

# *To Hawthorn Friends and Family –*

You may find interesting two data points from an on-line poll Hawthorn did last week for a new business pitch. It was of 450 adults among the pollster 1Q's standing sample of on-line participants, all responding they are (1) currently employed; (2) have at least an undergraduate degree; and (3) make more than \$75,000 per year . . . so skewed more educated and employed and slightly more up-scale than a true national sample, but also reflecting an increased likelihood to vote. While that skew served our purposes, it still validly reflects two interesting political/policy points:

## **Biden's Problem with Independents**

Last Fall, on the eve of the Virginia gubernatorial election, we predicted Terry McAuliffe was in trouble (and we were more right than we knew; he lost by two points a state Biden carried a year before by 10 points) when we saw Biden's national job approval ratings among Independents fall, over his first year in office, from 61% to 34%.

We noted then the "old" political rule (and, like most other old rules, only selectively relevant in an era when so much has changed in politics) that ***Independents decide elections***. Historically, Republicans vote for Republicans and Democrats vote for Democrats. Their turnout – unusually high or low – may be critical, but their partisan vote rarely changes. It is the Independents who decide most elections.

To the extent that is still true, **Joe Biden and the Democrats are in deep trouble.**

Our polling last week showed that while **President Biden's total national job approval was 33% approve, 47% disapprove (net -14 points)** and 20% no opinion, it was among

**Democrats, 60% approve, 21% disapprove, 19% no opinion (net +39 points)**

**Republicans, 3% approve, 89% disapprove, 8% no opinion (net -86 points)**

**Independents, 28% approve, 42% disapprove, 29% no opinion (net -14 points)**

Gallup, by the way, drawing on their total representative national sample January 3 – 16, had Biden's approval at 40%, disapprove at 56% (net -16 points).

Democrats face a huge obstacle to victory in the mid-terms when their President's approval is -14 points among Independents . . . AND when Republicans disapprove with FAR greater intensity than Democrats approve.

That's reflected in the latest (January 18<sup>th</sup>) Real Clear Politics **generic congressional ballot polling which puts the Republicans at 44.3% and Democrats at 41.2%**. For Democrats to keep control of the House, they need a five or six point advantage on this question going into an election, so they aren't just down by 3.1 points, but more like eight or nine.

When Walter Cronkite turned against the Viet Nam War, President Johnson said, "*We've lost Middle America.*" The Democrats will lose elections until they regain today's Middle America, the Independents. And they will only do that when they communicate clearly and credibly that they are acting competently and effectively in Middle America's interest . . . something the recent congressional train wrecks on voting rights and budget are unlikely to convince anyone, especially Middle America.

## **OTHER Vaccine Mandates at Risk -- ??**

We are increasingly hearing that the NEXT battleground for vaccine mandates are the NON-Covid vaccine mandates, such as polio, chickenpox, measles, mumps, diphtheria and whooping cough. Both the new opponents of COVID vaccine mandates from the political libertarian right, as well long-time anti-vaxers from the left like Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. (who was profiled coming to Washington to lead a march of thousands of anti-vaxers yesterday) are expected to focus next on OTHER vaccine mandates, arguing (to put it in the most reasonable terms), "*Of course, parents SHOULD vaccinate their children, but they should NOT be forced to by the government or school systems. Vaccinating children is a decision for their parents to make, not for governments to mandate.*"

When we asked, "*Should governments continue to require these (chickenpox, measles, mumps, etc.) vaccinations for children to participate in school and other activities, or should it be up to the parents alone?*" the results we got were, nationally, among all respondents:

**Government should KEEP requiring vaccines, 68%**  
**Vaccine decisions should be left to parents, 26%**  
**Unsure, 6%**

However, **among Republicans, only 41% said government should keep requiring, 50% said it should be left to parents, and 8% were undecided.**

Democrats were 86% government requirement, 9% parents and 5% undecided while Independents were 69% government requirement, 26% parents and 5% undecided.

But that Republican support for leaving vaccination decisions to parents could be critical. Currently, Republicans control:

32 state senates  
30 state houses of representatives

28 state governors' offices  
27 state attorneys general offices

Given 20 Republican governors are in states facing elections this year, the Republicans' hopes of winning governorships in the 16 Democratic states also facing elections, and the appeal of this to the energized Republican base, we could see NON-COVID vaccine mandates emerge as the new battleground in state legislatures this year and next year and in the 2022 state elections.

## What Does it Mean?

My wife, Ivy, often – and rightly! – responds to my more brilliant observations with, “*Perhaps interesting, but more certainly irrelevant.*” I’m not entirely sure what the above mean, but it may include:

- If the Republicans gain control of congress in November, it will mean an **even more deadlocked (if that’s possible) congress for the next two years** while the GOP avoids any action prior to their hoped for regaining of the White House in 2024. Even less will get done in Washington in the next two years (again, if that’s possible) than in the last few.

I recently read with interest New Hampshire Gov. Chris Sununu’s comment that the reason he did NOT run for the U.S. Senate this year – a seat he probably could have won – was because after he talked to some Republican senators in Washington, it was clear their only agenda for 2023 and 2024 was to see that NOTHING happened. He concluded that was no reason for him to go to Washington.

- If OTHER vaccine mandates get rolled back, it is going to mean specific problems for **some employers and most schools/colleges**. The new “divide” in America may be between living/working in communities that still mandate vaccinations and those that don’t. And it’s going to mean even more bitter political confrontations (again, if politics can get more bitter).
- If this reflects the ascendancy of the far, libertarian right . . . and provides an opportunity for timely alliances with the extreme populist left . . . then business generally had better worry about the **rolling back of pro-business policies** enacted over the decades by Main Street/Wall Street Republicans and pro-business/growth/labor Democrats.

## *Snark of the Week*

Even as an old Democrat, I can’t resist passing this on from a dear friend in Alabama, where I’ve worked for decades. He observed,

*“This year, 2022, both Groundhog Day and the State of the Union address will occur on the same day.*

*“This is an ironic juxtaposition of events.*

*“One involves a meaningless ritual in which we look to an insignificant creature of little intelligence, just emerging from a long nap, for prognostication and direction.*

*“The other involves a groundhog.”*

*John*