

MICHIGAN'S CLUSTERFUCK: PRELUDE TO A NATIONAL CLUSTERFUCK?

I'm not the only one calling MI's primary next week a clusterfuck—one of the state's top Dem consultants, Mark Grebner, thinks so too, though he doesn't use the word clusterfuck:

Of course, we may get lucky, but that's not really "a plan". With Clinton bouncing back tonight in NH, it's plausible that she and Obama will go round after round, with neither scoring a knockout.

Imagine next that Michigan's "primary" results in a Clinton landslide on January 15, caused mainly because the opposition will be confused and splintered by the available options. I don't know whether that will happen, but it may.

The consequence might be that Michigan's would-be delegation would prove critical to forming a majority. Not at the Convention, most likely, but during the wheeling and dealing phase that leads up to it, as the two sides struggle to assemble a majority.

If this comes to pass, the fight will be between Clinton's effort to seat Michigan, and Obama's struggle to uphold the DNC sanctions. One side extending pseudo-grace and forgiveness to our transgressions, while the other side asks in pseudo-good-faith, why he should be punished for complying with the DNC's rules and following their instructions.

[snip]

My question is: is there some reason

■ this can't happen?

I'm marginally less worried than Grebner is about the Democratic side (though trust me—he's a lot smarter about MI politics), mostly because I'm taking naive solace in the fact that "uncommitted" will appear on ballots, meaning Edwards and Obama supporters won't have to navigate what would be effectively a write-in vote, but with a legally significant word, to support their candidate. That doesn't mean Democratic voters won't choose to vote in the Republican primary, doesn't mean that those cross-over voters won't be decisive as they were in 2000 for McCain, and doesn't mean either party will get a real read of the support for its various candidates from the clusterfuck. It just means that Hillary will win by a smaller landslide (hey—with both Edwards and Obama supporters voting on the same line, who knows?), which will make the clusterfuck imagined by Grebner slightly less severe, though still a real possibility.

Me, I'm more intrigued by the way that Michigan's clusterfuck may begin to set off a larger clusterfuck for Republicans. There has been no polling in Michigan since mid-December, and in that poll Huck scored remarkably well. I can imagine that a wingnut populist might appeal to Michigan's depressed Reagan Democrats, to say nothing of the Dutch Reform Christians who run the Republican party in the western part of the state. In any case, Huck just announced he will send some bodies here before South Carolina, in which he promises to do very well.

So we won't just get the Romney (son of a former popular MI governor) and McCain (beat Bush here in 2000) head-to-head I had imagined. Though in **that** presumed contest we are already seeing some sour grapes that have been rotting since 2000, with the spokesman for former Governor Engler (whose failure to deliver the state in 2000 lost him an opportunity to serve in Bush's cabinet) predicting demise for McCain.

"I think McCain will have a good showing, but if he doesn't win, this could almost be it for him," said John Truscott, a Republican consultant and spokesman for former Michigan Gov. John Engler.

Rather, we'll have all three reasonably viable Republican candidates, competing in a very very weird vote that will be even less predictable than last night's Democratic primary in NH.

Which is why I find this statement from Ricky "Man on Dog" Santorum so remarkable.

Former Senator Rick Santorum said the results were the latest indication that Republicans were in for an epic battle among a field of imperfect candidates for the party's conservative base.

"It comes back to, O.K., Romney can't win, Huckabee can't win, McCain can't win, Giuliani can't win – the dynamic is you have a bunch of candidates who can't win," Mr. Santorum said. "I don't see how we don't come down to a convention that is going to decide this thing."

Here's the thing—I think Romney, McCain, and Huck are all viable in MI; it'll be the first state (and the only one before Florida) where it'll be a three-way race among all these candidates "who can't win." But it's going to be a very weird vote, with one week, no polling, high costs, and the whole cross-over thing, to confuse the issue. I suspect McCain will win, but I also suspect this primary may end up stumping the pundits even more than Hillary's win last night did, even as it takes on unexpected importance.

Which makes it very possible it will elicit more comments like Man on Dog Santorum, with people already—after just the second or third state—predicting a brokered convention and hoping (presumably) for some nationally viable

candidate to save the poor GOP from the clusterfuck it's heading towards.

Or maybe Man on Dog Santorum is just seeding that possibility, believing he would be any more of a savior for his party than any of these nutcases are.