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Pennsylvania is heading toward a disastrous train wreck regarding the counting of mail-in ballots, and that could have consequences for the rest of the country. Under state law, the opening of mail-in ballots can't begin until 7 a.m. on Election Day. That means the counting of millions of ballots that arrived in advance by mail could go on for days without anyone knowing who won the presidential election in Pennsylvania and that state's 20 Electoral College votes. Those 20 votes could well determine who the next president is.

Gov. Tom Wolf and Republican leaders of the state Legislature could have avoided the situation if they had put aside their partisan differences and worked together to give election officials more time in advance to start processing — but not counting — the mail-in ballots. Instead, it was more of the same political bickering that dominates Harrisburg.

There had been negotiations between the two sides to change the law and allow the ballot envelopes to be opened and prepared for scanning before the election, but they were far apart in their demands and failed to compromise. And frankly, there was no reason to make this a political negotiation. Allowing election officials to start preparing the ballots for counting early, something that goes on in numerous other states, would benefit neither party. Instead of making this a commonsense change to speed up the counting, politics prevailed once more.

Now it's too late for compromise, and it's all regrettable, especially for election officials across the state who will have to deal with counting an estimated 3 million mail-in ballots along with conducting in-person voting at the polls on Election Day. But it's even more troubling for the general public as there could be all sorts of shifting vote totals for days before the final vote is determined.

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There could be legal challenges on both sides with judges, not voters, deciding the election.

Ironically, the whole issue of mail-in balloting came about in Pennsylvania due to a grand compromise last year. In exchange for Republicans agreeing to ease restrictions on mail-in voting, Mr. Wolf and Democratic lawmakers agreed to end straight-party voting used by mostly older Democratic voters. Was another grand compromise possible? In the world of Pennsylvania politics, apparently not.

Pennsylvanians could now end up with a tremendous amount of uncertainty, confusion and consternation in the days after the election. We wouldn't be facing this situation if the governor and Republican leaders had done their jobs. – [Pittsburgh Post-Gazette editorial](#); [In Pittsburgh Tribune-Review, Gov. Wolf says the state is prepared](#)

Since the business of sending targeted messages is critical to most campaigns, I've been thinking about what's out there in this campaign -- and what's not. What I'm thinking is in the last days of a long, rough race in a state deemed critical to winning the White House, both presidential camps might be missing opportunities to close out strong.

First, a top Democratic ad-maker in Philly who's worked campaigns across the country suggests Joe Biden blew a chance for gains in far-northwestern Pennsylvania. Erie County -- population 270,000 with a Democratic voter registration edge of nearly 28,000 -- was one of [three key blue counties](#), along with Northampton and Luzerne, that voted for Trump in 2016 and helped him win narrowly the state.

Tom Ridge grew up in Erie. He was an assistant D.A. there after graduating Harvard, serving in Vietnam and earning a law degree at Dickinson. He then was elected Erie's congressman, as a Republican in a democratic region. He served six terms before being elected governor in 1994. He was reelected in 1998 before being named the nation's first director of Homeland Security following the terrorist attacks of September 2001.

So, safe to say, Ridge is an accomplished favorite son of the state's fourth largest city, no doubt still popular or, at least, respected in the place where he was raised. Last month, [Ridge endorsed Biden over Trump](#). Said it would be the first time he ever voted for a Democrat for president, adding, "It's time to put country over party." One could argue that the Biden camp should have jumped all over that and used it to get what would seem significant mileage out of a Ridge ad running in Erie.

Didn't happen. On Wednesday, Erie County Democratic Chairman Jim Wertz told me, nope, Biden's campaign had no Ridge ads in Erie. "It's not a bad idea," Wertz added, "We've got a county party ad featuring Colin Powell (former Secretary of State, who also endorsed Biden) set to run on Sunday, but it would have better to have Ridge." Wertz later called back to say the local party now plans a Ridge ad for Sunday. Both Biden and Trump have visited Erie, where the race is seen as tight, according to locals of both parties.

