

## Andrea Gyger

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**From:** John S Wren [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Monday, May 22, 2017 3:58 PM  
**To:** SoS Rulemaking  
**Cc:** [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** Comments - working draft election rules.



**John Wren**  
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May 22, 2017

To: Colorado Secretary of State Wayne Williams  
Re: Amendments to Colorado's Rules Concerning Elections (8 CCR 1505-1)

This is in response to your request for input regarding forthcoming enabling rules for the cobbled-together SB305, chaos out of the chaos created by the surprise passage of the extraordinarily poorly conceived and poorly drafted Propositions 107 and 108.

I urge you to scrape the rules altogether and do whatever necessary, possibly precipitating a special session of the legislature, to totally void the misguided SB305 and its evil mother and father, Propositions 107 and 108. The Propositions passed only because of the powerful propaganda, a distorted picture pounded into people with a very expensive saturation-advertising and publicity campaign, with no real organized opposition.

Why no organized opposition? It was thought social media alone would be enough to stop such obviously harmful-to-most propositions.

Even if 107 and 108 aren't vacated by the legislature, Colorado election law is too important and too complicated to be changed as it was in the very rushed end of session SB305. Adopting rules around the fun-house mirror of 305 will undoubtedly turn into the nightmare of a long, expensive, divisive, and needless legal battle. The only ones who will benefit are lawyers and political consultants.

It would be appropriate for this all be taken up this summer. Our wonderful Colorado Caucus was adopted in a special session the summer of 1912 that was called by then Gov. John "Honest John" Shafroth over the objections of powerful elite forces.

Ever since, our wonderful grassroots, neighborhood-strengthening Colorado Caucus has been under constant attack by wave-after-wave of new storm-troopers sponsored at root by those same powerful forces and their dupes, driven by a desire to have an educated-on-the-east-coast elite in control of Colorado politics.

As it stands now, major political parties will have the right under Colorado law to eliminate the caucus-assembly as a way to nominate to the primary ballot. They can be expected to do this. Going to the party-convention-only ballot access would greatly increase the power of the major parties, the power that Honest John Shafroth brought down in that special session in 1912 with the true grassroots reforms that were sweeping the

country at that time: referendum, recall, initiative, and, most importantly, the neighborhood caucus system that gave the grassroots, the common person, a real voice.

It might be argued that the “open” primary (proposed simultaneously with the Presidential primary proposition as a distraction, in my opinion) will offset this increase in party power, but it is easy to see that is just will not the case, at least not for long.

But I don't believe the chaos of an open primary will last more than one election cycle. It will be promptly corrected by the legislature after a disastrous 2018 Caucus and the outrage that will surely come from it. It's reasonable to expect the Tammany Hall-like political parties, will be firmly in charge of Colorado by that time. Then it will be almost impossible to get out from underneath the burden of the expensive, black-box Presidential primary for selecting Presidential electors for what has, temporarily I hope, become the meaningless vote in the Electoral College.

My friend Sue O'Brien was the conscious of Colorado politics before here untimely death. She was a great defender of the Colorado Caucus. Sue's wonderful column, one of here last, is still very much worth reading as a reminder of why our caucus-convention system is worth preserving:

***Caucuses aren't for ciphers***

*by Sue O'Brien*

*cipher - a person or thing of no importance or value; nonentity*

*- New World College Dictionary*

*So, what will we choose to be: ciphers or individuals?*

*Ciphers are faceless. They have value only as something to count - a signature on a petition or a vote to tally by machine. It's easy for ciphers to hide out. Hey, they're just part of the mob.*

*Individuals, by contrast, stand out. They t responsibility. And they rarely hide.*

*We have a sovereign opportunity to become ciphers this November. One of the few mechanisms left in modern politics that rewards individual initiative - the precinct caucus - is on the brink of being eliminated in favor of a political nominating system that would let wannabe candidates get on the ballot only by collecting - and counting - petition signatures.*

