Madame Chair

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In February 1971 the Democratic National Committee met and adopted a preliminary call for the next convention to be held in Miami on July 19, 1972. This call specified the number of delegates from each state and emphasized selecting delegates in accordance with the rule changes. Most importantly, each state had to guarantee that the unit rule had not been used at any stage of the delegate selection process, and that all prospective delegates were allowed a full and timely opportunity to participate.

In October 1971 we met again and adopted as temporary rules of the convention those recommended by the commission on rules. These included the procedures by which delegations could be challenged for not living up to the new guidelines; also they allowed for minority reports by a vote of 10 percent of the Credentials Committee or other such committees. They also set up temporary procedural rules, which became crucial in 1972 and at the convention itself. For instance, one contest allowed individuals whose names were included on the temporary roll to vote on all matters except their own credentials contest; another specified that the Rules Committee should nominate the convention chair and set the order of business. Finally, the DNC designated the makeup of the standing committees, where presidential politicking had already begun. Instead of two members on each of the standing committees (Credentials, Rules, and Platform) each state was given one spot. Ninety-five more spots were then assigned proportionately, with California and New York each receiving nine, while some states and territories received no additional spots.

The acting chair of the Credentials Committee was to be elected upon nomination from either the chair and executive committee, or by a member from the floor. The national chair was to choose the acting
Call for the 1972 Convention

chairs, subject to ratification by the executive committee. In interpreting the rules, the chair of the convention could have recourse to the rulings by chairs of previous conventions, any congressional precedents, and general parliamentary procedures.

Harold Hughes had withdrawn from the presidential race by the time we met in October, but members of the Reform Commissions wanted him to become Credentials chair to be sure the new rules were followed in seating delegates. Larry O’Brien felt the choice of that chair should be his own personal prerogative—a final chance to secure his support from labor and other big donors. He pulled together a coalition of labor and Humphrey supporters and then nominated attorney Patricia R. Harris, a former ambassador to Luxembourg.

Strategically her selection would 1) impress the media by visible reform, for she was African American; 2) highlight her undeniable eminence in civil rights and government posts; and, 3) emphasize obedience to the new rules. However we reformers felt otherwise. We suspected that anti-reform regulars planned a battle in the Credentials Committee, and that their intent had encouraged sloppiness in conforming to the pre-convention rules. In response, O’Brien enlisted Al Barkan, who directed the political arm of the AFL-CIO, to lobby for Harris.

McGovern asked me to nominate Senator Harold Hughes, of Iowa, in the committee meeting, but I had another idea. We asked Pat Harris to chair the Platform Committee, where women’s issues and minority rights would be debated. Then Hughes would chair the Credentials Committee instead of Harris.

When Pat Harris declined the Credentials post, black leaders, including Shirley Chisholm, encouraged her to withdraw entirely. Endorsing Hughes (actively or secretly) were Chisholm, Fred Harris, Kennedy, McCarthy, McGovern, and Muskie. Some remained detached, including Birch Bayh, Humphrey, Jackson, Lindsay, Wallace, and Sam Yorty, the last from Los Angeles. No one endorsed Pat Harris as Credentials Chair.

Next, O’Brien put his personal prestige on the line, saying he would resign if he lost the vote. Accordingly, the Humphrey/labor coalition (still a power in the DNC) roused itself, and Harris won the Credentials chair with a lopsided vote. We mustered only our twenty-nine guaranteed reform votes on the other side. As far as I was concerned, this skirmish showed O’Brien’s true colors regarding the new rules, which eventually would be decided in our favor in the Credentials Committee. And yet the media continued to praise O’Brien as the leader of the reform movement.
By 1972 I relied on a good chair and staff in every state. Still, I visited most states as their caucus or primary approached just to make sure that all went well. Needless to say, six months of that proved exhausting. Our staff in Washington had grown, and some came West to assist us. I sent one of them to organize the charming but impoverished ward that included Guadalupe, a town between Tempe, South Phoenix, and Ahwatukee. A devout liberal, our staffer had difficulty seeing beyond the rats, unpainted walls, and dirt floors to note the Spanish street signs, front yard shrines, and brightly-painted houses, not to mention two white churches on a gravel square. The Catholic church, one of the oldest continuously serving chapels in the nation, served Latinos. The other, nearly as tenured, blended Yaqui traditions with Christianity.

