

Monday, November 2nd, 2020

To Hawthorn Family & Friends -

Well, it's Election Eve . . . and to borrow the words of the late President Gerald Ford, "our long national nightmare" of this campaign season is about to be over . . . even if the litigation – hopefully not the riots – will go on for weeks . . . and even if the nightmare of the pandemic and its consequences threaten to continue and worsen.

This year we mark the most expensive campaign season in history – more than \$15 billion spent on all the races and issues, more than double four years ago.

More than 97 million votes have already been cast (since early voting started in North Carolina September 4), compared with 58.3 million early votes four years ago.

And it appears we're headed for the highest turnout among eligible voters since 1960. This year's early votes in Texas and Hawaii already exceed the total vote each of those states cast four years ago.

Painfully mindful of the error of my predictions four years ago, and noting some late movement (toward President Trump) in some battleground states, here is how we see things on Election Eve 2020:

President --

While our able (and partisan and age diverse) Hawthorn team are deeply divided, I think Vice President **Biden has at least a 60-40** chance of winning (which reflects a range of view among our team from 40-60, to 49-51, to 50-50, to 60-40, 66-33, to an 80-20 Biden landslide). Ahead in national poll averages by some six points, Biden **WILL** win the **popular vote**. But Senator Clinton won that by 2.8 million votes four years ago. Biden could win the popular vote by three, four, or maybe five million votes and still lose the **Electoral College**.

And the **Electoral College increasingly comes down to Pennsylvania**.

To reach the magic Electoral College victory figure of 270, **Biden needs to take a net of 38 electoral votes that Trump won four years ago**.

Ignoring (at some peril) [The Trafalgar Group's](#) polling from the far right, as well as Morning Consult's polling from the left, and accepting the more mainstream polls, we think Biden will get 10 of those electoral votes in **Wisconsin** and 16 of those in **Michigan**, while keeping the 10 votes Clinton won in **Minnesota** and the six votes she won in **Nevada**. But that leaves him 12 votes short.

Pennsylvania offers 20 and Biden seems in better shape there – although it's razor close – than in **Florida** (with 29 votes), **North Carolina** (with 15 votes), **Georgia** (with 16 votes), or **Texas** (with 38 votes, where polls and turnout offer Biden some hope, but where Trump raised twice as much money as Biden).

If Biden wins Pennsylvania along with Michigan and Wisconsin, he is President. Same if he wins **Florida**. Probably also true if he wins **Ohio** (without which no Republican has ever been elected President).

On the other hand, if combative outlier **Trafalgar's polling** is right, as it almost uniquely was four years ago, Trump is leading and headed for a victory in **Pennsylvania** (and where Biden is especially vulnerable on the fracking issue) . . . along with **Michigan AND Wisconsin**. That means Trump is re-elected and Trafalgar is set to emerge from this election as a “giant among midgets,” not a “one-trick pony” famous only for 2016. We have more faith in their Florida numbers, which show Trump winning **Florida** (and where the Biden campaign knows they face critical problems with Latin voters and Black turnout).

Clearly Biden DOES have more “paths to victory” than Trump, but **if Biden loses Pennsylvania, it is hard to see how he wins**, although there are a number of combinations that would do it for him (but require **Florida, or North Carolina AND Arizona**, or . . .). But we THINK Biden will win **Pennsylvania**. And we don't discount the POSSIBILITY of a “**secret Biden vote**” (perhaps **seniors**, outraged at the President's handling of the pandemic but unwilling to admit they will vote against the President and/or **young voters** who appear to be voting heavily this year) that could produce a Biden landslide.

But for now, we'll stick with our **60-40 Biden call, Biden with 279 electoral votes and Trump with 259**.

The U.S. Senate --

The Senate is **currently 53 Republican and 47 Democrat** (counting two Independents). So, to take control, **Democrats need a NET GAIN of THREE seats if Biden is President** (with Sen. Harris, as Vice President, taking the chair of the presiding officer of the Senate to break ties) **or FOUR seats if Trump is re-elected** (with Vice President Pence casting the deciding vote in a 50-50 Senate).

There are **35 seats up for election this year** (including two in Georgia, one of which WILL and the other of which very well MAY, go to a run-off election January 5th), **23 Republican and 12 Democrats**.

