

**June 26, 2020**

**To:**

**From: David Crow, Laurie-Ann Flanagan, David Beaudreau**

**Re: T3 Fertilizer Conference: 2020 Election Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic**

On June 25th, The Fertilizer Institute hosted their T3 Conference with guest speaker David Wasserman, the House Editor for the Cook Political Report, to discuss the status of the November elections with respect to the implications of the pandemic and economic shutdown.

**Introduction:**

Wasserman began by posing the dual questions of “how we got to this point in our politics” and “where are the upcoming elections headed,” outlining his presentation to cover cultural factors that influence and indicate the outcome of the upcoming elections. He noted that although Americans typically rally around the president during a crisis, President Trump is not receiving the same approval, listing 56% disapproval for the handling of COVID and 59% disapproval on race relations, relative to the average 66% approval rating for governors nation-wide according to Quinnipiac.

**How Did We Get Here:**

Highlighting the urban-rural divide that often indicates political alignment, Wasserman displayed breakdowns of voting tendencies by patronage to wholefoods and Cracker Barrel for Democrats and Republicans, respectively. He noted that in 2016, Trump won 22% of Wholefoods and 76% of Cracker Barrels, indicating a 54% culture gap which was triple the margin in 2008. He discussed other means of grouping voters, noting that the patterns of customers in Lulu Lemon of Arlington, VA and Tractor Supply Co. of Springfield, MO are now more accurate indicators, defusing criticism that this heuristic is purely regional in light of their mutual and significant market growth.

**Where Are We Headed:**

Wasserman then transitioned to discussion of polling safety, conventions, alternative means of voting, and virtual campaigning. Due to the fact that nearly 60% of poll workers in the midterm elections were 60+, Wasserman noted that many states are having to recruit younger workers to meet the high demand for voting opportunities. He also noted that even if states fail to supply a sufficient amount of trained polling management workers, it is unlikely that the presidential election would be rescheduled like many states’ primaries have been so far, as the date was set by Congress in 1845, and can not be changed without joint House and Senate Action which is unlikely. With respect to the upcoming party conventions, Wasserman predicted that the disparities in attendance will highlight the vast attitude differences between the parties, noting that the Republican National Convention is set to attract a large attendance in Jacksonville, FL, whereas the Democratic National Convention will be lightly attended and less-protested. In terms of the accommodations to be made for voters who are unable to get to the polls, he asserted the need for a massive shift to vote-by-mail. He mentioned that in 2018, 25% of Americans voted by mail, including 100% in OR, 94% in WA, and 76% in AZ, as well as drastically lower rates in the high-stakes swing states like MN with 7%, PA with 4%, and WI with 5% of ballots cast by mail. He also mentioned that most states will be unable to handle the volume of vote-by-mail ballots, especially with a projected record of 150 M voters in the upcoming election. Lastly, despite Joe Biden’s underwhelming online presence compared to other primary candidates like Warren and Buttigieg, he performed well on Super Tuesday in many states where he did not campaign. Wasserman asserted that without a significant visible presence, Biden represents normalcy and a return to the Obama era more so than an actual candidate; whereas Trump is very much an in-person rally figure in these states.

**Race for House and Senate:**

Noting a 233, 201, 1Democratic, Republican, Libertarian distribution in the House, Wasserman projected that the Democrats are in good shape to retain the House as the Republicans will likely be able to snag at most 5 out of the necessary 17 seats to gain the majority. He elaborated on the unlikelihood of this occurring, mentioning residual campaign funding that Democrats boast due to wealthy donors desperate to send a message against the president. He cited the median fundraising figures of $2.2 M and $360,000 for Democrats and Republicans, noting that it is much harder to fundraise during a pandemic which greatly benefits the incumbent party. Additionally, he noted that three times as many Republicans are retiring compared to Democrats, further jeopardizing seats which could be snatched by Democrats in districts which have been galvanized by Trump since the 2018. In the Senate, Wasserman identified the key races of Senators McSally (AZ), Gardner (CO), Collins (ME), Tillis (NC) which place the Republican’s 53-47 edge at serious risk.

**Race for the White House**

Mentioning that Biden would win the election by 10 points if it were held any sooner than November, Wasserman laid out the three outs that Trump has which could give him an advantage before election day: economic rebound, Biden’s waning image, and the Democrats’ geography problem. Before jumping into those three, he mentioned how neither campaign has adjusted their campaign slogan, and how both “Keep America Great,” and “Restore the Soul of the Nation,” fail to resonate with voters. He mentioned that Trump’s economy ratings are higher than his overall and COVID approval ratings, which will only continue to increase under Q3’s 30% predicted growth. Wasserman noted that while the Trump campaign squandered the financial and organizational head start, the potential to exploit Democratic divisions like Biden’s support of the Iraq War, support for the 1994 Crime Bill, his mental fitness, as well as his son Hunter Biden could prove to be very successful. Lastly, Wasserman recapitulated 2016 election statistics like Trump’s popular-vote loss by 2.9 M votes, but victory in the Electoral College due to 3 out of the 3141 electoral counties. In order to adjust for a potential repeat, Biden would have to win by as much as 4%, taking big swing-states like AZ, FL, NC, PA, MI, WI. He concluded by discussing how Biden’s running mate may impact his polling in some states, hinting at Kamala Harris to be the likely pick.