

Friday, April 10th, 2020
Good Friday and
3rd Day of Passover

To Hawthorn Friends & Family -

In addition to the Wisconsin election debacle, this week was marked by a decision to delay further **Georgia's** presidential primary to June 9, the same day as **West Virginia**.

Even later will be **New Jersey's** primary (July 7) and **Alabama's** still contested GOP Senate runoff (July 14). And while Vice President Joe Biden may now be the unquestionably presumptive nominee, it is still going to be hard for New Jersey Democrats to get through the delegate selection process and arrangements starting July 7 for the **convention the week of August 17**.

But the big news this week was the total disaster of Wisconsin's failure – by Democratic governor, Republican legislature, AND non-partisan Supreme Court – to protect both the health and voting rights of their people during a pandemic.

The response to reasonable suggestions that people shouldn't have to risk their health, nor voters be expected to stand in line for two and one-half hours, is to suggest voting by mail.

We highlighted the current U.S. vote by mail situation ten days ago.

To go into meaningful detail, we want to turn – as we promised Wednesday – to one of the real experts of the conduct of elections, **William R. Sweeney, Jr.**, currently Distinguished Practitioner in Residence at the School of Public Affairs at American University in Washington, D.C.

For nearly 10 years Bill was CEO of the International Foundation for Electoral Systems and earlier co-founder of the American University Campaign Management Institute, VP for Global Government Affairs for EDS, Deputy Chair of the Democratic National Committee and Executive Director of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee. We are honored to share his views:

From Bill Sweeney --

The Wisconsin election was an April warning to the United States that there are clear and present dangers to the November election. Those dangers need bipartisan dialogues and solutions rather than a new chapter of bankrupt arguments focused on data-free ideas about partisan advantages in election legislation which continue to dismiss the right to vote.

First, the opportunity to vote by mail was available in Wisconsin and the system was overwhelmed by voter demand. The Wisconsin Election Commission reported receiving 1,282,762 applications for ballots; mailing 1,273,374 ballots and then receiving 864,759 ballots by Election Day morning.

The Wisconsin press reports multiple voters and political leaders who applied for a ballot on time and never received one. The Wisconsin Election Commission data base has records of some applications but not all and reports ballots mailed but apparently never received by the voter. Unlike episodes in Georgia in 2018 where partisan interferences were alleged, Wisconsin seems to have been simply overwhelmed.

Rather than make excuses, leaders should now plan that the voters in the states where vote by mail is now available will take advantage of the opportunity and the systems will therefore be overloaded due to demand. Budgets for printing applications and ballots; personnel; data capacity; and postage all need to increase now.

As millions choose to vote by mail, the US Postal Service will need additional appropriations. This surge in election related mail is not in the current business forecast or budget.

Second, The U.S. Election Assistance Commission has regularly highlighted the personnel crisis of election day. Often a retiree or senior citizen, the average poll worker's age is well over 65. Thousands of Wisconsin poll workers refused to work election day due to legitimate concerns about their health. And polling places are often schools or public buildings, most now closed and few with sufficient space for "social distancing."

Wisconsin's responses to the lack of personnel were multiple. Polling stations were closed. Milwaukee, a city of 600,000 with a mayor's race on the ballot, had 5 open stations rather than 180 polling places. Green Bay could only open 2 stations rather than the usual 31 polling places.

The Wisconsin National Guard deployed 2,409 members to 71 of Wisconsin's 72 counties to assist election authorities with logistics. In accord with Wisconsin law, only county residents could work as election officials, so the personnel deployment was county specific. The Guard was "trained" by watching Wisconsin Election Commission videos which were supplemental to the classroom training given to poll workers in the past.

Finally, the release of the results was postponed until April 13 and it is clear there will be a flood of lawsuits in Wisconsin as the decisions in an exceptionally low turnout election will be challenged by both parties.

Five immediate issues need dialogue, resolution and budget.

1. The U.S. Election Commission needs another infusion of funds to assist the states with the purchase of sanitizer, wipes, gloves and protective equipment as well as expanded

printing and postage budgets. There should be a national or state procurement of these materials to avoid repeating the PPE and ventilator purchase fiasco.

2.State election authorities should be conducting conversations about polling station relocations now. Where there has been partisan administration of elections, poll closings have often been arbitrary, late in the process and directed at communities of color and college students. There should be no toleration for attempts to disenfranchise people as in Georgia 2018 and Texas primary 2020.

3.Election administrators all worry about the personnel crisis. Now is the time to determine past workers' intentions; recruit new workers; and adequately TRAIN them. The Madison, Wisconsin election board recruited last week from the list of licensed bartenders!

4.The U.S. Postal Service and the Democracy Fund have been working to create a "ballot" bar code designation to facilitate the mail. That process needs to become final to meet immediate election deadlines.

Additionally, the USPS needs a new infusion of funding to process millions of applications for absentee ballots and then the return of the ballots by voters. Given the Wisconsin and U.S. Supreme Court partisan rulings on postal markings, every ballot stuck in the mail past Election Day is an American denied exercise of their right to vote.

5.Wisconsin set a precedent for elections. Military personnel may be needed in logistics as well as the conduct of the election. Additionally, the National Guard is often the state election authorities' first line of defense against cyber attacks.

In 2018, 27 states relied on their National Guard's expertise in cybersecurity to protect their election systems. There are 59 National Guard cybersecurity units with 3,900 troops in the United States.

There needs to be both additional federal funding available to the states to utilize their state National Guards for cybersecurity in 2020 and there needs to be multiple, immediate conversations about deployment issues (uniforms, weapons, chain of command).

The United States promotes democracy and elections as the way for a society to make judgements about the future. Wisconsin highlighted the frailties of our system. There's opportunity and time to address the issues and recommit our country to "ballots, not bullets."

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I am grateful to Bill for sharing his views through our forum.

Email voting – along with other pandemic accommodations – is going to be a hot, partisan issue . . . what to do, who does it and how it is funded will all be massive roadblocks . . . particularly given the White House/Senate majority view on mail voting.

In an article Wednesday morning headlined,

**Trump: GOP should fight mail-in voting because it
'doesn't work out well for Republicans'**

POLITICO, noting, "In-person voting has been complicated by the coronavirus' spread across the country," reported:

President Donald Trump on Wednesday directed Republicans to "fight very hard" against efforts to expand mail-in voting amid the coronavirus pandemic, suggesting that such a shift in ballot-casting practices would yield unfavorable electoral results for the GOP.

"Republicans should fight very hard when it comes to statewide mail-in voting. Democrats are clamoring for it," Trump wrote on Twitter. "Tremendous potential for voter fraud, and for whatever reason, doesn't work out well for Republicans."

I would say it is highly unlikely we will see a federal mandate or federal funding – and it will cost will over \$2 billion according to experts – for an all-mail November election. The salvation – for those who live there – are the big states that provide for easy early voting.

More as "the winds of change" continue to blow.

John