

DO IOWANS CARE MORE ABOUT FAMILY AND CHRISTMAS THAN GOP PRIMARY REALITY SHOW?

Today is the day of the year when a bunch of Big 10.2 teams get thumped in bowl games. As such, it is a key part of the holiday season for college football fans, including those who live in the Midwest.

Tomorrow is the day of the Presidential electoral season where a few hundred thousand Iowans go to caucuses and exercise a unwarranted amount of control over who our next President will be.

Mind you, last Friday was the day when both Iowa and Iowa State got thumped in bowl games, but if these Iowans are Sugar Bowl fans, tomorrow is also the day when people stay home to watch the game rather than get herded around a crowded room for several hours. (The caucus was just one day later, on January 4, in 2008, though bowl games were skewed earlier because of the calendar.)

The juxtaposition of the heart of bowl season with the IA caucuses shows that we've arrived at that state invoked so often by those raising concerns about the logical outcome of the Mutually Assured Destruction on primary timing of the last decade or so: when the holiday season basically became campaigning season (though some raise the specter of pre-Christmas votes, too).

Isn't it about time that some of the bajillions of reporters on the ground in Iowa do some reporting on whether or not this is good for democracy? Rather than tracking granular differences in polling numbers or thinking of different ways to say "Santorum Surge," couldn't

some of these reporters interview Iowans—those caucusing as well as the majority who won't caucus—to find out whether they paid more attention to their family's regular Christmas celebration or the political circus being staged around them?

I don't doubt that the volatility in polls this year stems, in significant part, from the terrible candidates in the GOP field; none of them, it seems, can survive the scrutiny of a few weeks. But I also wonder whether the timing plays a part. That is, it's likely that a goodly number of likely caucus goers haven't been concentrating all that much on whether Newt will force their grand kids to quit school and instead take a unionized janitor's job, whether Mitt will outsource their jobs, and which of them are promising to start a war with Iran. The Des Moines Register's highly respected poll says 41% of those polled may change their mind. Isn't it possible that these citizens who have been entrusted with such power over our political system simply have been doing what the rest of us have been, enjoying one of the only weeks of the year when we get to spend extended time with our families?

Maybe it's time we actually figured out whether waging an electoral campaign as if it were background Christmas Muzak is good for democracy.