Guadalupe often sheltered Latinos who had recently crossed the border and needed to get their bearings. It lay on a Yaqui Indian reservation, which prevented its affluent neighbors from turning it into a golf course or opening a mega-church. Matters in Guadalupe also raised myriad questions of jurisdiction.

I missed spending time in Guadalupe, for I focused on drawing support from every registered voter. Many western states were still caucuses or semi-primary states, and we needed people—off the streets, if necessary—who would vote in the primary and in the election. I had to devise a method to let people know where McGovern stood on other issues than the war in Vietnam.

We put together an issues booklet, but it took so long to reproduce in an attractive format that we mostly used the single-issue sheets developed earlier. Also, I asked to send people out into whole voting districts where we probably had a strong chance. These included South Phoenix. As acres of citrus orchards disappeared on its eastern edge, an area was transforming into a *barrio*. I focused on districts with high Democratic registrations, or with minority prominence, or those located near a university where anti-war sentiment flourished.

As other candidates, we faced Muskie, Bayh, Harris, and Lindsay, for the former mayor of New York had many Arizona connections plus money to burn. Although Humphrey had not announced, an uncommitted group supported him anyway. We knew Muskie had been endorsed by the state chair and the governor, and we suspected that Raul Castro (a future governor) also favored Muskie. I finally got Bill Mahoney, a Kennedy man and former ambassador to Ghana, to resist endorsing anyone but McGovern. I felt it crucial that we lasso some Arizona delegates even though McGovern insisted none were available. Some staffers
thought we could get three; ever the optimist, I was hoping for six. We ended up with five, half of the ten committed delegates. Muskie kept nine delegates, and Lindsay walked away with six.

For the next few weeks I attended strategy meetings in the East, sometimes flying on the campaign plane. On those flights I grew especially fond of Bill Dougherty, the committeeman for South Dakota, who seemed one of our more level-headed advisors. While I worked Arizona, others ran New Hampshire and Iowa. Then I made a circuit of the Rocky Mountain states, including long telephone calls to Hawaii and Alaska.

Because the Arizona primary came so early, I later corralled Jim Walsh, Jack and Dunny Phelps, and others to assist in state primaries. Liberals in the state of Washington came to Portland to meet with me; another weekend, I met them in Seattle. We wanted to confront Senator Henry Jackson on some measure, and selected three districts in Washington.

I took Jim with me to Vancouver to begin organizing, enlisting, and training volunteers. Again, we used our door-to-door tactics, which worked. In a week we won that district. In Seattle we chose a black district and a liberal union district, where we had worked all year, and scooped up delegates in both. I persuaded Vancouver’s young mayor, Don Bonker, to endorse McGovern and run as delegate. (Bonker later became a force in Congress.) We would lose the Washington delegates in the Credentials Committee at the convention, but of course we did not know that yet; it represented another instance of O’Brien favoring the power structure. The McGovern forces decided not to fight for those three delegates.

However, Illinois and Wisconsin were critical states, to which we dedicated March and early April. Gene Pokorny had won Nebraska and was running that region. I spent only a week in the suburbs north of Chicago because McGovern was not doing well in Illinois. My visit helped, and we eventually carried part of the area. By then Pokorny was running Wisconsin. He called and said, “I just can’t handle the whole state. Jean, we are going to lose unless you come in and take over half the state.”

So off I went to run the half west of Madison, where Humphrey was strong. We had to carry liberal Madison or we were not going to win. By the August convention, we had secured fifty-five of their sixty-one delegates. On primary night I stayed late in Madison, and then drove through a snowstorm to join the celebration in Milwaukee.

