



“It’s what I DO!”

— Farley Forelock

An Election (Certainly Not Ours)

— A Fable —

Not so long ago, in a country not far away, leaders of its two political parties began gearing up for their usual five-year election cycle. Halfway through the twenty-first century, the nation of Aqualandia had become justifiably proud of its new government structures. Years ago they had lengthened the presidential term to five years because, they observed, it took nearly two years to elect a president with the result that very little actual governing got done. Some elections early in the century, notably the infamous election of 2016, had been more chaotic than they preferred, so they took action to restore order and propriety to the process. After cleaning up the mess caused by the disintegration of one of the major parties, they established rules covering every eventuality: rules to qualify candidates for the national primary (they had to have significant name recognition in all three states as determined by well-regulated polling); rules ensuring that all Aqualandian residents could vote after passing a simple advertising-susceptibility test (to make sure voters would be properly *informed* by political advertising); rules awarding all thirty-three electoral votes from each of the three states to the candidate winning the popular vote in that state, and rules governing the three carefully timed steps to the election of a president. “The Institution,” as the rules were lovingly called, was universally admired around the world, especially in the remaining three nations of the European Union where Aqualandian principles were closely observed and often imitated.

The Three States

After many decades of experimentation with a larger number of states, Aqualandia’s Institutional Convention structured the nation into three regional states. Every ten years, the national census would adjust the boundaries of the three states. By law, the Coastal Region, geographically split because of the propensity of the coastal areas to be influenced by “non-continental” forces, was drawn to include thirty-three percent of the registered residents who lived closest to the two coasts. The Central Region included the thirty-three percent of residents who lived between the two inland edges of the Coastal Region extending south from Aqualandia’s northern border. The Southern Region was made of the thirty-three percent of residents closest to the southern border between the Coastal and Central states. Since those

three states added up to ninety-nine percent of Aqualandia residents, those citizens whose wealth placed them in the top one percent do not vote in the primary election. The logic held that those among the 'one percent' are less likely to be influenced by political advertising and, therefore, do not qualify as primary voters. In an Institutional provision called the Manhattan Compromise, this disparity was remedied by requiring each 'one-percenter' to vote twice in the general election, since they had been unrepresented in the primary process. Their campaign contributions supplemented their participation and were considered ample recompense for their sacrifice.



The fact that the census changed the shape of the three states every ten years caused an ongoing joke, especially popular among Europeans and late-night talk-show hosts. The map of Aqualandia was drawn to look, alternately, like a smiling face or a frowning face, depending on the population distribution. The current host of the CBS Late Night Show said, "to get this nation smiling again, fifty million people will have to move north."

The Two Parties

Aqualandia's history had shown that any deviation from a two-candidate election distorted the election process and its outcome. In previous centuries, third-party candidates like George Wallace, John Anderson, and Ross Perot were found to have splintered the natural ideological distribution of the nation in ways that appeared to subvert the will of the people. So, that eventuality was prohibited. The Institutional Convention called for exactly two political parties. While there were no regional requirements for party membership, the Blue Party found its members predominantly located in the Coastal Region. The Red Party dominated the Southern Region to a large extent. The Central Region was typically found to be divided between the Blues and Reds from election to election in less predictable patterns, as were the one-percenters.

The Three Steps in Electing a President

Step One required candidates to qualify for the primary ballot in their state by uploading their name-recognition data to the secure election website using a specially designed PresElect App downloaded from iTunes. After six months of streaming YouTube, Snapchat, and TechPol appearances, that same PresElect App was used by voters in a national same-day primary election to select the candidate who would represent their party in the general election.

Step Two required party leadership to meet with the nominee to establish the priorities, policies, and values that all party members would support in 'down-ballot' races for the Senate, House of Representatives, the three Governorships, and local elections. 'One-percenters' of both parties were included among the leadership of the party of their choice, ensuring that party platforms would not violate market-based business practices.

Step Three, of course, was the general election. Given the way the intellectual competence of the electorate had evolved in recent years, it needed to be the simplest step. With only two candidates to consider and two publicly-debated policy platforms to choose from, how hard could it be? It was designed to be orderly, simple, and easy to understand (even in the Southern Region). However, this particular year, 2060, has all the earmarks of being ... well, different.

The Candidates

After a messy primary season, one candidate from The Red Party emerged with the most votes – even though nobody in the party could stand being in the same room with him. Farley Forelock appealed to voters who were unhappy with government (sort of everyone) and by insulting everyone who didn't agree with him (sort of everyone). In his youth, he had attended a little-known university in pursuit of a double major in marketing and law (specializing in bankruptcy law). While there was no record of a degree, he learned a lot from his mentor, the founder of the university. Farley went on to make a fortune in the construction business with bombastic marketing ("We're the best and THEY are terrible!") and minimizing construction costs by paying as little as possible for labor and materials ("Some of our nation's laws can be very friendly if you know how to use them"). In an undergraduate course in election law, Farley recalled writing in his notebook, "If a person is successful enough to be a credible candidate for president, why would he or she want to actually BE president? It seems like a lot of work. All I've ever really wanted to do is WIN!"

