

Commentary

Delegate Yost: Cleveland is tough but nervous

DAVE YOST
Special to The Plain Dealer

Maybe the best thing anyone ever said to describe Northeast Ohio came from LeBron James two years ago: "In Northeast Ohio, nothing is given. Everything is earned. You work for what you have." As the Republican National Convention opens today, it's earning time again.

Let's be honest: Everybody in Ohio is proud that the national spotlight is on Cleveland this week — and most of us are nervous about what's about to happen here. This is a city where talent is never enough, and the breaks often seem to go the other way. Usually, Cleveland is nobody's preseason favorite to win, whether you're talking sports, the economy or politics.

But here we are. It's earning time.

I'm not a fan of the prospective nominee of my party, for reasons that I made clear before the primary, when it might have mattered. But I'm a big fan of some of his most ardent supporters, and it somehow seems right that this convention is here. These are people who, like Cleveland, have been given nothing, who worked for everything they have. There's steel in their spine, their will and often in the toes of their boots.

They represent what's best about Ohio, and Ohioans.

They haven't given up on America — but they've been wondering a lot lately about our political system, about the government, about the media. With all the attention given to the nominee, the real story is where these folks end up.

But here's one thing I know for sure: America would do well to relearn the lessons of Northeast Ohio: Never give up, expect nothing, earn it all.

I'm Ohio's auditor and a Kasich delegate. I'll be writing about my observations at the convention — what it's like to be there, what folks are saying. There won't be any scoops, and the big-brain punditry is outside both my weight class and above my pay grade.

My hope is simply to share the experience.

I married into Cleveland — my wife, Darlene, grew up on the West Side, and her brother worked at Republic Steel. I played some of the bars here in the 1970s when I was a musician, and have come to love this town over the years.

To be honest, I'm a little peeved about the snarkiness from the East Coast types about CLE, especially the smirks about the River That Catches Fire. For anybody who thinks a current events reference from 1969 makes them hip and relevant, I propose we show them what's really hip and relevant and buy them a Burning River Pale Ale with a smile.

Only a town like Cleveland could take a civic black eye and defiantly name its excellent flagship brew after it.

As tough as Cleveland is, we are nervous. It looks like there will not be any attempt to wrestle the nomination away from the prospective nominee. The Establishment doesn't riot, so the risk of civil unrest seems slight on the GOP side of things.

The thousands of protesters said to be arriving with dreams of TV cameras dancing merrily in their heads are another matter. It probably won't get ugly, and law enforcement will likely be able to contain it if it does. We are confident, but nervous.

This is Cleveland. Anything can happen. Just ask LeBron.

Dave Yost is Ohio's auditor and a Kasich delegate.



LYNN ISCHAY | THE PLAIN DEALER

Cleveland threw a big welcome party for delegates, the media and 500 VIPs at North Coast Harbor Sunday night.

First impressions

CLEVELANDERS OPEN ARMS TO DELEGATES

Midwestern 'niceness,' sense of security put visitors at ease after months of concern

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Republican delegates streamed into Cleveland on Sunday, buoyed by the city's welcome and the upbeat dawn of a convention they hope will mend the party's internal strife.

Most of all, they said they were excited by their first impressions of Cleveland and its preparations.

"I came in and said, 'OK, this is a major city,'" said Ryan Davidson, an Idaho delegate for Ted Cruz. "It looks great."

Cynthia Bryant, the leader of the California delegates, said many of them have

never been to Cleveland, though she has been here twice in the past year.

"First of all, the people in Cleveland are very nice," she said. "It's not that Californians aren't nice, but there's a Midwestern niceness here that you don't find everywhere. And even though Cleveland is a Democratic city, everyone here has been so gracious about everything."

Connie Hair, the chief of staff for U.S. Rep. Louie Gohmert, a Texas Republican, said she didn't know what to expect from the city.

