Running for President: The Case of John Glenn

For several years I have been following, off and on, the careers of eight United States Senators—in their home states and in Washington—with the thought that some day I might do some writing on the United States Senate. One of those senators is John Glenn. I went to Ohio when he was campaigning for reelection in 1980, and travelled with him for a couple of days. And I have watched and talked with him occasionally since then—most recently on a campaign swing through Mississippi, Louisiana, Iowa and Nevada in early November. When I chose to tag along with him I was simply looking for some senator from a large state; so it was an unexpected bonus for me when Glenn decided to run for President. One of the features of the U.S. Senate, as you know, is that a fair number of its members want to be President. Since I have found myself studying one who is actually running, I thought I would talk this evening about his efforts.
It is not my purpose to handicap John Glenn's chances in the nomination race. Right now they seem remote. In the polls, he is running second in the field of eight; but he is running a distant second to the frontrunner Walter Mondale--46-16 in the Gallup poll, 45-22 in the ABC-Washington Post poll. Since no votes have been cast, it would be foolish to scratch him from the race. Someone once said, the reason we hold elections in the United States is to see if the polls are right. And, sometimes they are not. But if they are at all accurate, Mondale is the heavy odds-on favorite. What I do want to talk about is the relationship between one person's candidacy and the nomination process, in an effort to illustrate both.

With respect, first, to the nomination process, you may have noticed that I have already slipped into the familiar metaphor of the horse race—to wit, "the field," "handicap," "the frontrunner," "scratched," "the odds on favorite." It is impossible to escape the horse race metaphor. But it is not as appropriate for the nomination process as it is for the general election. Not, that is,
unless the horse race you envision is the steeplechase. For the nomination contest is a race with a succession of different hurdles to surmount. If you fail to clear a hurdle, it is difficult to get up and continue, much less to win. Both a steeplechase and a nomination race are elimination contests, in which contestants drop out one by one, and in which the winner is more the survivor than the one with the fastest time.

Theodore White, in his campaign books, described nominating politics as guerilla warfare, in which a combatant faced 50 separate ambushes. Jules Witcover entitled his book about the 1976 contest, Marathon. Those metaphors, too, convey the idea of a grueling elimination contest in which one contestant survives enough hurdles, or ambushes, or miles to win. Nowadays the nomination goes to the one contestant left on his feet at the end of the process—in mid June. And the party convention—no longer the decision-maker—merely crowns the survivor. This view of nomination politics turns our questions away from the swiftness of the contestants to the endurance of the contestants. What does it take to survive this
long and difficult process? Or, what do the non-survivors lack that causes them to drop out? So our question about John Glenn becomes not can he win so much as can he survive. Or, how long can he survive? That, indeed, is exactly the question the scorekeepers in the media are now asking about his candidacy.

What, then, does it take to survive the nomination process—to capture a majority of the convention delegates? Thinking in the abstract, it takes appropriate resources, it takes effective strategies for using those resources and it takes a favorable context in which to work. Resources, strategies and context are the three grand variables of every political campaign. And it must be said, immediately, that none of them is static. They change constantly over the course of the campaign—which is why campaign managers tell us that no campaign is predictable and every campaign runs out of control. Glenn's manager commented in November, "This campaign won't be won by the things we've planned. It will be won by our reaction to the things that come up that are not planned."

Without trying to be all-inclusive, let me be a bit more specific
about these three campaign ingredients. By resources I mean the personal experience, the public attention and the political support with which a candidate begins the race. By strategies I mean decisions about the utilization of resources in matters such as positioning, organizing and timing. By context I mean such conditions as the number of contestants, the sequencing of state selection processes, the national demography, and national issue concerns.

Let me speak first of context.

For there is one overriding feature of the nomination process itself— which deserves special attention. And that is its length. Informally, the nomination process goes on for three years before any actual voting for delegates takes place; and the formal delegate selection period, state by state, is 3 1/2 months long. This feature forces us to think of nomination campaigns as occurring over time, as changing over time. Candidates can augment or dissipate their resources. They can experiment and alter their strategies. They can gain strength, lose strength or stall out. Unknown candidates have time to emerge;
well known candidates have time to self destruct. Time and sequence are key variables in any analysis.