In the other corner of the state, one could argue there's opportunity for the Trump campaign. While Philadelphia is far from fertile ground for Trump, or any Republican, there are parts of the city, in south and northeast Philly, where he actually won a couple wards in 2016. And although the citywide Democratic

registration edge is better than six-to-one, the city is at the center of the nation's fourth-largest media market. What happens there is news in three states to millions of voters.

Trump pushes law and order hard in this campaign, especially in the wake of racially-centric demonstrations. Some of this led to riots and looting, some of it occurring in Philadelphia. Maybe a trip to the state's largest city isn't the worst idea. The city is in turmoil again this week after police on Monday shot and killed a 27-year old Black man, [Walter Wallace Jr.](#), who was holding a knife. His family says he had mental health issues.

Subsequent violent clashes between crowds of protestors and police resulted in [30 officers being injured](#), one hospitalized after being run over by a pickup truck. This led to a city curfew and calling out the Pennsylvania National Guard. If Trump were to, say, visit with injured officers and their families, or even simply give a law and order speech in Philly, he could vividly underscore his professed support of front-line law enforcement. (Efforts to reach Philly GOP Chair Martina White for her thoughts on this were unsuccessful.)

Granted, such a stance is not always popular across all segments of society. But it resonates with Trump's base. And it could tug at some suburban voters in a region where suburban votes are trending away from Trump. Hey, who knows if anything new in Erie or Philly this late in the game can impact an election? But if it's close, who knows what might help to win? – **John Baer's column in [Pennlive.com](#)**

Voters across Pennsylvania are receiving text messages with a surprising — and false — claim about Biden. “Hi, I’m a Democratic volunteer with APP PAC,” the text says. “Did you see Joe Biden endorsed sex change operations for children as young as 8? That’s way too extreme and frankly it’s really weird.” The text, sent by the conservative Super PAC [American Principles Project](#), asks voters to watch a 30-second video, in which a narrator falsely claims Biden endorsed such medical procedures. The video includes images of Biden speaking to Mieke Haeck, the mother of an 8-year-old transgender child, at an Oct. 15 [ABC town hall](#) in Philadelphia.

Biden told Haeck “there should be zero discrimination” against transgender people, including children. Terry Schilling, APP’s executive director, claims that amounts to an endorsement of sex-reassignment surgery for children. “We finally got him on camera saying this,” Schilling said. “It makes it more powerful than having a narrator have to say this all on camera.”

But Biden didn’t say that. And APP used a narrator to falsely claim he did. Haeck called APP’s claims a “blatant lie.” “It has nothing to do with medical intervention, medication or surgery...,” she said of her question for Biden. “It’s about my daughter using *she* and *her* pronouns, growing her hair and being who she is in her heart.” Schilling said his group is texting 1 million Democratic and independent voters in Pennsylvania, using more than 100 volunteers from around the country. Fervid partisan sentiment that simmered on social media four years ago has bubbled over into this year’s race for a state House seat in Northeast Philadelphia.

The Republican City Committee last week resurfaced 2016 Facebook posts from Democratic nominee Mike Doyle, in which he used the N-word and posted a picture of a gravestone covered in anti-Semitic graffiti. The party posted the social media screen-grabs on Facebook and sent them to reporters.

In the posts, Doyle, who lost a 2018 bid for the same 170th District seat to incumbent state Rep. Martina White, also posted at one point that he lived “in the most racist part of the city.”

He apologized in a statement last week. “In 2016, tensions were at an all-time high,” he said. “I like many other Americans engaged in confrontations via social media. Unfortunately, during one of my interactions with a blatant racist and anti-Semite I mocked their hate by using the language of hate myself.” The Philadelphia Federation of Teachers rescinded its endorsement of Doyle last week, calling itself “disgusted and disappointed.”

White, the city’s lone Republican state legislator and chair of the local party, said Doyle should drop out of the race. Bob Brady, chairman of the Democratic City Committee, said he wishes White good luck. “He must have her nervous,” Brady said of Doyle. – **Chris Brennan’s “Clout” column in *Philadelphia Daily News***



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