Transcript

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**Adia Samba-Quee:** [00:00:00] Civics 101 is supported in part by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

**Tat Bellamy-Walker:** [00:00:03] For an ever so brief moment here at Civics 101, we had the pleasure and privilege of working with Tat Bellamy-Walker, our fellow here at the station. Now Tat, of course, went and got himself a full time job there. Gain is our great loss. But he did make an episode of Civics 101 before he left us. Without further ado, here's Tat Bellamy-Walker with contested conventions.

**Gerald Ford:** [00:00:25] Mr. Chairman, delegates and alternates to this Republican convention. I am honored by your nomination and I accept it.

**Tat Bellamy-Walker:** [00:00:37] This is Gerald Ford.

[00:00:38] He was the Republican nominee for president in 1976.

[00:00:42] Republicans have had some tough competition. Let me say this from the bottom of my heart. After the scrimmages of the past few months, it really feels good to have Ronald Reagan on the same side of the line. [00:01:00]

**Tat Bellamy-Walker:** [00:01:00] He's giving a speech to a room of delegates during the 1976 Republican National Convention. The convention helps the party select a nominee for president. Ford just won the nomination after an intense battle with candidate Ronald Reagan. This all helped Ford move forward as the party's choice.

[00:01:19] I'm Tat Bellamy-Walker, a fellow here at Civics 101. Today, we're answering this listener's question: would a contested convention be similar to a caucus? And by caucus, the listener means the process of a party coming together and discussing why they like their candidate.

[00:01:36] But before we do that, let's start with what conventions are.

**Shannon Bow O'Brien:** [00:01:40] Conventions are to formally select the presidential candidate.

**Tat Bellamy-Walker:** [00:01:44] That's Shannon Bow O'Brien, a political science professor at the University of Texas at Austin. O'Brien describes this as a big cheerleading party. She says this is where delegates cast their votes with hopes of moving the candidate to the general election.

**Shannon Bow O'Brien:** [00:01:59] So it's this giant [00:02:00] rally to get everybody excited about the candidate and the candidate gets to speak and put forward their agenda.

[00:02:07] And often the party platform is often created or finalized at the convention to where the candidate will say, you know, if you elect me, this is the list of stuff we're going to do. That's often managed, too.

**Tat Bellamy-Walker:** [00:02:20] But then we have contested conventions. A contested convention happens when no candidate gets the majority of delegate votes during the state primaries. The one in 1976 was closed for the Republicans, but Ford pulled out enough delegates to not force a contested convention. And these days, because of the primary and caucus process, contested conventions are rare. We usually know who the candidate is before the convention even starts.

**Shannon Bow O'Brien:** [00:02:49] We haven't had one really in my lifetime.

**Shannon Bow O'Brien:** [00:02:52] The last time this happened was during the 1952 Democratic Convention in Chicago, when a reluctant Adlai Stevenson, [00:03:00] then governor of Illinois, won the nomination with outgoing President Truman support. This was in effect like a caucus. Candidates wheeled and dealed and made concessions, and one by one they dropped out. It took three rounds of voting to beat out his opponents. And in this round, Stevenson received 617 votes. Stevenson's win appears to be a result of a deep racial divide. Truman believed nominating a candidate from a state with Jim Crow laws in force would turn black and northern white voters away from voting for the Democratic Party. Contested conventions might seem bad, but Shannon says that's a misconception.

**Shannon Bow O'Brien:** [00:03:43] A lot of times I think people think with a contested convention that they're kind of in disarray or they're crazy. A lot of it just means the states are really divided and the states have no one candidate could get a good job of selling themselves across the state. [00:04:00]

**Tat Bellamy-Walker:** [00:04:00] So that's how a contested convention works. Do you have a question about our election process or anything else civics related, you could submit your question at Civics101podcast.org. That's Civics101podcast.org.