

Conventions still serve purpose

As a longtime political junkie, it was an honor to have the opportunity to serve as an Indiana delegate to the 2004 Republican National Convention in New York City.

The role of national political conventions has obviously evolved over the years. For decades, national conventions were the place where national power brokers gathered to determine who should be each party's nominee for president and vice president.

Those days are long gone. Now, the primary system determines the selection of a presidential candidate, and the vice-presidential candidate is typically chosen by the presidential nominee and is merely acquiesced to by the convention delegates.

Because national conventions lack the "wheeling and dealing" of old, many political pundits believe the events serve as little more than long "infomercials." That criticism may be somewhat warranted, but as a first-time delegate, I found the process fascinating.

For starters, not all infomercials are bad. Some are quite informative. And I think modern political conventions serve an important purpose of jump-starting the fall presidential-campaign season and promoting public debate.

Admittedly, the conventions are tightly choreographed and designed to provide only one side of the story. However, let's face it: There are many citizens who take their responsibility to vote very seriously but nonetheless do not eat, sleep and drink politics every day of the year. A quick glance at each convention can give these voters a solid introductory understanding of why each party believes its candidate is the right man for the job.

On a personal note, the highlights of my convention trip were the chance to shake hands with Iraqi war Gen. Tommy Franks and boxing promoter Don King. (Both are Bush supporters.) My favorite speech was the one delivered by Democrat Sen. Zell Miller, of Georgia. Sen. Miller spoke for the hundreds of thousands (maybe millions) of conservative Democrats who are beginning to wonder if their party has left them behind on both social and national security issues.

On a completely different topic, several of our local schools deserve kudos for their academic



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achievement. As was reported in *The Shelbyville News*, Shelbyville, Morristown and Triton Central high schools all had significant increases in overall SAT scores last year. In fact, the schools ranked as the top three in overall score improvements for the central Indiana area.

The area's largest increase came at Shelbyville High School, where the average total score for the Class of 2004 was 1,055 (out of a possible 1,600), an increase

of 95 points from the previous year's graduates.

Shelbyville High School Principal David Adams indicates that the improvement is due to a more challenging curriculum at the school and an organized effort to provide SAT workshops for students who plan to take the test.

Shelbyville High School should also be praised for its outstanding achievements with students who have taken the national Advanced Placement (AP) tests. AP tests give students an opportunity to study at a college level while still in high school and earn college credit for their efforts if they can show a high level of competency in the subject matter.

This week, it was announced that Shelbyville had six students receive a perfect score in four different AP subjects. Twenty students received a score of four (out of a possible five) in various subject matters, and 25 students received a three. These are outstanding results for our school system, and most of these students will now receive college credits because of their efforts.

Obviously, test scores are only one component of a strong academic experience. However, test results do matter, and everyone involved in these achievements — students, parents, teachers and administrators alike — should be proud of their efforts. It is great to be reminded that our children have the opportunity to receive a first-class education in our local schools.

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