

## **To Hawthorn Friends & Family –**

We are witnessing and will continue to witness in the coming days, weeks and months (perhaps longer considering the President's likely premature Easter date for reenergizing America's social mobility/interaction), a shift – perhaps permanent – in the way Americans and those around the world live their lives.

In response to some (o.k. a few) of your kind inquiries for my views, here I am, once again, attempting not to repeat what has already been said (a near impossible task). But, here we go, in the wake of the Coronavirus/COVID-19 (bear with me, folks)...

### **What We DO know**

There is going to be an extraordinary amount of emergency money that will be distributed to industry hit the hardest, a state and local government fund, hospitals, and a substantial increase in employment insurance for workers. With the basis for its distribution vague, and the arguments about the federal bailout packages changing seemingly by the minute, at best that leaves us with a new battleground of international, federal, state and local crises . . . from all four of which Hawthorn has already been responding to calls for help.

As the son of a college football coach, I feel keenly seeing the disappearance of sports including the postponement of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. Politics have gone silent or online (I don't know which is worse), community events have been canceled, restaurants are closed (some, surely, never to reopen), hourly workers are left in desperate circumstances with little "safety net," and traffic has vanished (and with it, hopefully, fewer wrecks and fatalities).

What this leaves us is a gaping hole in available news coverage. In this situation, for better or worse (to paraphrase the late C. Northcote Parkinson whose "law" was "Work expands to fill the available time") – the new "law" is, "COVID-19 media coverage expands to fill the available hours." This forces the American public into watching President Trump – who is validly front and center on this – and a great media draw presenting a constantly evolving (and sometimes inconsistent, if not contradictory) story. He IS the face of this crisis. Certainly, he will benefit if we quickly recover from a short recession . . . but given his "counter-punching" (and blame shifting) skills, I wouldn't count him out in a prolonged depression.

### **How Are We Spending Our New-Found Free Time?**

News outlets are seeing a 51% increase in news consumption, with 49% of viewers checking the news multiple times a day, some obsess over it every waking moment.

What is normally a varied "entertainment landscape" as Axios asserts, is now forcefully focused around a single topic of information and developments. Additionally, app downloads, cable news networks, broadcast newscasts, social media interactions, and self-publishing sites are all experiencing a spike in activity.

People are bored. They are looking for a way to fill their time (sports reruns and puzzles can only entertain one for so long) while searching for answers that some of the smartest minds have yet to deliver.

This invites conspiracy theorists that seemingly create whole sites – overnight – dedicated to things like why Dr. Fauci was absent from the President’s stand-up (following his admission that he can’t “jump in front of the microphone” when he disagrees with the President).

## **How Some Are Dealing**

In an attempt to ease some of the uncertainty, a voice, mostly silent for three years is suddenly being heard once again: Former President Obama has re-entered the scene.

For really the first time since leaving office, President Obama has taken to social media (A smart move seeing that individual social media usage is up 56% in the past two weeks) to address the corona virus crisis.

Although the former president has chosen to stay silent on most of the hot ticket items of Trump’s Presidency, he is now routinely taking to Twitter to both be a voice of inspiration and knowledge during this time.

Unsurprisingly, he is revving up engagement to a massive audience, so much so that a Washington Post article he linked to became the [MOST VIEWED publication in the history of the Post’s website](#), overcoming even the news of President Trump’s Access Hollywood tape.

## **The Political Campaign Chaos**

So far, nine states have delayed their primaries.

Contingency plans are being made for the Democratic National Convention (Milwaukee, July 13-16) and the Republican National Convention (Charlotte, August 24-27) both of which have been little more than boring multi-night telethons for decades.

Vice President Biden is trying to find relevance and Senator Sanders is looking for a graceful exit that keeps him relevant.

There is growing pressure to go to an all-mail general election in November, something only three states (Washington, Oregon and Colorado) do now and few of the other 47 are equipped to handle (and assuming the U.S. Postal Service doesn’t go bankrupt and face operational disaster by late summer).

All of this is intensified by the increasingly early voting, due to start this year in Minnesota in late September.

The only certainty is the absolute guarantee of further changes, many of them unanticipated.

Stay well. Stay healthy. Stay sane. Stay safe.

*John*