The Blue Party primary season was also messy. The winning candidate, Ophelia Empath had long experience in various governmental roles at a sufficiently high level to make her nomination inevitable. Her candidacy, however, was a two-edged sword. On the one hand she appealed to many Blue voters because she had high-level government experience; but she was detested by the category of voters in both parties who were unhappy with government (sort of everyone) and held her accountable for the *status quo*. While she appealed to many as the opportunity to elect the first female president, she also had the disadvantage of being part of a political family that had a well-earned reputation for personal controversy. So, voters seeking stability were wary of a candidate who was always followed around by high drama.

Many Aqualandians were anxious to vote AGAINST both candidates. It was harder to identify many who were enthusiastically FOR either of them.

The Winning Strategy

Farley Forelock had been studying the government of Aqualandia for some time and had formulated a plan. He observed that the people did not seem capable of selecting a president who was up to the job. The increasing distaste for government and a diminishing participation in it seemed to be making that condition worse. He reasoned that somebody had to choose a president who would put the government on a stronger path. "If only I could just choose someone ... " How to do that?

Farley had made some simple observations:

- The Red Party candidates likely to run against him were weak. There were so many of them, they would divide what little support they could generate.
- Red Party voters were willing to engage in a blame game if they were persuaded by the right kind of nationalist cheerleader.
- The Blue Party candidate was surrounded by potential land mines that could derail her candidacy. A clever opponent could win if he was willing to play hardball.
- Presidents in his lifetime had entered office as vigorous men in the prime of their lives and left it as grey-haired, aging, tired men. The job was a great burden. Who would want to DO such a job? The REAL power, he imagined, would be to unilaterally select the right president and bypass the burden of office.

Using his previous theatrical experience, Farley decided to play the part of a bigoted buffoon, inciting large crowds to fear and distrust people of different backgrounds. He predicted that the undereducated population at the bottom half of the economic spectrum would blame their lack of success on others. He also reasoned that they would not be interested in the complicated analyses offered by the other party. So, he embarked on a campaign of insults, division, and over-simplification. In a party accustomed to over-simplification and finger pointing, it should be easy to win the nomination.

After the vote count, the outcome astounded everyone except Farley Forelock ("I told you I would WIN, that's what I DO"). He was now the Red Party nominee. That was that.

Once he had won the nomination, it was time for Step Two: party unification, platform development, and the vice-presidential selection. This step was easy – he merely said "no" to every policy position the party leaders proposed and reminded them that the voters had spoken. In front of a bevy of reporters, he told them — if the party wanted to win, they had to agree with the positions he had supported during his successful primary campaign and accept his choice for vice-president. He assured them he would make his VP announcement soon. His message appeared in headlines in every newspaper in Aqualandia: "Do you want to win? Then stick with me, that's what I DO!" Polls showed widespread support among the Reds. Party leaders had no choice but to nod their heads and wait for his VP announcement.

As he had predicted, the Blue Party nominee was lambasted for serious security violations during her government service. She didn't go to jail but her credibility was damaged. Many public figures expressed diminished confidence in an administration headed by Ophelia Empath. So, while her name would remain on the ballot, voters began pulling away from her. That was the signal for Farley Forelock to prepare the final step of his strategy. He named his vice-president — a long-planned choice that emerged from his usual behind-the-scenes deal-making — on the last day to put a name on the three state ballots. He then flew to Scotland for an extended visit to one of his golf courses.

Everyone looked at each other – “Whuh just happened?!” Of course, they couldn't know what Farley Forelock had planned as Step Three – that would be the clincher. But that would have to wait until the proper time.

Election Day was fairly straightforward. The South and Central states both voted for Forelock, earning him 66 of the 100 electoral votes. As soon as those numbers were confirmed, the votes from Coastal Region were meaningless. One-percenters were also irrelevant. Farley paused on the 13th green before putting for par. His Twitter feed from Scotland acknowledged the outcome “I told you I would win, it's what I do.”

In fulfilling the formality required by The Institution, the electors met on December 19th to confirm the outcome. That was that.

Mystery swirled around Aqualandia's capital in anticipation of Inauguration Day on January 20. Adding to the tension, President-Elect Forelock decided to stay overseas and conduct what was billed as a “Final Presidential Tour” of his golf courses and casinos, finalizing three deals, selling one property and buying two more. The press had questions that went unanswered – would he be putting his properties and businesses in a blind trust as other wealthy presidents had done? Would he announce a new CEO of Forelock Enterprises? Would he announce his cabinet soon? Would The First Lady begin remodeling and painting the exterior of the Presidential Estate, as he had promised, “on Day One?” However, Forelock's usually productive Twitter account (#WEWIN) was silent. With impeccable timing, Farley's plane touched down at JFK airport and the usual array of microphones on the tarmac awaited the new president's first words. His orange hair blowing in the breeze, without a teleprompter, he scowled his usual scowl and said, “As I had intended from the start, I have selected the president of my choice. I hereby resign from the presidency effective immediately. The Vice President-Elect, now the President I have chosen, will be inaugurated on January 20. I accept the thanks of a grateful nation and wish the new president well.”

