

GUEST COLUMN

Mitch Henck: Tighter race will be vicious, entertaining

September 4, 2016

What? Donald Trump has gained 12 points on Hillary Clinton among likely Wisconsin voters since early August.

That's right. According to The Marquette Law School Poll of 803 people, Trump trails Clinton 45 percent to 42 percent among likely voters, compared to a deficit of 52 percent to 37 percent early last month.

Why? Clinton is slipping. In fact, the former secretary of state fell in favorability from 43 percent to 35 percent in that time, and her unfavorable number rose from 53 percent to 58 percent. Trump's favorable number actually went up a percentage point, and his unfavorable went down two to 63 percent.

And how about this: 26 percent of respondents say Clinton is honest, compared to 31 percent who say Trump tells the truth. And on the question of "Who cares about people like me?" Clinton is down from 47 percent to 40 percent. Trump remains at 31 percent.

Clinton leads by 5 percentage points among registered voters, but how do you measure first-time voters? The Marquette poll didn't ask respondents if they had never voted in the past. On that front, Trump does 3 percentage points better in recorded telephone and internet polls than he does in surveys where humans actually ask you questions. Does that mean some won't say out loud that they will vote for Trump?

We do know that 19 percent of those in the poll say they won't vote for Trump or Clinton. That's up from 6 percentage points from those who said they wouldn't support Obama or Romney in 2012.

Those neither Trump nor Clinton voters could latch on to Libertarian Gary Johnson or Green Party candidate Jill Stein. Johnson has 11 percent and Stein 7 percent in the Marquette poll. If they go up instead of down, the presidential winner will be in the low 40s.

That means Trump is right on the cusp.

Of the independents, 18 percent lean Republican while 16 percent lean Democrat. So with Trump's rough few weeks after his convention, why is it so close? Yes, Clinton has suffered a constant dose of email and Clinton Foundation stories. But something else is going on.

Marquette pollster Charles Franklin says, "It's hard for Clinton to get a positive message out when Trump dominates every news cycle."

Even if Trump's mainstream media coverage is negative and Clinton's attack ads are running, the spotlight is always on Trump. It prompts the viewer to tune in to see what the television star is going to say next.

Because Trump has been in public view for 35 years, will attempts to smear him as a racist or cartoon character backfire the same way it did when Art Buchwald made fun of Ronald Reagan?

Trump is not as polite as the Gipper, but neither are we. In the age of Twitter and Facebook, society is more crass and cynical of all politicians.

In the primaries, most of Trump's opponents made the mistake of getting elected. And when they get rich from public service, the sharks are in the water. Clinton suffers from financial success the way voters held it against former Wisconsin Gov. Tommy Thompson in the U.S. Senate race, which he lost to Tammy Baldwin.

The bombastic Trump loves to talk about his wealth in front of God and everybody. That is part of the reason why Trump only has 81 percent of Wisconsin Republicans. He is up three points in that category, while Clinton's support among Wisconsin Democrats went from 90 percent to 89 percent.

So get ready for possibly the most vicious and entertaining campaign in history.

On this Labor Day weekend, we are reminded of the greatest showman of all, Al Jolson, when he said, "You ain't seen nothin' yet."

*Mitch is a Madison, Wisconsin based commentator, broadcaster and standup comic.
The Mitch Henck Show is broadcast live 8-11a.m. Monday-Friday at www.mitchhenck.com.
and on 92.1FM, The Mic in Madison. Contact Mitch at: mitch@mitchhenck.com*