Successful campaigns will proceed over time through a succession of stages. In the first stage, the candidate acquires credibility. Credibility means being recognized, being taken seriously and being given some plausible chance of winning. In succeeding stages, the candidate parlays that credibility into increasing support and into improving estimates of his chances of winning. These improving estimates of his chances, are what we call momentum. And in a lengthy, sequenced process like this, momentum is essential. For it is in the nature of campaign politics that over time, attention, money and votes flow toward candidates who have momentum and away from candidates who do not.

To employ the inescapable Glenn-like metaphor, candidate credibility fuels the lift off stage of a political campaign. Without it no campaign can get off the ground. Successive stages are booster stages; they supply momentum. The first of the booster stages occurs when the candidate
recruits an organization, volunteers, contributions--early and strong commitments of time, energy and money. The next booster stages occur as the candidate moves from recruiting workers to recruiting voters. And significant additions of voters are like booster rockets, giving the campaign increased momentum. Over time successful campaigns move through a reenforcing succession of stages—from initial credibility to initial momentum to increased support, to increased momentum and so on. Candidates who have gone through a couple of booster stages become hard to stop—which is why the early delegate contests in Iowa and New Hampshire and, Glenn hopes, in Georgia, Alabama, Florida and Oklahoma are so important. By the same token, candidates who cannot generate any momentum or who cannot hold the momentum they have cannot survive for long.

Since momentum is so necessary for candidate survival in this lengthy nomination process, it is necessary to note, here, the got or has importance of the media in deciding which candidate has/not got momentum. During the/informal, pre-voting period, the media tells the rest of us...
3 1/2 month formal who is "doing well" or not "doing well". During the/voting period, the
media tells us who did or did not do "as well as expected." But the
standard of expectations against which the media judges the performance
of the various candidates are set by the media themselves. So they set
the rules and they keep score. They do this, of course, with the help
of certain indicators, like polls. But polls—especially in the
present informal pre-voting period can be very unreliable; voter
preferences are particularly volatile; and the latitude for interpre-
tation, therefore, is large. Currently, the media are telling us that
John Glenn is not "doing well"—that he is "slipping" or losing his
sequential
pre-voting momentum. A sample of some media headlines will
tell you what I mean.

April 1983 (WP) "Glenn With Hero's Send Off Launches
Bid for Presidency"

July 1983 (NJ) "Democratic State Party Leaders See Race
Even as Glenn Gains on Mondale"
August 1983 (WP) "Democratic Governors Show Increasing Interest in Glenn"

August 1983 (LAT) "Survey Finds Glenn Strong Against Reagan"

October 1983 (WP) "In Last 3 Months, Glenn's Fund Raising Outpaced Mondale's"

October 1983 (WP) "Glenn Encounters Frost in N.H."

November 1983 (WP) "Shakeup in Glenn Campaign Aimed at Shoring Up Weaknesses"

November 1983 (WP) "Glenn's Swing South Shows Gap Between Promise, Performance"

December 1983 (WP) "Glenn, Hoping to Make up for Lost Time, Reorganizes At the Top"

December 1983 (NJ) "Democratic State Party Leaders See Mondale Pulling Away from Glenn"

December 1983 (WP) "Avoiding Mistakes, Mondale Enters 84 With a Widening Lead: Glenn Has Fallen Back Since October"
January 1984 (WP) "Fund Raising Problems Force Glenn to Cut Staff"

January 1984 (WP) "Temperatures and Glenn Outlook Falling in Iowa"

January 1984 (WP) "Mondale Holds Commanding Lead in Race for Democratic Nomination"

February 1984 (WSJ) "Why is John Glenn, So Popular in the Past, Running So Poorly?"

All of these are comments about momentum. In the eyes of the media scorekeepers, John Glenn had it and has lost it. At this point they are speculating on Mondale's running mate, and on the contours of the Reagan-Mondale contest. Unless the voters cause a reversal of this media assessment, John Glenn will not survive beyond mid-March.

