

# Biden Can Have a Little South Carolina, as a Treat

Paul R. Potts

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## Tuesday

You don't need to eat any pączki.

*But I want to!*

You don't need to eat any pączki.

*But I deserve a pączki!*

You don't need to eat any pączki.

*But my own wife brought two bags home and they are on the dining table!*

You don't need to eat any pączki.

*But at work, there are a whole lot of them in the break room downstairs!*

You don't need to eat any pączki. You know they will make your joints hurt, and after the sugar rush fades away you will be nodding off at your desk by mid-afternoon.

*Why do you hate freedom?*

You don't need to eat any pączki.

*Why do you hate the fine people and culture of Poland?*

You *still* don't need to eat any pączki.

*FINE. I hate it when you are right.*

You're welcome.

## Sunday

Well. That week went by fast, in an anxious blur.

I'm at home while Grace takes the older kids — the “Varsity Team” — to Mass. I'm here with Benjamin Merry, Elanor, and Malachi. We aren't taking everyone today because, well, there's no polite way to put this, but both Elanor and Malachi have terrible diarrhea which they keep blowing right out of their diapers. So here I am trying to write my newsletter and nervously keeping one eye on the situation.

## ***Ultra Q* (1966 Japanese TV Show)**

The kids are watching episodes of *Ultra Q*, the Japanese TV show from 1966, the year before I was born. This is a *kaiju* show, featuring giant monsters. The 24-minute episodes were shot on black and white 35mm film, which means that the Blu-ray has surprisingly good image quality. They are not dubbed, and the young kids can't read subtitles, but honestly, they don't really need to. I thought the older kids would like these. It turns out the older kids are indifferent to them, but Benjamin loves them. Every time a giant ape or slug appears on screen he jumps around and hides behind a chair.

The action is pretty simplistic, although the sets and acting are better than I expected for the genre. The first episode features a monster called Gomess. The actor playing Gomess wore a Godzilla suit, the one used in *Godzilla vs. Mothra*, with some modifications. Besides just being miniature monster movies, these episodes feature a recurring cast of investigators, and so in structure the show is a bit like *The X Files*. This show is also a precursor to the next series, *Ultraman*, which was in color.

Best Buy has both these series in reasonably-priced “steelbook” Blu-ray sets, and more, including the later series *Ultra 7* and *The Return of Ultraman*. So far I've only bought *Ultra Q*, but I might get the next set in a few weeks. The boxed sets are very nice, with one exception — it is very hard to pry the discs off the tops of their hubs, as this requires so much force that it is possible to crack the disc. So once again, a CD or DVD or Blu-ray case fails at its most important job — protecting the discs from damage.

## **Intermission**

I just had to pause because Elanor blew up another diaper. Neither baby is feeling very well. If I hold Malachi, Elanor screams. When I set down Malachi to change Elanor, Malachi screamed. I just got a text message telling me that the truck has a flat tire.

It's one of those days I'm hoping to forget soon.

## **Yesterday**

Grace and I had a tentative plan to go see the Metropolitan Opera live stream of *Aggripina* yesterday, but we didn't. We did run an errand to Ikea, though. I

wanted to pick up some kind of bookcase to use in my office. We also took a look at shelving options that we might consider for the house. It has been our goal since first viewing this house to get it fully set up with enough shelving to hold our whole library of over 4,000 books. Most of the books are still in boxes. I have wanted some kind of custom shelving, but that hasn't been in our budget. I'm not enough of a woodworker to make the kind of thing we want. But the SVALNÄS system looks like it might work for us.

The shelves are bamboo. Bamboo is very stiff, so the shelves probably won't sag under the weight of books. I like the fact that you can change the vertical spacing of shelves and get shallower or deeper shelves. There are some walls in the basement that would perfectly accommodate a set of shallow, closely-spaced shelves to hold a whole wall of mass-market paperbacks, while other walls could hold deeper shelves. In the basement, which tends to get damp, I don't want closed-back furniture mounted against, or even close to, the walls; that's a recipe for mold.

There are some things I don't like about it. The system includes some options for cabinets, but there aren't glass-fronted cabinets available. I would like to put some of my more valuable and collectible books, and cabinet-of-curiosity items such as bismuth crystals and vintage bottles and milk glass, behind glass doors, not opaque bamboo doors. I'm also not really happy with the sides of the shelves, which have open brackets attached to them. I don't think the brackets will work well as bookends, which means we won't be able to fill the whole shelf with books and we might want to add bookends. That could turn into a big pain for hundreds of feet of shelving. But maybe this system could do *much* of what we want.