We think the **Democrats will lose** the current Democrat seat in **Alabama** but **hold** onto the Democrat seat in **Michigan**. If those two things happen, then they need to flip **four or five of the 14 Republican seats in** (listed in what we believe is order of likelihood of Democrats' flipping them):

Colorado

Arizona

Maine (complicated by 2nd-choice voting)

North Carolina

Iowa

Georgia Perdue Seat (may not be decided until January)

South Carolina

Montana

Alaska

Kansas

Georgia's Loeffler Seat (won't be decided until January)

Texas

Mississippi

We believe there is a probability, however slight, the **Democrats** will win at least four of those and **will have control of the Senate in a Biden presidency**. **If Trump is re-elected, it seems FAR less probable the Democrats will win the necessary five to have control in a Trump presidency**. Prevailing wisdom is that if Trump wins, he keeps the Senate narrowly Republican. At the other extreme, a Biden landslide could produce a four, five or six Democratic majority in the Senate.

Said differently, **to keep their majority control of the Senate** in a Biden presidency, the Republicans have to win 11 of those 14 races. Based on current polling and our sense of political momentum, that seems UNlikely.

What we DISagree with is Politico's headline this morning: "Biden in command; Senate up for grabs." In the simplest terms, if Biden wins, Democrats probably win the Senate. If Biden loses, Democrats could well fail to take the Senate. In 2016, every state voted the same party to victory for Senate as it did for President.

Our "dark horse" prediction: The Democrat, Dr. Al Gross, wins in **Alaska**.

We think there is an **60-40 chance Democrats will take control of the Senate**, especially in a Biden presidency. But we don't fault our esteemed friend Larry Sabato's prediction earlier today of a 50D - 48R Senate, with the two Georgia seats to be decided in the January run-off.

The U. S. House of Representatives --

The current U.S. House is **232 Democrat, 197 Republican, 1 Libertarian, and 4 vacancies**.

We agree with prevailing thinking in Washington and around the country that **Democrats will INCREASE their House majority**, adding five to 15 seats, holding on to (and hurting the GOP ticket) in the suburban districts they won in 2016.

Governors --

Current governors are **26 Republican and 24 Democrat**. Only **11 are on the ballot** in 2020, nine incumbents (6 GOP, 3 Democrat) and two open (one of each).

The **only change we expect is for Montana to switch from Dem to GOP**.

State Officials --

As always, states with gubernatorial races are also busy electing lieutenant governors, secretaries of state, and most importantly, **10 state attorneys general** (who play an increasing important national role on issues like restricting the internet giants). We see little change in those offices.

Critical to utilities and their customers, 10 states have elections for **public utility commissioners**. Again, we see little change coming here, unless an unexpected Democrat sweep in a new battleground state like **Georgia** puts the Trump-championing commission chairman "Bubba" McDonald at totally unexpected risk.

However, there are key races – likely to impact the nation’s shift to renewables – in **Arizona, New Mexico, the Dakotas, Georgia and Montana**. Only two of the seats are up in **Georgia**, but three – a majority – are up in **Arizona and Montana**.

State Legislatures --

Current state legislative control of chambers is **58 Republican and 40 Democrat**, a recovery by the Democrats from lower standing in the Obama years.

The Great Charlie Cook and his team say six chambers are “**Toss-ups**” this year (2 Dem and 4 GOP), and he has 3 Dem chambers “Lean Dem” and 9 GOP chambers “Lean GOP.” These include the possibility BOTH houses could switch in **Arizona, Georgia, North Carolina, and Pennsylvania**.

The big news will be if the **Texas House** switches from Red to Blue. That seems UNlikely to us, but it is clearly possible.

Ballot Measures --

According to the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), there are **121 statewide ballots measures** being decided Tuesday. Because of the difficulty of gathering signatures in a pandemic, that is the **fewest number since 1986**. There were 154 in 2016, and 174 in 2012.

Without any claim to be expert on any of these, among the ones we’re watching this year are:

- The “**gig economy**” workers-are-employees measure (Prop 22) in **California**, to which that gig economy (Uber, Lyft, etc.) have contributed more than \$200 million in favor of it (versus \$20 million spent against it).
- Increased **taxes on commercial properties** (Prop 15) in **California**, which could impact previously protected wind and solar generating properties and would impact rental properties.
- Other **California** issues on **affirmative action** in college admissions and government hiring, ending **cash bail**, and regulating **dialysis** companies (to which they have contributed more than \$105 million to the proponents’ \$8.9 million).