Let us examine, then, the resources and the strategies of the Glenn campaign to see if we can understand its problems and its prospects.

John Glenn came to the presidential race with one of the three basic resources well in hand--public attention. As the highly publicized, and lavishly honored first American to orbit the earth, he had long
since gained what every political candidate needs first and foremost—name recognition. More than that, he had unreservedly favorable name recognition. He was an authentic national hero and an attractive human being—widely compared to Dwight Eisenhower and, lest anyone forget, soon to be the subject of a highly touted movie reminding everyone of his decency and his heroism. From the moment he was elected to the Senate in 1974 he was mentioned as a presidential possibility—in 1975 feature articles/entitled: "Sky Is Limit for Politician John Glenn; Could Astronaut Orbit into White House?" or "Could This Man Be the Ike of the Seventies?" or "Mr. America in the Senate." He had added solid political credentials through one term in the Senate, and in 1980 through reelection to the Senate/by the largest margin in the history of Ohio. From Glenn's name recognition and from his electoral success, he derived instant credibility, instant lift off in the late fall of 1980. It is a stage through which several of his Democratic competitors Cranston, Hollings, Hart, Askew, McGovern anyway—have still not passed over two years later.
Just what resources Glenn began with, in terms of political support within the Democratic party were a lot less obvious. The first time the question of running came up in our talks, in mid-November 1980, he said

I expect to begin making more speeches. Where it will lead, I have no idea. With Kennedy and Mondale on the left and with Hollings and Scoop on the right, I see myself somewhere in the middle. Exactly where that leaves me I'm not sure. But if you ask me, does this mean do I have a big organization in place, geared up to go, the answer is no. I don't know what will happen.

He was positioning himself, strategically, as a centrist in the party's ideological spectrum, and, presumably, would find his support somewhere in that center. But the center is more vague than the extremes. And my campaigning with him in Ohio had given me the strong impression that he thought of his support in just such vague terms. When I asked him
who supported him, he answered,

I suppose you could start with the Democrats.

And, I got more votes in the big cities. But that's only because more people live there. You hunt where the ducks are. It's not a case where I'm strong in the cities and not in the agricultural areas... We found that in order to get the vote I did in some counties (in 1974) I had to have gotten at least 50% of the Republican vote.

We carried all 88 counties in 1974--the first time that had ever been done. So I'd have to say we have support all across the board.

And when a reporter on that trip noted that Ohio voters, when polled, liked him but could not say what he had done, Glenn answered.

I doubt if people could tell you much about what any senator's specific positions were unless some-one harped on just one issue all the time. I'm not
a johnny one-note. I don't care if I'm not known for one particular issue... If I do a good job across the board and people feel that I do a good job on the whole, then I'd be satisfied.

He thought of his political support, then, as across the board support based upon an across the board record.

In a presidential nominating race, however, it is risky for a candidate to remain as unspecific as that. People who participate in nominating politics are their party's activists—more knowledgeable, more connected to groups, more issue-oriented, more ideological, and less centrist than the rest of the party or than the general electorate. Nomination voters are not an across the board group; nor are they looking for an across the board record. A candidate will be hard put to survive the nomination process without finding a committed core constituency among these highly motivated voters and workers. A candidate is incalculably aided in this quest if he has what we call a natural constituency—one based on some common bond, ideological or regional or
associational, a constituency that is identifiable, ready made and waiting for him. McGovern and the anti-war people, Carter and the southerners, Mondale and organized labor, are recent Democratic party examples. John Glenn, began with no such identifiable natural constituency and he perceived none. His Ohio model provided no incentive even to think in terms of groups. When I asked his 1974 campaign manager, soon to become his presidential campaign manager, where Glenn's support came from in 1974, he answered, "I hate to say this but it's the truth--the people. He could go around the party organization and the labor unions and establish contact directly with the ordinary voter. He had no base whatsoever, and not anywhere, within the party organization," Glenn spoke similarly about support that did not depend on groups. He said "In the places where the organization leaders opposed me, I went into the union halls and talked directly to the rank and file. That's where I got my best vote." He began, therefore, with only the vaguest idea of who it was in the party who might be ready to fight, bleed and die for him.
It was not a problem finding the initial cadre of workers to help him capitalize on his lift off and give him early momentum. There were enough Ohioans supportive of their favorite son to do that. It was a problem of finding a larger, booster stage circle of committed voters from among the party centrists with whom he identified. Descriptions of them, as "across the board" or "the people" or "the rank and file" provided little guidance. Glenn's constituency-building task was from the beginning his most crucial and most formidable one.