Then I came back to work in the West, mainly a caucus region, with local delegates moving on to county and state gatherings as they did in Utah. These meetings were too small for McGovern to attend, so I made
most of the speeches, with help from Frank Mankiewicz. Heavily unionized Nevada split between McGovern and Jackson, who by then was running well in the West except for in California. Shirley Chisholm took some votes, mainly in the East, a symbolic triumph for blacks and for women. In the light of history, her victory seems ironic, for McGovern lost many votes due to his support of equal rights; minority rights, including possible quotas; and privacy and choice regarding abortion.

Alaska split between McGovern and Jackson, and Hawaii gave us six and one-half delegates compared to Scoop Jackson’s eight and one-half. Wyoming gave us only three and one-third, compared to six for Jackson and one and one-tenth for Chisholm. When the campaign began we had not expected to win any votes in these three states. In the other caucus states we gleaned seventeen votes in Colorado versus seven for Chisholm and one for Jackson. In Idaho, we pulled twelve and one-half,
while Chisholm took two and Jackson only one-half. We won sixteen of Montana’s votes, losing one to Chisholm. In Utah, despite opposition from Governor Rampton, we ended up with fourteen McGovern votes, three for Terry Sanford, and one for Humphrey. I was grateful for the response to my recruitment of volunteers and pleased with the campaigns they had helped me run.

The other three states in my region were primary states. The Oregon primary preceded California’s, offering us a barometer on the political climate in its massive neighbor to the south. Also, the victor in the Oregon primary would head into California the following week with banners flying. The Kennedy-McCarthy struggles in Oregon and California during 1968 raised the ante further. Even when other candidates backed away from campaigning there, we wanted a big vote to boost us into California. I lived in Oregon for a month, staying with Betty Roberts, a state senator who would later serve on the Oregon Supreme Court. Washington state sent nine busloads of people into Oregon to help get out the vote for the primary. The workers stayed for the whole weekend before the election. We loved seeing that kind of commitment.

By then McGovern had commandeered a campaign plane, so I hopped on and traveled with him for a dozen Oregon appearances. We kept in close touch with Gene Pokorney, Joe Grandmaison, and Carl Wagner, who were working hard in California. They consistently told McGovern that the California campaign was not going well.

“We’re going to lose it,” they said. “It’s not being run like our other state campaigns, and we don’t like it.”

Thus it was that when I bumped into McGovern on the Oregon tour, he said, “You’re getting on the plane, and you are going back to California.”

“But I’m in the middle of this Oregon campaign.”

“Well, you’ve got to take four days out, and go into the San Francisco and Los Angeles headquarters. Get them organized so that the materials get out. Make them run this the way you have run other states.”

The difference in taking over California, of course, was wrenching it from the hands of any number of high-powered politicians and campaigners.

I flew south and met a red-haired, former Lindsay staffer who ran the mainly black community of Oakland, where Warren Widener was mayor. Our guys were right: we were absolutely losing California. The redhead in charge treated people with contempt, trying to buy their
votes. I could see it would be more difficult to reform him than to win that area, and I certainly could not do both. So I went into the headquarters, grabbed him by the back of his collar, and shoved him out the door, saying, “You’re fired!” I seemed to have migrated a long way from growing up “nice” in Utah. I still don’t know where I found the courage but the local politicians backed me up.

Ultimately I got that area turned around. We used the computers and, in many areas, the California politicians ran things their own way. Some were experienced and effective. When my four days elapsed, I returned to finish the Oregon primary, where we pulled thirty-four votes for McGovern, with only three going to other candidates.

Then it was back to California, which really should have been split into three regions. The Sacramento and inner valleys constituted one distinct part. I was successful in setting up these farm areas like our regular campaigns. The northern area, around San Francisco and up and down the peninsula, was another distinct region, and the campaigners in charge there were open to my suggestions.