We would probably hire a handyman to attach the pieces to the wall. Since this is a completely modular system we could do it room-by-room or wall-by-wall. I might start with a small section of wall in the downstairs and experiment, and see how it goes. I'd rather make mistakes and learn lessons screwing up a small piece of wall in my office in the basement than a large wall in the family room.

## Programming Books

We also stopped off at the Barnes and Noble store on Haggerty Road. I wanted to buy a couple of technical books, including a Python language reference book, since I've been doing more Python programming recently and my books are quite out of date. But the list price for the O'Reilly book *Python in a Nutshell* is now a startling *eighty dollars*. So I'll... live without that book for a while longer. And they didn't have any of the other things I was interested in, like a book on Racket programming for the kids. So I'll have to order a copy of *Realm of Racket* elsewhere.

I've been trying to teach Sam a little Scheme using the first edition of *How to Design Programs* but I've concluded that it is actually a terrible textbook, because it completely fails to illustrate the more interesting aspects of programming in

a Lisp-like language early on. It introduces functions early but **lambda** very late, which makes no sense, because **lambda** is fundamental to Scheme. It introduces functional decomposition of problems early, but recursion very late. In my opinion this is completely backwards. I don't think there's much point in teaching Scheme as if it was just like Java, because it absolutely isn't. So I will dig into my boxes and find *Scheme and the Art of Programming* and other books that actually convey the joy and power of programming, even if they are much older and the examples don't precisely match the language dialects available in Racket.

After we got back from running errands, Grace and I managed to do a little cleaning. We changed the sheets on our bed, which is never easy because as soon as we strip the bed, the young kids immediately want to climb on it. Grace swept the bedroom floor. But we haven't even made a dent in the pile of dirty laundry in our room, which we call "Mount Washmore." At this particular stage of family life, every minute spent concentrating on some kind of cleaning or organizing is a minute that the kids are busy demolishing the house in another room. If I sound a little demoralized, it's only because I am.

## Taxes

Later in the evening I took over part of the dining table, unpacked my bag full of paperwork, and paid some bills. Then I dug into our taxes. I decided to try using the online H&R Block service. It went pretty smoothly. With seven kids, and a huge amount of mortgage interest, we wound up owing very little in Federal taxes from 2019. So we're getting a refund. We wound up having to pay only a small amount in state taxes, which is unusual. More typically, we wind up with a Federal refund, which we then immediately have to spend to pay the state tax bill. But I keep tweaking our state withholding numbers, and it looks like I have finally gotten them about right.

Taxes reveal some pretty shocking truths. For example, they reveal that my employer paid almost thirty thousand dollars to our health insurance company in 2019. It's hard for me to imagine any circumstances in which I could have paid that myself. And despite that, I still have a big pile of medical bills.

I am unable to get too excited about the Federal refund, which will amount to approximately 0.0000001 Bloomborgs, or one ten-millionth of Michael Bloomberg's wealth. Most of it will go to pay some bills — medical bills, the remaining bill for the kids' choir, and the upcoming bill for Joshua's braces. I should be able to pay one line of credit off completely, which will help our finances every week, since it is our highest-interest debt. I don't expect there to be much left after that. Certainly, not enough to cover the car repairs we need. But I am going to try to set some aside, if possible, for garden projects, because that can help us get some small part of the way towards growing our own food.

This year's tax refund will be especially important to our finances because all the economic signs are flashing red, and I don't expect to get a raise this year. If

I do get one, I think it will not do much more than help keep up with inflation.

## Electoral Politics

For the Lenten season, I'm trying to be a little bit less obsessed with electoral politics, which I have very little influence on, and to be a little less snarky and argumentative when I do discuss them. So far I am not doing a great job of that.

I should admit that I have never been very good at predicting election outcomes. In 1983 I told my family that I thought that John Glenn, who was running as a Democrat, would beat Reagan. Who now even remembers that Glenn ran for President? He came in sixth in the Iowa Caucus, and third in New Hampshire, did poorly on Super Tuesday, and dropped out in mid-March.

There's been some news this week from the Iowa Caucuses. The partial recount was completed. Buttigieg actually gained a few votes, but only a very few; Sanders and Buttigieg's numbers remain so close, and the corrections so unconvincing, that AP still won't declare a winner:

In the new results, Buttigieg has 562.954 state delegate equivalents and Sanders has 562.021 state delegate equivalents out of 2,151 counted. That is a margin of 0.04 percentage points.

