

With a bang and a whimper, anti-Trump campaign succumbs in Cleveland

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Highlights

Anti-Trump movement among GOP delegates appears to have peaked a couple weeks ago.

Rules Committee members show little appetite for discord ahead of convention next week.

The quixotic campaign to “free the delegates” and deny Donald Trump the GOP nomination effectively ended late Thursday with a bang and a whimper in a dimly lit convention center basement 13 hours into a marathon Rules Committee meeting.

The bang was administered by Jordan Ross, a constable from Laughlin, Nev., in full uniform with a shiny seven-pointed gold star and stentorian voice that he freely admitted he loves the sound of. Even before Kendal Unruh, a Cruz delegate who teaches at a Christian school in suburban Denver, had a chance to offer a “conscience clause” that would enable delegates to ignore their pledge to vote for Trump, Ross rose to say the jig is up, the game is over, offering a motion stipulating that nothing in the rules would undo delegates being bound to the popular will of the voters back home.

“I have no intention of returning to Nevada’s voters and telling them I had a part in shredding their votes,” Ross said.

The vote was a crushing 87-12, leaving the movement to “free the delegates” and stop Trump nowhere near the quarter of the Rules Committee’s 112 members that would be needed to raise the issue next week on the convention floor.



Unruh went on to offer her conscience clause, but it failed on a voice vote. Unruh never mentioned Trump, only the fundamental American right to keep faith with one’s principles.

“One cannot force a doctor to perform an abortion when it’s against his conscience. You cannot force the Mennonites to go into the draft. This is how our Founding Fathers set up the rule of law,” Unruh said. “All I am asking is that you regard this as the sanctity of the vote and the duty and the obligation of each delegate to cast a ballot according to their conscience. That is a God-given right that cannot be taken away by the RNC, by any party or by the state.”

But it appeared that Unruh's movement had peaked a few weeks ago and was now overtaken by the hunger of delegates for a successful convention. For a subdued Unruh, the night ended with her withdrawing a couple of other motions.

The rules must still be approved by the convention delegates when they convene Monday. Steven Lonegan, an Unruh ally who directed the Cruz campaign in New Jersey, told the American-Statesman on Friday: "Batten down the hatches. Full speed ahead."

But the mood Thursday night made plain that the party's rule makers were weary of the naysaying about their presumptive nominee and insistent that the time had come to close ranks and rally around the outsider who was the people's choice.

The debate culminated and was crystallized in an exchange between Utah's Sen. Mike Lee, who is Texas' Sen. Ted Cruz's best friend and closest ally in the Senate, and former Texas Republican Party Chairman Steve Munisteri, an ally of Republican National Committee Chairman Reince Priebus.

"At the end of the day, I hope that whoever our nominee is going to be this time will win over the delegates," said Lee, who isn't supporting Trump, as the committee was voting to keep delegates bound. "Rules like this are not going to help. This problem, this angst, as we will see in a few days, is not going to go away, just because we paper over it with rules."

"So I say to Mr. Trump and those aligned with him: Make the case. Make the case to those delegates who want to have a voice. Make the case that they should use that voice to support him," Lee said. "Don't make the case that their voice ought to be silenced. That is not going to help elect him president. That is not going to help him in the long run."

"I have great respect for Sen. Lee," Munisteri said. But, Munisteri said that, while Lee purports to represent the grass roots, "you want to ignore what is really the grass roots, which is millions of millions of voters that voted for Donald Trump. If we're really representative of the grass roots, and we're really representative of conservatism, we listen to those voices."

"Sir, there is nobody else running for president in this party than Donald Trump," said Munisteri, who began the campaign season as a senior adviser to Kentucky's Sen. Rand Paul. "The most important thing is not to let the left wing take over our country this fall, and the only thing that's standing between that happening is our victory with our nominee and our ticket. It is time, sir, for you and everyone else to come together, to say this party is united and we will defeat the Democrats."