Is the national election a great pumpkin parade?

By Glenn Brownstein

Perhaps the most distinctive aspect of this year's national election is its timing. Halloween is a holiday where even the most seasoned politicians have clearly enjoyed their belief that both Jerry Ford and Jimmy Carter will turn into pumpkins. Thus, the election this year will likely be remembered for being celebrated more for its entertainment value than for its political significance. And although half of the eligible American electorate will sit this one out, it's hard to see how a responsible national media could miss this big, but not all that important, story. Although many referenda and local races dominate the election (if you believe Tom and Newt's Carter has a lock on the Bay State, so that race clearly should not be a factor in a potentially high turnout).

Why are there so many apathetic voters this year? Maybe the long-suffering voters, with their decades, and even years, of voting, have finally decided it's time to stay away. Whatever the reason, it's likely to mean that the campaign will need to take a different approach next Tuesday night in the form of a presidential debate. For Carter, the campaign's goal is to stay interesting, or else it will be swept off the political radar.

The campaign will need to find a way to make the transition already been made. The next step is to turn the election to the House of Representatives. Carter's campaign chairman James Baker recently acknowledged that the President's forces have often even considered the possibility of donating money to the McCarthy effort. So that is the point I mean the McCarthy backers are accomplishing exactly two things with their votes. They are indeed registering their discontent in a more positive way than if they did not vote, and more importantly, they are indeed helping the Ford campaign.

Now, eight years later, McCarthy could very well pull out enough Carter support to allow the election to be a most competitive race between Mr. Carter and Ford. Perhaps Mr. McCarthy's campaign workers acknowledge that, barring a miracle, he cannot win a single electoral vote. Who are they? What are their motives?

First, they are liberals — former supporters of George McGovern, backers in the primaries in the North or Massachusetts or Missouri. Second, they are anti-Carter Democrats and Mr. McCarthy himself said last week that "I think if I spoil the game the two parties have been playing it will be good for the country."

That is the strange role for McCarthy. The campaign reported this week that the McCarthy campaign has only even considered the possibility of donating money to the McCarthy effort. So that is the point I mean the McCarthy backers are accomplishing exactly two things with their votes. They are indeed registering their discontent in a more positive way than if they did not vote, and more importantly, they are indeed helping the Ford campaign.

McCarthy has made his point. He has successfully challenged Ford's legitimacy and has succeeded in discriminating against third party candidates. He has shown that he could be a legitimate contender for the presidency. But he cannot win. He will not carry one state. Even optimistic McCarthy backers hope for only ten percent of the vote in his best states. Liberals for McCarthy must realize that what his vote could do — it will not elect their candidate, but it may give a narrow victory to President Ford.

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