It was a task made doubly formidable by the kind of personal qualities and personal experience the candidate brought to it. John Glenn has immense personal strengths. He is very stable and very nice; he is courageous and careful; he has very strong beliefs about
private virtue and about public responsibility; he is intelligent and
independent; he is large minded and fair minded; he has a rock-hard
integrity and a healthy ego which requires no periodic massaging. In
short, John Glenn possesses the most important personal quality of a
President--character. But character alone never built a committed
political constituency. Political skill builds a political constituency.
And John Glenn is a man of uncertain political skill.

Politics is an other-directed business. The most effective politician
blends inner strengths with skills that enable him to reach toward others.
He projects an image for others to see; he seeks support from others;
he seeks credit from others; he binds himself to others with ties of
loyalty, obligation, friendship, and trust. Neither Glenn's pre-political
experience, nor his natural political instincts, nor his developed
political style are especially well calibrated to these outward reaching,
constituency building tasks. In his pre-political experiences, as a
marine fighter pilot, as a test pilot, and astronaut, he performed alone.
He relied upon supportive ground crews, but he could take their support for granted. He did not have to ask for it. "The right stuff" was his, not theirs. Similarly, with public adulation. He orbited the earth alone and he received public acclaim for his action. He did not have to ask for it. In explaining why he went into politics, he has always said, "I didn't want to do it as an ego trip--I had enough of that to last me the rest of my life." Having started in politics with maximum recognition by others, he never had to reach for it. And, therefore, he never internalized certain political skills. Campaigning in 1980, he said.

I don't get my kicks in politics from the adoration you get. I've had all of that. I want to accomplish something in the Senate...I want to work on amendments, fight in committee and on the floor for things I think are right... I don't think about tooting my own horn. Several times I've had it happen that I've won a big battle on the Senate floor,
come back to the office all excited about my victory
and yet never even told my press secretary about it.
I have been very poor on the PR aspects of the job.
My attitude was that the press would pick up whatever
I did, that they should pick it up. Then I would be
amazed to find that nobody back home knew what I had
done...I didn't think that was part of my job.

In six years he never sent out a single newsletter to his constituents
in Ohio. Nothing in his pre-political experience sensitized him to the
need to reach out for support via publicity. He had been a successful
loner and he continued to think like one.

If prior experience did not drive him to cultivate others, neither
do his instincts. He is not in that sense, a natural politician. Let
me give a small example. On my first trip to Ohio, he gave a let's-not-
be-complacent pep talk to the political rally of Boilermakers Lodge 85
in Rossford. He got little reaction during the talk, received a routine
round of applause at the end, got down off the podium and got halfway out
of the union hall. The MC went to the mike, thanked him for coming and said that Glenn was once a plumber too. When Glenn heard that he shouted "That's right, I was a plumber." He turned, ran back to the podium, jumped up on it, and ran toward the mike. The MC said "You don't have to come back." Glenn grabbed the mike and said "My dad was a plumber in New Concord. I spent my summers digging holes for septic tanks and I hated every minute of it." The audience laughed. "I was the pipe threader and reamer and cutter; and I cut, threaded and reamed miles of pipe. And that was before you had machines. That was hard going." The audience cheered. Glenn waved, jumped down off the podium and left in a heightened mood of good feeling. A natural, instinctive campaigner would have made that obvious connection at the very beginning of his talk and built a sense of identification with his listeners—the more so since Ohio's union had never been strong supporters of his.

