

Aging and the Presidency

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In choosing a president, it is not how old the candidate is. Ask instead how the candidate is old.

McCain's 71 years of age tells us when he was born and that he is still alive.

Standard actuary life tables supplied by the National Center for Health Care Statistics reveal that the average 71 year-old white male has another 13.5 years of further anticipated lifetime. This figure applies to the average, that mythical individual who represents the cumulative experiences of many thousands of same age white males.

But John McCain isn't average. Actually no one is. To derive a more specific prediction means folding in all relevant data which bear on longevity, on "HOW" he is 71. First, family history: his mother is still alive at age 96. His father died at age 70 of a stroke. He has two siblings, an older sister with a past history of breast cancer and a younger brother Joe, 66.

His personal health history is well-documented dominated by the grievous injuries consequent to his Vietnam experience, and his history of four malignant melanomas in 2000. Three of these were not-invasive, one was which necessitated extensive post-op plastic surgery. McCain has had regular checkups for this tumor which are reported to be clear. Relevant data for this particular stage of melanoma indicates a 78% five-year survival and 66% 10-year survival.

Acknowledging the future uncertainty posed by his cancer history the largest other health risks for a 71-year-old man are cardiovascular diseases. However, he hiked the Grand Canyon rim to rim two years ago and had a normal exercise cardiogram in March.

Two recent reports from Stanford and Harvard estimate that a high degree of physical fitness lowers the overall risk mortality of men in their 70s by 30%. If we include these statistics as well as other contributing data points (enlarged benign prostate gland, discontinued smoking 28 years ago, history of colon polyps), medication usage includes one aspirin per day, hydrochlorothiazide, a diuretic used for his bladder stones, occasional use of Zyrtec, and antihistamine, and Ambien SR for insomnia, putting all of these issues into a formula would indicate a further life expectancy prediction for John McCain of 15 years.

With such a critical election at hand it is wise to burrow down into the details as precisely as we are able. Others comment that some 40-year-olds are ill equipped to be president. Others claim that some ninety-year-olds are still improving.

Wisdom increases with age, recklessness decreases with age.

Age is a credential, not a disqualification.

There are many reasons to vote for or against John McCain as he seeks the presidency, but the calendar is not one of them.

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