The Associated Press has reviewed the updated results and will not call a winner, given remaining concerns about whether the results as reported by the party are fully accurate.

The Iowa Democratic Party certified the result

The committee ultimately voted 26-14 to certify the results on Saturday, the last day to do so, according to the party's rules. To get there, the committee first voted down a proposed amendment to fix issues with precincts that allocated more delegates than they had to give and a problem with a Des Moines County precinct's misreported results.

The small number of delegates makes Iowa not very important, in the overall election results, but this has illustrated that Iowa really shouldn't be first next time.

## Biden

I knew because of the polling that Joe Biden was likely to win South Carolina, but he actually did much better than the polling suggested. *The American Prospect* reported that

...the biggest county in the state has closed one-third of its polling locations.

And

This precinct consolidation for the highest-profile 2020 election in South Carolina has not been publicized, however. Instead, the new voting location for residents is updated on the South Carolina Election Commission website. “They don’t tell people what’s been closed. They’ll tell you where to go,” said Brett Bursey, executive director of the South Carolina Progressive Network. Regular registered voters are unlikely to go online to confirm their polling location before every election.

They have set up some plausible deniability, because they changed these polling places for small local races, when polling took place during the school week, and so schools could not accommodate voting. But the Democratic primary is held on a Saturday.

I’m not clear on exactly what result this voter suppression had on election results. Usually the states try to suppress black voter turnout. But Biden has high support among black voters in South Carolina. So were these moves targeting a specific demographic that was less likely to vote for him, such as younger black voters? I don’t know, but we must oppose all disenfranchisement. I don’t think that we should have gotten rid of Federal supervision of voting in South Carolina under *Shelby County v. Holder*. This kind of behavior taints Biden’s win, even if it didn’t change the results.

By the way, this is the first time that Biden’s ever won a state in a primary, in this, his third run for President. It’s somehow fitting that this happened on February 29th, a day that only rolls around (nearly) every four years. Brigadoon has emerged from the Highland fog, and Biden has won a state. With whatever small influence I can wield, I’m trying to make it so that he never wins another one.

South Carolina is a deep red state; there’s not a chance in hell that Biden, if he is nominated, will turn it blue. So a victory there is entirely about racking up delegates, not electoral votes.

Biden’s first campaign for president ended ignominiously, when it was revealed that he plagiarized speeches. This campaign has been full of strange speeches and claims. He has walked back the claim, repeated in speeches in South Carolina, that he was arrested protesting Apartheid in South Africa and trying to travel to meet Nelson Mandela. None of that ever happened. But he has a long history of completely fabricating stories about protesting for Civil Rights. His actual record as a legislator is terrible. No wonder he constantly lies about it.

## Warren

I have a bit more sympathy for Warren supporters, as I see them expressing their disappointment on social media. Grace and I spoke about Warren and her book in conversations 19 and 20 of our podcast in 2018. Many of her supporters seem to support her largely based on their support of identity politics — that is,

because she's a woman, and they want to vote for a woman for president. They also very rapidly make the jump to the belief that she is losing mostly, or even solely, because of misogyny.

I've written until my hands go numb about how that's no way to practice identity politics. Warren has a lot of strengths, going into this election, and I was willing to vote for her, as my second choice. But she's completely failed to demonstrate any sort of principled commitment to progressive programs, and she's thrown Bernie Sanders, the front-runner, under the bus, now saying that even though she has no path to victory, she is staying in the election so that she can help trigger a brokered convention. In other words, her Super PAC is sticking with it just for the rat-fucking. No one should support that no matter what kind of intersectional identities they possess, or want to support in someone else. It's frankly offensive and most voters who aren't pundits or elitists can see through her bullshit from miles away.

Some Warren supporters are actually still talking about the possibility that she might partner with Sanders, as vice president. That's a fantasy. A few months ago it seemed like she might be able to do that, but I don't think she was ever willing to accept that. And after her bizarre attacks on him, there's absolutely no chance of that now.

I'm not good at prediction, as I mentioned before, but if the Democrats screw over the most popular politician in America, running on the most popular policies, I would be entirely unsurprised to see Warren join the Bloomberg ticket.

## **Super Tuesday**

Super Tuesday is coming up. I expect Sanders to win most of the Super Tuesday states decisively. I think Biden might remain competitive in some states. I think Buttigieg and Warren will not. But I reserve the right to be wrong!

I was going to write about coronavirus, but I seem to have a mild fever and I'm dizzy, so I'm not feeling well enough to do it.

Have a great week!

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