In reaching to political audiences of this sort, Glenn needs all the help he can give himself. For he is not an effective public communicator. He has a speaking style that is stiff, mechanical and
unexciting. He has difficulty conveying spontaneity or imagination to those he seeks to reach; he has difficulty making his enthusiasm their enthusiasms. His listeners may like him or respect him; but they are not moved to follow him. When he has the chance to interact with an audience, in questions and answers, he is more persuasive.

His earnestness, his range of knowledge, and his good humor show to better advantage. He does better still in small group or one-on-one conversations after the formal part of the presentation is over. For Glenn and his staff, a formal public speech is always viewed more as a defensive, maintenance operation than as an opportunity for constituency building. In a media age, with a media natural in the White House, Glenn's struggle with his speech making is a constituency-building handicap.

There is one other respect in which he lacks the style of a natural politician. When you follow him around, you notice a lack of instinct or liking for the bread and butter routines of politics--the small talk, the back slapping, the gossiping, the joking, the flattery, the
reminiscences, the favor swapping. When we went to a large Democratic
party dinner in Toledo in 1980, Glenn arrived after the pre-dinner
mingling, went directly to the head table, gave his speech in turn
and left as soon as the speaking ended. Before his speech to the Cook
County Democratic dinner in May 1981, he stood uncomfortably beside
Mayor Jane Byrne in the receiving line while hardly exchanging a
word with her. On a similar "testing the waters" trip to Arkansas
in March of 1982, the Democratic Mayor of Little Rock and the City
Director came to the airport to greet him; but his staff engaged them
Glenn
in conversation while / sat off to one side waiting for the press to
arrive. In a meeting at the June 1982 mini-convention with four
southern state Democratic party chairmen urging him to declare his
candidacy, he dodged their entreaties without attempting to weave
any alternative personal or emotional connection with them. Those
observations square with his reputation as a senator--that he is a
loner, that he does not socialize much with his colleagues--that he
keeps his own counsel on legislative matters.
In private encounters with non-politicians, Glenn is spontaneous and warm and gives of himself to others. The day after he declined to work the party dinner in Toledo, he worked the Lancaster County fair like everybody's neighbor, stopping to talk to anyone and everyone who was remotely interested. He will sign an autograph cheerfully and patiently for anyone, anywhere no matter how busy or rushed or preoccupied.

But the more a setting is overtly political and the more politicians there are around, the more he becomes rehearsed in action and reserved in emotion. I do not mean, of course, that he cannot or will not reach politically. I only mean that he is disinclined to do it without prodding. Because this natural reluctance was held to be responsible for his 1970 primary defeat by Howard Metzenbaum, Glenn spent his next four years, doggedly paying his dues to Ohio's Democratic establishment.

And his politicking paid off in his 1974 primary rematch with Metzenbaum. He is, obviously, a politician and a successful one. He is ambitious, competitive, and calculating. But one of his campaign workers, watching him talk to people at the opening of his campaign headquarters in 1980 summed up the non-political-political paradox.
(In 1974) we had to kick his ass every minute to make him campaign the way he should. He doesn't stroke people. He doesn't create excitement. It's hard to keep people working for him. They just fall away. He's a great guy and great Senator; but he's not a politician. He's a hero. Look at him over there signing autographs. He'll never be beaten.

His biographer, Frank Van Riper put it: "Nearly everyone outside of politics who knows Glenn likes him and instinctively trusts him... It is as if Glenn the politician is somehow—inexplicably—apolitical...That is the paradox of John Glenn. It is as if there are two John Glens, each struggling against the other in the public perception." For a candidate engaged in constituency building, the paradox reveals both his opportunity and his problem.

If, of course, John Glenn could seize leadership on some issue that, in and of itself, gave him command of a committed band of enthusiasts,
his difficulties as a constituency-builder might be offset. But he
lacks policy pizzazz as well as presentational pizzaz. His policy
interests lie in the areas of foreign policy, defense policy and
research and development—all of which grow out of his personal
experience. But he tends to express his interest in these issues in
practical and technical terms rather than moral and popular terms. And
he tends to ask people to think more about their long run future than
their present concerns. This technical, future oriented perspective
is also a product of his scientific, space age background.