- A number of **election process** questions (including redistricting in **Virginia** and **Missouri**, ranked-choice voting in **Massachusetts**, top-two primary in **Florida** and a more exotic version of it in **Alaska**, electoral college in **Colorado**, eliminating a majority of house districts victory requirement for governor in **Mississippi**, appointment instead of election of New Mexico utility regulators, etc.).
- **Marijuana** (and other drug-related) issues in **Arizona, Montana, New Jersey, South Dakota, and Oregon.**
- Minimum wage and tax issues in **Florida, Arizona, and Illinois.**
- Statehood request in **Puerto Rico.**

“Deep in the Weeds” --

For those political junkies with no real life (which describes most of us in recent weeks) who wonder how in the world we come to these views, we can share that we have this year considered **traditional political measures** (even after President Trump re-wrote all the rule books in 2016) as well as given more weight than usual to **non-political measures**, trying to discern whether each benefitted (early, mid-campaign, and late-breaking) President Trump and the Republicans or Vice President Biden and the Democrats. Most usefully, we have talked to our **colleagues “outside the DC Beltway”** who live and work in politics “on the ground” in the battleground states, **NOT in Babylon-on-the-Potomac, the WORST place to sense what is happening in the “real” America.**

Among the **traditional political measures** we considered were:

- **Voter Registration**, with the advantage in the critical battleground states of Florida, North Carolina and Pennsylvania (although NOT in Georgia), going to the **Republicans.**
- **Money** – As the late Jesse Unruh said, “The mother’s milk of politics” and as Depthroat advised, “Follow the money.”

In the 52 years since my first campaign (as a volunteer for Tom Eagleton in 1968), I have NEVER seen a year with such an overwhelming fundraising advantage for Democrats, especially against an incumbent Republican president who is a self-proclaimed billionaire. The Biden campaign has raised \$952 million to the Trump campaign’s \$533 million.

In the most contested Senate races, Democrats have outraised Republicans by more than two-to-one (four-to-one in Kansas). In South Carolina, Jaime Harrison raised \$57 million in the third quarter, breaking the previous record for ANY senate candidate. Of course, that doesn't guarantee victory. The record he broke was Beto O'Rourke's, who LOST in Texas in 2018.

For the Democrats, ActBlue raised \$1.5 billion in the third quarter (almost \$3 billion for this cycle), compared to \$385 million they raised in that quarter two years ago. And the average donation was \$47, coming from more than 13 million donors.

Money advantage is clearly to the **Democrats**.

- **Advertising** – Of course, money pays for advertising. The two presidential campaigns have spent \$1.3 billion since April 8, much of that driven by Biden who has blown past Trump, which was easy when Biden entered the last month with \$114 million more cash-on-hand.

While I can't imagine what it is that any voter doesn't already know this year and needs to be reminded of by advertising, it is still striking that in the final week before the election Biden and pro-Biden groups are outspending Trump and pro-Trump groups \$127 million to \$68 million – almost two-to-one. And Biden's spending in the battleground states has generally edged Trump two-to-one, such as Arizona, where Biden is up with \$50 million to Trump's \$20 million.

The advertising advantage is clearly to the **Democrats**.

- **Social Media** – President Trump is, of course, the grand master of political social media. On Twitter he has 87.3 million followers to Biden's 11.8 million, an almost 8-to-1 advantage. On Facebook, Trump's official page has gotten 130 million reactions to Biden's 18 million.

Advantage: President Trump and **GOP**.

- **Polling** – In the **NATIONAL** polls, Trump's numbers are consistently awful (and have been for four years) on:
 - right-wrong direction of the country
 - personal favorability and likeability (tho' better than four years ago; Biden also better than Clinton)

- job approval (other than the economy specifically, generally well BELOW Bill Clinton in '96, Obama in '12, and Bush in '08, all of whom WON re-election, but above Carter in '80 and H.W. Bush in '92, both of whom LOST re-election)
- voter choice, currently 50.9% Biden, 44.4% Trump.

The one thing on which Trump exceeds Biden is the enthusiasm of his supporters. And there has been troubling polling results for Biden in recent months among Latin/Hispanic voters and projected African-American turnout.

National polling advantage: to the **Democrats**.

In the **BATTLEGROUND STATES** Biden leads . . . but, on average, just a bit more than Hillary Clinton led four years ago. And on Saturday, USA TODAY's headline was, "Trump still gaining in swing state polls Will it be enough?"

