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A Hail Mary heave to block Trump's nomination

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The Republican Party establishment is falling all over itself in its attempts to stop Donald Trump from becoming the GOP standard-bearer. One way to deny Trump the presidential nomination is with a divided convention. This would happen if Trump does not win a majority of the delegates during the primary season. There seems little chance, however, that any other candidates can get a majority or even beat out Trump to be the leader going into the convention.

Yet, there is a clear way that the party can block Trump. Republicans must take up a long-neglected practice: favorite-son candidacies.

Favorite-son politicians, usually senators or governors, have a discreet popularity in one state or region. A state's entire delegate slate goes to the national convention pledged to support him or her. If the official can make a viable run for the nomination, then the delegates stick. Otherwise, after a number of ballots, the votes can be traded for future spoils to support a more popular candidate.

As brokered conventions gave way to primaries, the favorite-son idea fell into disuse. National candidacies have become the way to run for office. But a series of Republican favorite-son candidacies could stop Trump from picking up the 1,237 delegates he needs to take the nomination.

The GOP establishment is already using this method on a de facto basis. Senator Ted Cruz won his home state of Texas and the neighboring state of Oklahoma on Super Tuesday. The party barons are banking on Senator Marco Rubio of Florida to take his state, and Ohio Governor John Kasich to take his. If these favorite sons can't carry their states, Trump may be able to waltz to the nomination.

The Republicans, however, could take the favorite-son idea to a more extreme conclusion. Trump is leading in many other states. The party could run popular state officials in them to drain away votes from him.

Granted, it would make the convention even more complex. But it also could be that the Republicans can find a better candidate from the ranks of those not currently in the race.

A favorite-son plan carries with it some serious potential risks. The first is that it is not at all clear that any local candidates can beat Trump. Running favorite sons may simply further split the support of the remaining candidates.

It is also possible that Republicans do not have a popular enough figure in some key states. In California, for example, which has by far the largest remaining delegate haul, there is not one statewide elected Republican official. There are a number of House of Representatives members of note though, including Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy, and some big-city mayors. Yet the party may have a hard time finding someone who can compete with Trump's star wattage.

One major problem in some states is that the time period to register to run for the nomination has run out. The deadline is rapidly approaching in many others.

In New York, for example, the party would have been able to put up former Governor George Pataki, who ranked well in some early New York state polling. However, the time period to register in the state has run out, and Pataki is apparently not on the ballot.

But Republicans would still have time to put someone up in seven of the major remaining states, including New Jersey and the biggest, California, which by itself has 7 percent of the total delegates to the convention.

Perhaps the GOP could quickly get some proven moderate vote getter on the ballot, someone like a former New Jersey Governors Christie Todd Whitman or Tom Kean. It could also look to Meg Whitman in California. All have their downsides, but this type of candidate may be able to attract voters turned off by Trump and Cruz and not interested in Kasich or Rubio.

A favorite-son plan may be a difficult way of denying Trump the delegate total to win the nomination. But the party is already trying to do this. It may be time to look back at the most battle-tested method that helped lead to old-fashioned contested conventions. For the Republicans, it may be that favorite sons are the way to go.