Glenn's great senatorial contribution to nuclear policy was his leadership
in framing, arguing and passing the nuclear non-proliferation act;
but it is a lot less immediately and politically popular than the
nuclear freeze, which he supports, but does not lead. His opposition
to and then support for SALT II turned on technical matters of verification.
His opposition to the MX missile and his support for new nerve gas
safety and
supplies turn on technical judgments about/battlefield needs. Taken
together they send mixed signals on defense matters; and they lead him
into no one's embrace. His deepest passion is reserved for increased
support for basic research and development and hence for the educational
enterprise in general; he makes sense when he says that educational cuts
mean that we are "eating our seed corn"; and he talks comfortably and
knowledgeably about the latest and future technological possibilities;
but no one can rally an army of supporters with a battle cry for "seminal, Nobel,
laureate, breakthrough research." So, while his policy strengths seem
to promise a sweeping vision of the future, his articulation of them
often produce an indigestable flow of detail.

On matters of domestic policy, Glenn's Senate voting record tilts
unmistakably liberal. By one common measure of liberalism, Ted Kennedy's
1980 ADA score was 100, Fritz Hollings' was 55 and Glenn's was 80—much
higher than Gary Hart's 61, and just about identical with Alan Cranston's
83. But Glenn has not been a leading, recognizable advocate of any domestic
liberal cause. That is not where his policy interests or his policy passions
lie. His issue positions—thoughtful and muted—have not been constructed
or packaged in order to win him the committed support of liberal activist
Democratic constituencies—labor, blacks, Jews, environmentalists, women,
peace groups. In their organized forms, at least, these groups have
supported candidates whose issue passions made a strong claim on theirs.
Let us turn, then, from the matter of resources to the matter of strategy. For, whatever his problems, Glenn has had an overall strategy for winning the nomination and a set of implementing strategies involving positioning, organizing and timing. His fundamental strategic premise has been that he had the best chance to defeat Ronald Reagan and that the Democrats, wanting to defeat Reagan more than anything else, would make the pragmatic decision to nominate him. That estimate of his chances rested first on his strength of character and on the Boy Scout values which delineated that character—a combination which would offset Reagan's strong personal appeal. And it rested secondly on Glenn's philosophical orientation, centrist in substance, future looking in tone—a combination that would best challenge Reagan's backward-looking conservatism.

Thus his early slogan "Old Values and New Horizons." He believed that the general election would be won in what he calls "the sensible center" and that the country would be best governed from that same "sensible center." And he believed that for one or the other reason or both—i.e., that he could win or that he would make the best President—Democrats would nominate him. It was a
perfectly plausible strategy. But it was not, as we have been saying self executing.

It would have to be implemented through a set of actual campaign decisions--some long range, some ad hoc. Let me talk about two or three such strategic decisions--all of them being some function of the resources of which we have been speaking.

The first such campaign decision was one of timing--when should Glenn commit himself to the race. For over two years he went around the country testing the waters. His posture was that he was thinking seriously about running but had made no decision. For most of the time that was true. Glenn is characteristically careful and slow in making up his mind; and he had been unseasonably late in entering both his 1970 and his 1974 Senate races. By the time of the June 1982 Democratic mini convention, however, his staff and friends said he had decided to run. But he would not commit himself. He did not think there was any hurry. In his meeting, at the miniconvention, with the four southern state chairmen one exchange went like this.
Chairman: I'd like to enlist in your campaign, but I have a limited amount of time in which to decide. What I need to know is whether you are going to be a candidate and whether you are prepared to run a mean and tough campaign. If you do decide to run, what sort of plans will you make. You're behind.

Glenn: As I said, we are thinking very very seriously about it and we will be making a decision very soon. I think that 14 or 15 months out from the election is enough time to put everything together. A year may not be enough time, but in a year and two or three months, everything can come together. If we decide to go, we'll have a big staff... And we will run as tough a campaign as is necessary.