"My impression of Ohio came from watching 'M*A*S*H,' with Klinger,"

she said, referring to the character who hailed from Toledo and was played by Jamie Farr. "I even watched 'WKRP in Cincinnati.' But this is great. I'm happy to see police everywhere. It's great to see that."

Hair spoke as news reports streamed about the shootings of police officers in Baton Rouge.

"Let's put it this way, I'm very upbeat, but guarded," she said.

Eric Eakin wasn't so upbeat.

"Our town is an armed camp," said Eakin, of Bay Village, as he drove near Public Square. "[City officials] have girded their loins

to the nth degree. There can't be this deep of a divide in this country for this type of military response."

Others disagreed.

Sheri Auclair, a Donald Trump delegate from Wayzata, Minnesota, said she was impressed.

"There's a general feeling of safety," Auclair said.

Others were more concerned about the experience.

"Everyone has been so friendly," said Sen. Tom Cotton, a Republican from Arkansas. "Arkansans and Clevelanders have a lot in common — a spirit of industry, hard work, family, whether it's on an Arkansas farm or in the city."

Charles Blankenship, a surgeon from Texarkana, Texas, flew into the city Sunday morning. Downtown streets were quiet, and he seemed upbeat. He said he realizes that protests will be a big part of the convention. He also said Cleveland's welcome was great. But his focus is on what happens on the stage at The Q.

"The main thing will be what happens at the convention, not what city it is in," he said. "We need to get over the hurdles and get the party together."

Plain Dealer reporter Susan Glaser contributed to this story.

Historic connections

Arkansas delegation honors Cleveland's Rockefeller

LAURA DEMARCO
The Plain Dealer

There were some high-profile guests at the Arkansas delegation's RNC party at the Cleveland History Center on Saturday: Gov. Asa Hutchinson, Sen. Tom Cotton ... John D. Rockefeller?

Well, the last one was a re-enactor, albeit a sharp-dressed one in a sweet suit and straw hat. But there were real Rockefellers among the delegation, hence the reason the Southern state hosted a party dedicated to the Standard Oil founder, one of Cleveland's most famous and influential sons. Born

in New York in 1839, John D. Rockefeller moved with his family to Cleveland in 1853. He founded Standard Oil, which became one of the largest companies in the world, in Cleveland in 1870. Although he and his business later moved to New York, his imprint on Cleveland can be seen to this day on buildings and parks and housing estates.

The 40-member delegation to the 2016 Republican National Convention includes John D.'s great-great-grandson Will Rockefeller, son of late Arkansas Lt. Gov. Win Rockefeller. Win was the son of John D.'s fourth

son, Winthrop Aldrich Rockefeller, the Republican governor of Arkansas from 1967-71. He was "the first Republican Arkansas governor since Reconstruction," as Will Rockefeller proudly pointed out.

Will's mother, Lisenne Rockefeller, is also with the Arkansas delegation.

"We wanted to do something to celebrate that connection to Cleveland," said Jonathan Barnett, national committeeman for Arkansas — and party organizer for the elegant dinner party for 160, set amid the classic cars, Great Lakes Expo posters and Cleveland memorabilia

in the History Center's main hall.

In addition to the John D. Rockefeller impersonator — actor John Thobaben — the evening included a pre-party tour of Lake View Cemetery, where John D. and many members of the Rockefeller family are buried.

"It was short, but it was very emotional," said Barnett.

The convention is Will Rockefeller's first visit to Cleveland.

"It has been fantastic. I always wanted to come visit," said the Little Rock resident who worked with Arkansas Sen. John Boozman before

deciding to take a position in his family's business. "There's a lot of strong emotion to see where John D. got his start in business and in life, and his eternal resting place."

Will Rockefeller said he's especially interested to learn more about Cleveland and his great-great-grandfather's history. And he was reveling in all the Cleveland connections.

"Cleveland made John D.," he said. "Everyone thinks of the Rockefellers and New York as being synonymous, but really New York would not have had John D. had he not had Cleveland first."