready to vote as the chairman wishes. Under the new rule, though, a national chairman may never even have to signal that he wants a resolution tabled. This change will often amount to a gag rule against even consideration by the full RNC of conservative grassroots priorities.

2. Each state delegation to the national convention elects a man and a woman to each of the four national convention committees. Routinely the RNC establishment has delayed providing members of the national convention committees the contact information of their fellow members of those committees. Meanwhile the RNC uses for the establishment's purposes the contact information of those committee members that they receive from the state parties.

So the newly elected convention committee members cannot contact each other for a long time during which the party establishment can. Thus it is virtually impossible for grassroots conservatives on the convention committees to network with other members until after the establishment has its network in place on each convention committee.

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This unfair practice was so obnoxious that grassroots conservatives succeeded in 2012 in passing a new rule, Rule 41(c), which applied to the 2016 national convention. That Rule 41(c) read:

"No later than twenty-five (25) days prior to the national convention, all members of each of the various convention committees shall be provided the most current listing of their fellow committee members, with complete contact information."

But the RNC did not comply with this rule in 2016.

As has happened before other conventions, RNC employees began personally contacting Convention Rules Committee members. They established relationships with committee members and formed an establishment floor organization to control the Convention Rules Committee.

Exactly twenty-five days prior to the 2016 national convention, members of the Convention Committee on Rules and Order of Business received from the RNC a list of fellow members of that committee and only their email addresses, not their complete contact information as the national rules required.

Nevertheless, a large number of conservatives on the Convention Rules Committee who are committed to encouraging a flow of power in the party from the bottom up were soon able to form a reform coalition and to begin drafting proposed amendments to the national party rules.

The reform coalition's proposals, discussed in [the report](#) by former Virginia Attorney General Ken Cuccinelli, forced the party establishment on the defensive for much of the Convention Rules Committee meeting.

The establishment had a highly-organized, working majority on the committee, so they systematically defeated the proposed decentralizing reforms. And they replaced the wording of Rule 41(c) that grassroots conservatives had put into the rules in 2012. Here is the wording of the new Rule 41(c) that the establishment rammed through at the Cleveland convention:

"No later than twenty-five days prior to the national convention, all members of each of the various convention committees shall be provided the most current listing of their fellow committee members' names. The contact information of members of the Convention Committee on Rules and Order of Business shall be confidential. The Republican National Committee shall create a system by which the public may contact the designated member of the Convention Committee on Rules and Order of Business by state that permits the members to retrieve those messages."

So in the run-up to the 2020 national convention, the RNC establishment will have all the contact information for Convention Rules Committee members, to use as they please, as soon as the state Delegations elect them. But without major and probably incomplete research to compile each other's contact information independently, the members of the 2020 Convention Rules Committee will have to communicate among each other through an electronic system controlled and monitored by the RNC establishment.

In my re-election campaign this year, I pledged to support our party's presidential nominee, and I do support him, financially and politically. Donald Trump was not my first choice for our presidential nomination, but I urge all party leaders and activists to support Donald Trump for President and Mike Pence for Vice President.

You may not like everything Donald Trump does, but you won't like anything Hillary Clinton does. She would be a disaster for every conservative principle you and I share.

Morton Blackwell
Virginia Republican National Committeeman