In southern California, however, my advice fell flat. Frank Mankiewicz and Gary Hart were running the region, arm in arm with local big shots. Frank had installed many ex-Lindsay campaigners and mixed them with local VIPs. In addition to the tangled egos, his computerized campaign bogged down regularly. By the time I arrived, campaigners in the northern and southern California offices barely spoke to one another, and no one spoke to the folks in the Sacramento Valley. We didn’t do as well in California as we should have. I deduced that I should have gone there earlier, but the men running things felt more than adequate.

McGovern went ill-prepared into a debate with Humphrey and Chisholm in Los Angeles, and we devoted considerable time and money on a series of Truman-style train stops, but the trip was not well organized. Meanwhile the computers that we counted on continued to jam. Once I finished in Oakland and Los Angeles, I continued south into Orange County and then Riverside. During the last two weeks, I sat in on the strategy sessions for the overall California campaign. All in all, we came close to losing to Humphrey. And Humphrey’s people, who had opposed proportional voting throughout the reforms, now wanted their proportion of the votes in California. And we reformers, who had boosted proportional delegations, suddenly favored unit rule in order to gain all 271 delegates.

Next came the primary in New Mexico. George Wallace was so strong there that many good people ran as his delegates just to get to the convention,
where they then could switch to support other candidates. We ended up with ten votes for McGovern and eight for Wallace, under the direction of state chair Rudy Ortiz and his statewide get-out-the-vote effort.

Thus the campaign evolved, state by state. Early speakers and “name” supporters were mostly westerners and midwesterners, including Governors Frank Morrison of Nevada and Bill Dougherty of South Dakota, and representatives of the former Peace Corps and Food for Hunger groups. Also, we cultivated a crop of Hollywood stars who were antiwar, feminist, or African-American. Leonard Nimoy, of Star Trek fame, signed on early, as did Dennis Weaver, a strong environmentalist. Then Warren Beatty involved other stars in putting together a series of benefit concerts. Shirley MacLaine, his sister, negotiated with and advised the National Women’s Political Caucus and the National Organization for Women (NOW). Nixon was a known quantity, especially in California, and so stars such as Robert Goulet, Carol Lawrence, and Alan King stepped up. Cash by the barrel appeared. Our major donors included Stewart Mott, the liberal General Motors heir, as well as a representation from Malibu Colony, including intellectual gurus such as Miles Rubin, business executive Harold Willens, and executive producer Norman Lear.

NOW had emerged in 1970, during the DNC reform, underwritten mainly by Jewish, liberal women. A year later, the National Women’s Political Caucus sprang to life in Washington, D. C. Each played a vital role in the civil liberties movement and focused primarily on ratifying the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) rather than lobbying for partisan candidates. They tried to involve women from both parties in reform, as well as addressing national issues of crucial interest to women. The ERA had easily passed Congress and had been ratified by most states before archconservative groups such as the John Birch Society and the Eagle Forum joined ranks with the budding Religious Right to defeat it in one state legislature after another.

Dan Berman, a liberal Salt Lake City attorney, insisted that the congressional route was the more difficult path when it came to establishing equal rights. First, the case should be brought before the United States Supreme Court, where a decision should state that the male language in the Constitution always had included women. (Unfortunately, our foremothers had worked the same angle, and their husbands’ rhetoric stained the legislative history. The Constitution clearly denied rights to women, to people of color, and even to white men who did not own property.)

Dan’s approach had appeal as a retroactive embrace of everyone through the fourteenth amendment. “Then,” he explained, “if you do
lose that case and have to go with an amendment, every woman in the country will back you, not just the liberals.” I tried but failed to convince women’s groups of this logic. Already I was regarded suspiciously by eastern liberals because I came from Utah. (What seemed snobbish then foreshadowed further suspicion of my origins after a covert and successful campaign launched against the ERA in the late 1970s and early 1980s by the Mormon hierarchy.)