*It's a lousy proposal put forth by an otherwise admirable organization: the Bighorn Center for Public Policy.*

*Now, I have nothing against getting on the ballot by petition. But why eliminate the choice - caucus or petition - that our present system provides?*

*It's not as though there's something inherently wrong with the caucus. And, even though these grassroots conclaves have seen declining attendance in recent years, there's a lot inherently good about them.*

*Look around modern society. We have a woeful lack of what Harvard scholar Robert Putnam calls "social capital" - the dynamism that comes from doing things together and making community decisions together. Yet the spate of election "reforms" we're seeing these days almost seems designed to stomp out the last vestiges of community collaboration.*

*"Voting and following politics are relatively undemanding forms of participation," writes Putnam in his influential "Bowling Alone." "In fact, they are not, strictly speaking, forms of social capital at all, because they can be done utterly alone."*

*We can be utterly alone, too, when we perform the two other actions modern politics seems to want to limit us to: writing checks and watching attack ads on TV. We're systematically replacing "social capital" with plain old monetary capital.*

*Colorado's traditional caucus-convention system, in contrast, rewards the shoe-leather and diligence. It provides a low-cost way for aspirants to work the neighborhoods, investing energy instead of dollars. Recent proof of this pudding came in the race for the GOP **nomination** in the 7th Congressional District, where Rick O'Donnell captured **first** line on the primary ballot with a low-budget campaign that focused on traditional caucus and door-to-door campaigning. O'Donnell eventually lost the primary to the better-funded Bob Beauprez, but his achievement in getting on the ballot was impressive.*

*But even more important than the caucus' benefits for candidates is its benefit for ordinary citizens. It's a vibrant neighborhood forum for hashing out ideas - the last remaining arena in which you can get on the first rung of the ladder toward political effectiveness by just showing up.*

*I've covered precinct or town caucuses in Iowa, Maine, Minnesota and Mississippi as well as Colorado. My favorite memory is of escorting a big-deal network analyst to his very first caucus in an American Legion hall in Iowa. This was a political expert well into his 50s, yet he'd never seen a caucus; primaries had always been his beat. He was blown away. For the first time in years of covering politics, he told me, he'd seen the true face of America.*

*He was right. Caucuses offer a peculiarly intimate view of a community and its people. They'll amaze you with the quality of caring and thought participants bring to the discussion. And sometimes, if you're very lucky, you'll see new, young leaders find their first toehold in the process.*

*Why is the Colorado caucus withering? First, because the legislature, in an ineffectual grab for national headlines, created a meaningless presidential primary that eliminated the headline race that once inspired much caucus activism.*

*Second, because we're all getting good at sitting on the sidelines. The Kettering Foundation's David Mathews once reminded readers that the word idiot comes from the Greeks. Privately, they thought, was akin to stupidity. "Idiots" were incapable of finding their place in the social order.*

*Why bow to the trend of letting the next guy do it? Why sell out to letting money replace shoe-leather at every level of American politics?*

*Why not keep the caucus as an open door to involvement, while continuing to provide the petition alternative? Bighorn's goal may be to increase the number of people peripherally involved in the process - but the initiative will never replace the quality of participation the caucus can provide.*

*Good political talk ... is where we recognize the connectedness of things - and our own connectedness. ... Good political talk is also where we discover what is common amidst our differences. -David Mathews, "Civic Intelligence"*

Sue O'Brien was editor of the Denver Post editorial page.  
[For more about Sue and original of this column, click here.](#)

Mr. Secretary I urge you to do whatever is necessary to see that the legislature vacate Propositions 107 and 108. If this is not done, they will certainly be attacked through other means by those who wish to limit the power of an east coast elite, both liberal and conservative, as they continue their attempt to move beyond Aspen and Boulder and to take control of the entire state of Colorado.

Respectfully submitted,

John Wren

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