

Bill Kaplan: Joe Biden can win in Wisconsin

Posted on Monday, Jul 20, 2020

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“Trump faces rising disapproval and widespread distrust on coronavirus, (Washington) Post-ABC poll finds Trump’s ratings for handling the coronavirus have dropped by 16 percentage points among white evangelical Protestants to 68 percent today; by 15 points among white men without college degrees to 56 percent; and by 11 points among rural residents to 48 percent approval.” Trump’s support is waning. Why?

Trump’s incompetent handling of COVID-19 has led to widespread community spread and an extended recession. “The path forward for the economy is extraordinarily uncertain and will depend in large part on our success containing the virus. A full recovery is unlikely until people are confident that it is safe to re-engage in a broad range of activities” (Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell). However, COVID-19 is out-of-control.

More than 3.7 million cases nationally, about 42,000 in Wisconsin (WI). U.S. cases are expected to rise over 100,000 per day. Deaths are increasing nationally to over 140,000 and over 840 in WI. By October, the U.S. death toll could be 200,000! And, in WI the virus has spread to suburbs and worse to rural counties, ill-equipped to handle hospitalizations and other medical care. Trump’s mishandling of COVID-19 has upended the 2020 election.

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The Cook Political Report said: “Currently, Wisconsin is the tipping point state; the state gives Biden enough electoral votes to claim an Electoral College victory.” It

rates WI as “lean Democratic.” Moreover, RealClearPolitics’ average of WI polls gives Biden a 6 point lead over Trump. MJS reporter Craig Gilbert said: “The overall polling in Wisconsin is unquestionably grim for Trump at the moment.”

Biden isn’t overlooking WI. The Associated Press reported: “Joe Biden turns focus to Wisconsin with battle-tested hires Two veterans of (WI Democratic Senator) Tammy Baldwin’s successful 2018 reelection campaign will run Biden’s Wisconsin operation.” Other campaign staffers include advisers to Wisconsin Democrats Governor Tony Evers and Representative Gwen Moore. Baldwin called the campaign staff “some of the best Democratic talent Wisconsin has to offer.” More good news.

“The Wisconsin Democratic Party raised \$10 million in the second quarter of the year, girding for battles in both the presidential race and the state legislature in one of the country’s most closely divided battleground states. Party officials said the \$10 million haul, which is split between the party’s federal and state accounts, is the best quarter it has recorded in its history” (Politico). Governor Evers told Politico: “I don’t think there’s a Democrat in Wisconsin that’s going to take Donald Trump for granted. ... But we just cannot let down our guard.”

The Biden campaign will have to maximize turnout in Madison and Milwaukee, but winning and electing down-ballot Democrats demands focus on rural WI, specifically thousands of Obama voters who later supported Trump. Former WI Democratic Representative Dave Obey told me: “The best way to win in rural WI is to campaign there. Focus, money and organizational efforts must also be directed to state legislative races in rural areas.”

Biden can win in Wisconsin.

— Kaplan wrote a guest column from Washington, D.C., for the Wisconsin State Journal from 1995 – 2009.