

Drain the Swamp, Or Be Drowned By It

by Conrad Black



The presidential race appears to have tightened in the last two months. President Trump's approval rating has ticked up from 41 percent to 45 percent, while his disapproval rating has fallen from 56.5 percent to 53 percent. And these are averaging some clearly stale and dated polls, a number of which effectively are the products of Democratic-front organizations because of the unrepresentative echelon of voters that they canvass.

Taking the most recent and reliable polls, the margin is significantly closer than that. Knowledgeable Democratic strategists, such as former Pennsylvania Governor Ed Rendell

on Fox News Wednesday night, agree that approximately three points should always be added to Trump's totals to account for the reticence of many of his supporters when speaking with pollsters. Nor will all those who disapprove of Trump necessarily vote against him, as that fact by itself does not necessarily imply that they have a higher opinion of Joe Biden.

Finally, for these purposes, because of the large built-in Democratic popular vote pluralities in California and New York, if Trump comes in within 3 percent of his chief opponent, he is likely to win as he did four years ago. The lesson of these numbers, insofar as one may be deduced, is that the race is tightening, and as the betting odds show, is now about an even proposition.

The president's improvement in the polls has rattled the Democrats and flushed Joe Biden out of his home for a few modest and carefully insulated forays out in the nation beyond his Delaware driveway gate. And it must be said that in his appearances Biden has been adequately fluent and the generally affable person he has always been, outwardly at least, throughout his career.

In these circumstances it would be tactically unwise for Trump or the Republican campaign to belabor the arguments that he is mentally deficient or senile or that he is in any way personally in league with the violent urban guerrillas who have generated so much rioting and property damage across many cities over the summer. The president would be in danger of incurring the charge of demagoguery if he gave any comfort at all to the current Democratic mantra that he is more or less deliberately inciting violence in order to frighten the country, "rooting for violence" in Biden's preposterous expression.

Biden's Vulnerabilities

The principal variables for the last eight weeks of this campaign appear to be progress on the coronavirus, on the related unemployment levels, and whether serious indictments against the fabricators of the Trump-Russian collusion fraud can be brought down forcefully and believably without being vulnerable to the already warmed-up charge of political direction of the Justice Department. And beyond all of this, there looms the question of vote-harvesting and posted ballot fraud on a grand scale. It all makes for a very unsettled pre-electoral climate.

It must be disquieting to the Republican campaign that the Democrats and their Siamese twins in the rabidly partisan media have been so durably successful in terrorizing the country about COVID-19. It is difficult and requires exquisite care to explain in politically acceptable terms the very slight chances of serious illness or fatality, but we've reached the point where that task must be undertaken in earnest. Those who are not immunocompromised have a minimal chance of a serious problem; the people of the United States, and broadly, people as a species, must be emboldened to be less exaggeratedly frightened.

In Rooseveltian terms, the fear is more worthy of being feared than is its ostensible subject.

It is clear that the president's executive talents are again manifest in the steady narrowing of the time anticipated before a substantially effective vaccine is available. The latest estimate is that its existence will be confirmed by the end of next month and distribution to frontline health workers and the vulnerable sections of the population will begin just before election day.

Presumably, if this timetable is confirmed through September, it will relax public anxiety considerably and accelerate the

process of opening schools and bringing the unemployed back to work, creating a benign cycle for the Republican campaign.

If the president leaves it to the public to decide on the comparative mental and physical stamina and purposefulness of the candidates, and desists from belittling Biden as a senescent geriatric, he will steer clear of the shoal on which he has frequently foundered of seeming to be an ungracious bully and braggart, and gratuitously pejorative in his comments on rivals.

He already has a target-rich rhetorical environment to operate in by confining himself to his opponent's practice of facing in all four directions on most public issues. Biden is extremely vulnerable on everything from a new shutdown of the economy on a slender medical pretext to his fluctuating enthusiasm for the Green Terror (including fracking), to his clear commitment to raise taxes. These points can be made matter-of-factly in a way that assists the public in deciding how to vote rather than inciting sympathy for Joe Biden as a worthy veteran being unfairly disparaged.

Bring on the Indictments Already

It is unconscionable that Special Counsel John Durham has taken us to this point without a serious indictment over the Russian nonsense. There can be little doubt after Justice Department Inspector General Michael Horowitz's report and other revelations in various congressional committees and the release of previously classified information, that serious illegalities were committed by prominent members of the Obama Administration in the Russia-Trump collusion canard.

Attorney General William Barr generously invokes the COVID-19 crisis as an excuse for Durham's dilatoriness, but he has had 18 months and if he gets much closer to the election, he will have brought needless controversy upon himself by late indictments..The attorney general has stated that the public

should been given—enough information on this subject to make an informed decision on Election Day.

Unless Durham has fizzled completely—and there is no hint of that—he should have assembled a serious case against at least one prominent official by now. It is obvious that very serious offenses were committed by someone, but it is up to him alone to identify and prosecute the culprits.

On the dangers of mail-in voting initiated by unsolicited mass-distribution of ballots according to an always partly obsolescent voters' register, the bipartisan commission headed by President Carter and former Secretary of State James Baker concluded several years ago that this was a great cause of possible fraud and chicanery. Everyone who believes in honest elections can only hope that the judiciary deals with the pending welter of litigation fairly and effectively, and that the Republicans are as well-mobilized with observers and lawyers at all stages of the voting process as the Democrats, to ensure that skullduggery is either frustrated altogether or of equal weight on both sides.

Donald Trump will either drain the swamp or the swamp will drown him; in either case, elections hereafter should be less contentious for a while. Whenever it ends, the Trump phenomenon is an exhausting challenge.

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