There ARE fewer undecideds than four years ago. There MAY be as many/more "shy" Biden voters as Trump voters. But Trafalgar is doubling down on their pro-Trump predictions from four years ago in the Battleground states.

Battleground polling advantage: Slightly (and subject to dispute and error) to Biden and the **Dems**.

- **Ground Game** – As noted, the Republicans won the earliest ground game with registration. And as Democrats abandoned (and, in many states are still absent from) door-to-door campaigning, the Republicans seized the lead there, as well. Finally, no one does rallies more exciting to his supporters (if horrifying to anyone who has heard there may be a pandemic) than President Trump, who has two dozen stops planned the final week of the campaign.

Although, we would note, his Sunday evening rally in Rome, Georgia, reflects a campaign having to spend too much late time (and money, which they don't have enough of) in the smallest of Sun Belt markets, when they should be concentrating on the Rust Belt.

I would also note Trump has decided NOT to make a final fight for the suburbs, put instead is concentrating on smaller, non-urban markets: Rome in Georgia; Green Bay, Wisconsin; Rochester, Minnesota; Dubuque, Iowa; Hickory, North Carolina; etc. Many are on the fringe of major television markets, but his appeal remains to his base, not to the suburbs his party lost in 2018.

But a clear advantage in the ground game to Trump and the **GOP**.

- **Voter Enthusiasm** – From his signature rallies in 2016, continuing (to the horror of some) through the pandemic, to the final weekend of this campaign (with caravans on the road in countless communities), President Trump wins the voter enthusiasm contest. Indeed, while I know some Democrats are enthusiastic about defeating Trump, I know none are enthusiastic about electing Joe Biden.

Clear enthusiasm advantage to **GOP**.

- **Turnout** – Ultimately, of course, it comes down to who votes. We appear to be heading for the highest turnout of eligible voters since 1876, certainly higher than the modern record in 1960. Historically, increases in turnout always benefitted Democrats. However, the Trump campaign strategy is to register and turn out white, none-college-educated, mostly men who did NOT vote in 2016. Add to that the “shy” Trump voters, and perhaps higher turnout is not as Democrat-favoring as historically thought (although, clearly, EARLY voting was heavily Democrat, but Republicans are catching up and made it clear from the beginning they would go to the polls ON Election Day).

Advantage: To **Democrats**

Among the **non-political factors** we considered in making this prediction were:

- **COVID** and its impact on:
 - health and mortality, genuine human suffering including . . .
 - jobs, businesses, household financial crises, both the suffering from the losses and the rage against shutting down
 - home schooling, again both the burden and rage
 - general socialization deprivation/fatigue/fear
 - all creating deep division within the Republican Party, especially at the state level
 - AND particularly with the worsening infection, hospitalization and death numbers, denying the Trump campaign the opportunity to focus on anything else (and not helped by Donald Jr.’s comments that 1,000 deaths are “almost nothing.”) . . . possibly eroding Trump’s support among seniors

- **Weather**
 - fires in the West, from California to Colorado, with extensive power outages
 - hurricanes and floods in the South, also with power outages
 - an early cold winter and snow in the Northeast and Midwest
 - all adding to focus/debate on climate change and fossil fuels/fracking
- **The Economy . . . in the last week of the campaign**
 - the stock market's having had its worst week (10/26 - 10/30) since the pandemic set in in March
 - layoff announcements by Boeing and Exxon Mobil
 - foreclosure increases
- **Riots and Protests**
 - still going on from Philadelphia to Portland . . .
 - while Washington, DC boards up preparing for Tuesday night
- **The Federal Failure . . .**
 . . . to pass pre-election renewed benefits to help people losing businesses, jobs, cars, homes, education, medical care and members of their family
- **The Rage of the American People . . .**
 . . . some creating the wave President Trump has ridden, other creating a wave that may swamp him, but both sure to leave our country deeply polarized, suspicious, hostile and more hateful (and nostalgic for those of us who can remember when a year – 1967 – was called “*the summer of LOVE*”).

On behalf of all of us joining you on this sometimes painful journey, and in the hopes you stay well: healthy, safe and reasonably sane,

John

PS: As I make these, and read others', predictions, I am reminded of the story that when President Truman returned to Washington after his epic upset re-election victory in 1948, the WASHINGTON POST hung on their building a sign, “Mr. President. We’re prepared to eat crow whenever you’re prepared to serve it.” Given the extreme and absolute predictions the “experts” have made, there will be a lot of crow-eating to be done starting on Wednesday.