The leaders of the women’s groups seemed naive in thinking they could be both politically effective and bipartisan. I kept telling them, “You are going to be just another League of Women Voters. That’s fine for supporting issues, but not to organize politically.” It was like trying to explain the concept of vertical to people who only saw horizontal.

The women’s movement never became as effective as it might have been had it organized two party branches. As it was, they could not force action through either political party, for bipartisanship is not the avenue to change. They tried to run women for office in both parties, but really didn’t know how to go about securing delegates. The candidates had to help them. McGovern was the only candidate who really cared, but his campaign hadn’t the flexibility to distribute special privileges. Now, as then, the stars of the women’s movement want to be stars. I didn’t want to be a star; I wanted to elect my male candidate in what was, admittedly, a male system. Meanwhile, Bella Abzug, Gloria Steinem, and Betty Friedan unconsciously divided the women’s movement into their cliques, with each of them out front. Many supported Shirley Chisholm during the primaries and at the convention.

We had won enough primaries and caucuses to convince us we would carry the convention. In June, Utah held the last of the preconvention primaries. I returned home to get myself reelected as the national committeewoman and get McGovern delegates elected. Like the national party, we were pretty well divided. We ended up with mostly McGovern delegates, but Governor Rampton still supported someone else. (Nobody was sure whom.) Salt Lake City had served as the McGovern headquarters for the western states, so this convention naturally wielded influence. McGovern wanted me to work with the Rules Committee, so I persuaded the Utah delegates to elect me to that, as well.

Then a national Anybody but McGovern (ABM) movement erupted. Its purpose was to combine the remaining Muskie delegates, a number of Jackson delegates, the Humphrey delegates, including an uncommitted block that would back him if doing so seemed feasible. The goal of these varied forces was to win votes in the Credentials races, agree on
one candidate, and then beat us. Fighting flared among delegates from many states over who should be seated and whether women, blacks, Hispanics, and youth each were proportionally represented. The conflict over fairness flared in many delegations and even in McGovern’s campaign. What an unruly contrast to the well-choreographed Republican convention that followed!

Once again the call to the convention provided for three committees—Credentials, Rules, and Platform—to meet prior to the convention so their reports could be mailed and studied by the delegates. Grant Ivins and I flew to Washington, D.C. immediately after the Utah convention to attend Rules Committee meetings, already in session. My quick getaway was problematic in Utah because I could not remain home to organize our delegates. Before leaving I reviewed a detailed plan with Doris Roemer, who ran the state headquarters. She managed beautifully, but there was no ducking the accusation that I was absent.

A summer storm engulfed us when we changed planes in Chicago. The pilot of our plane, scheduled to land at the Washington National Airport, announced that a hurricane was closing in along the Atlantic coast. We would race it to the airport. As we neared the coast, the pilot advised us that we would circle for a while and check out alternate airports. Soon, we learned that all feasible airports were also closed. We would find the calm in the eye of the storm and descend through it.

I can still relive that white-knuckle descent to an airport lit only by emergency runway lights. Rain drenched us as we straggled down the stairs and across the pavement toward the few lights in the terminal that were powered by a standby generator.

For almost an hour I walked the concourses, trying to locate the McGovern aide assigned to meet me. Finally I got in line for a telephone and eventually reached headquarters. Hours earlier they had sent a young driver to pick me up and had not heard from him since.

I told them not to send anyone else; I would make it to a hotel when the taxis reappeared. At about three in the morning, a group of us squeezed into a cab. When I reached the hotel, I learned that the suite reserved for me had gone to Millie Jeffrey since someone else had taken her room. I moved in with Millie.

In the morning we learned that the hurricane had swept our young driver’s car under a bridge, and he was in the hospital. About midday, my luggage and papers caught up with me. I tried not to see this tumultuous arrival as an omen. My experience at the 1972 Democratic national convention had begun.