

***April is the cruelest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.
Winter kept us warm . . .
Summer surprised us***

T. S. Elliott (1888-1965)
1. THE BURIAL OF THE DEAD
From "The Waste Land" (1922)

To Hawthorn Friends & Family –

In what is starting as “the cruelest month” in any of our memories, I (quotation-addicted old speech-writer that I am) thought maybe a couple of quotes might be a welcome distraction from the constant news cycle. And while the first, above, seems sadly timely, far more hopeful is the closing quote at the end, from FDR.

Perhaps it is a helpful distraction as well – and not totally frivolous – to look beyond the daily (even hourly) news coverage at the rest of the POLITICAL year.

As of April 3rd, we are 202 days away from the general election on November 3. Early voting is scheduled to start in 167 days, on September 18, in Minnesota.

Any current assessment of the year has to rely on the line for which former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld is best remembered, when he talked about

“the unknown unknowns”

And that’s what we’ve got an abundance of right now. Among the generally “unknown unknowns” I would suggest might be:

The Primaries --

So far, **15 states** (PLUS Puerto Rico) **have delayed their primaries**, including large states like **New York, Ohio** (delayed at the 11th hour the night before), **Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Georgia**.

June 2nd is now shaping up as a **mini-Super Tuesday** with 11 primaries. Five were originally scheduled that day: **Montana, New Jersey, New Mexico, South Dakota, and the District of Columbia**. They are now joined that day by **Connecticut, Delaware, Indiana, Maryland, Pennsylvania and Rhode Island**.

Because of state and local elections – not just the Biden-Sanders brawl – **Wisconsin** is determined to go ahead with their primary next **Tuesday, April 7**. I predict it is going to be a disaster – given that 100 jurisdictions reported this week they could not staff even one polling place – but hope I am wrong.

The Conventions --

The **Democratic** National Convention WAS scheduled for Milwaukee **July 13-16** and Vice President Biden was quoted widely this week that he could not envision the Democrats' meeting on those dates. That seems especially true given the one-year postponement of the Tokyo Olympics, which were supposed to be July 24 – August 9, along with the postponement of Wimbledon planned for June 29 – July 12.

*[Story is just breaking as I am writing this that **Democrats will postpone convention to August 17, the week before the Republicans.**]*

The **Republican** National Convention is now scheduled for Charlotte **August 24-27** . . . and President Trump has vowed it will go on as scheduled and will be “incredible” (just like having the pews filled Easter Sunday, one might ask?).

Of course, neither convention has been anything more than a made-for-television event of pretended importance since 1952. It is not clear who – other than the sponsoring cities and attending junketeers – would miss it, or why.

But there is sure to be a huge flap – especially in the Democratic Party, in whose nomination Sen. Sanders continues, as a non-member, to express interest – about what will replace it and how.

Louis Jacobson has written – insightfully and in detail – about these convention issues in **Larry Sabato's Crystal Ball** this week.

The Candidates --

Also unknown is whether **Bernie**, as he continues to insist, will continue his campaign? Does anyone think he can win the enormous share (more than 60%) of remaining delegates he would need to overtake **Biden** (who needs less than half of the remaining delegates)?

Almost as unknown is whether **Biden** will remain healthy, find a gaffe-free voice, and become relevant to Americans' current concerns?

Most unknown is whether New York Governor **Andrew Cuomo** will emerge as a dark-horse darling to force a contested convention? He certainly can't from the standpoint of winning any delegates in the primary process, but could the current delegates become deadlocked? Given Biden's grip on what party machinery exists – not to mention his “oppo.” research file on Cuomo – this shouldn't happen. AND New York's primary is now not until June 23rd.

The Campaigns --

Yet another series of “unknown unknowns” is how the campaigns will operate, with **no events (media, policy, supporters, public, or fundraising)**. ONLY Bernie and Elizabeth Warren demonstrated any real ability to raise money on-line. How do the candidates – including “down-ballot” – and parties campaign in a pandemic world?

Early Voting --

As we noted, early voting starts in **Minnesota September 18**. For states that make it easy to vote early, it is very popular.

Two states where we have worked in recent years – **Nevada** and **Florida** – proved that in recent elections. Florida cast 68.96% of its ballots early in 2016 and 64.34% in 2018. Nevada cast 62.41% of its ballots early in 2016 and 56.8% in 2018. In **California**, more than 5.2 million votes were cast early in 2016.

That may take some of the pressure off Election Day voting, but many of those early ballots are cast at voting centers/public offices, which have to be open and staffed . . . and people willing to go to them. Indeed, **in Florida more early votes are cast in person than by mail**. AND the delayed primaries (and, possibly conventions) as well as demands for even more accessible by-mail voting may put pressure on this process. And the states that don't have it aren't equipped for it nor are they ready to “ramp up.”

Another “unknown unknown.”

Election Day vs. By-Mail Voting --

While 11 states provide some form of (mostly county option) vote-by-mail, only **five states** currently conduct their elections entirely by **mail: Colorado, Hawaii, Oregon, Utah and Washington**. They comprise exactly **6.77%** of the American population.

While all states permit some form of absentee voting, and a number have specific “early voting” systems (examples noted above), MOST Americans go to the polls on (or before) Election Day to vote, standing in close-packed lines, served by tens of thousands of volunteer workers (many older), sitting closely together in public buildings now closed.

Given security fears of on-line voting, the only alternative is an **all-mail election**.

And if there were **time** (there realistically isn't) and **legal authority** (also lacking) to switch to all-mail voting, there is no **money**. Estimates of \$2 billion have been called “woefully low.”

Hard to see how mail-in voting works for most Americans. More on this next week.

The Two Greatest Unknowns --

First, obviously, is **how long** this horror will last? Will we get back to normal by early summer? Can we plan to conduct politics routinely in the fall?

Second, what are the **consequences** . . . on people, on our healthcare system, on businesses, on the economy, and – hardly the most important but decisive to how we move forward – on voter attitudes and turnout?

We simply don't know . . . and those two make all the other “unknown unknowns” even less knowable.

A Final Unknown --

Tempting – but unnecessary – as it is, I have not commented on all the **recent polls** coming out, and the commentary on all sides of, the “Trump Bump” and whether it is real and sustainable.

A Final Unknown, *contd.*

Sadly, the worst is still to come for America. It will be weeks, perhaps months, before Americans face and internalize the awful realities of this scourge and what it has done to them, their families and friends, their jobs and finances, their homes, their sense of security, even their basic survival.

Only then will they start to sort out whom they blame and whom they trust.
Polling can measure how those feelings are moving, but – certainly not this early – **not where they will end up.**

A Voice Realistic, but Still Hopeful --

Speaking nearly eighty-four years ago, on September 18, 1936, to the Tercentenary of Harvard College, as both an alumnus and as President of the United States – in those desperately dark days of Depression in the United States (“*I see one-third of a nation ill-housed, ill-clad, ill-nourished*”) and worldwide, with Asia at war after the Japanese invasion of Manchuria, and Europe falling into fascism and headed for World War II – Franklin Delano Roosevelt nevertheless sounded a realistic but hopeful note, quoting the Greek tragedian Euripides (480-406 BCE)

***“There be many shapes of mystery.
And many things God makes to be,
Past hope or fear.
And the end men looked for cometh not,
And a path is there where no man sought.
So hath it fallen here.”***

Sharing his unbounded confidence, let us hope we find the “*path . . . where no man sought.*”

Stay well: healthy, safe and as sane as possible.

John