The chairmen, like a lot of other potential supporters, wanted a commitment from him so that they could commit to him. Another one of the chairmen said to me "If he would announce ten days or so after the November election, that would be best. I don't want Kennedy and Mondale bugging me. I want to be able to say 'I'm supporting John Glenn.'"

But Glenn did not commit himself either "very soon" or in November. He lingered for ten months between private decision and public commitment. Partly, it was a resources-strategy relationship. Talking about it this...
November, he explained,

We just sat down and tried to figure out how long it would take us to mount a campaign and the number we came up with was 14 or 15 months...
It was part of our thinking that I didn't have the problem of name recognition that some of the other candidates had. If you had gone down the street in some town outside of Colorado and asked who Gary Hart was, they would have probably said he was a football player or something. I didn't have that problem. People knew who I was. My problem was that people didn't know my record. We figured 14 or 15 months would be just about right to get that across.

I believe that this calculation was wrong, and that this first decision, about timing, was the biggest mistake of the Glenn campaign. In Glenn's own words, they faced two tasks, one organizational and one presentational i.e., "to put everything together" and "to get (my record) across." They did not give themselves time enough to accomplish either within the context of the nomination process. I would not argue that with more time he would have won the nomination. I am only arguing that with more time, he would have given his strategy a fairer chance.
As the headlines I read indicated, the Glenn campaign has had organizational problems. This is not unusual. All campaigns have a large experimental, improvisational component to them. But the Glenn difficulties have been more damaging than most. And I think if they had organized earlier, they would have minimized that damage. For one thing, there would have been a national campaign staff in place at the point when the media decided to scrutinize the Glenn candidacy. And that staff would have had some time to shake down, smooth out and gear up for its public debut. For the media was not about to wait for Glenn's announcement before assessing his chances. And, thinking of him as a something of a political amateur, they were especially likely to zero in on the quality of his campaign organization. When they did so, especially after Kennedy's decision to drop out propelled Glenn unexpectedly into second place, they found his staff to be so unprofessional and so rudimentary as to cast serious doubts on his chances. That early stereotype never left the calculations of the media scorekeepers; and it has been reenforced by every announcement of a staff shakeup.
But Glenn for his own reasons should have opted for more rather than less organizing time. Unlike Kennedy and Mondale—his two main rivals at the time—he had never run a national campaign. He had no national network of potential allies; and, worse, his dalliance froze in place those who wanted to sign up. Further, the Glenn people had to figure out how they wanted to organize. Thinking of their support as coming from the center—or "across the board" or "the people" or from "the rank and file"—of the party they began to organize in thirty states—to create their national network. They articulated the rationale that theirs was not a special interest constituency, but "a constituency of the whole."

They spoke of creating a national "tidal wave" which would wash away the individual state based "sand castles" of their opponents. They would rely heavily on television to create this "constituency of the whole" or this "tidal wave"; but they felt they needed to build political structures to which Glenn supporters in nearly every state could attach themselves.

When, in October of 1983, they faced both budget constraints and the realities of the front-loaded primary season, they changed their strategy
and allocated resources disproportionately to a few early decision states. to signal the change, And they fired their national field director. A campaign without a natural constituency, which took that long to decide which states to surely organize would have benefitted from an earlier start.

But Glenn's time problem in "bringing things together" or organizing has been nothing compared with that of "getting my record across"—the presentational problem. Again, he needs time. And he has not given himself enough of it. That may seem like a bizarre conclusion to draw about a great American hero. But it is precisely his hero's image that is the problem. So absorbing and so dazzling was his astronaut accomplishment, that it has held him prisoner ever since. He cannot break out of the hero's mold to create another public persona as an experienced political leader and potential President. His nine years of service in the U.S. Senate remain eclipsed by his five hours in space. Even the movie "The Right Stuff" hurt him by resolidifying his image as our astronaut hero.

He faced exactly the same problem in Ohio; and it took him a long
time to solve it. As he himself often comments:

When I first ran for the Senate in 1970, whenever I would speak and then ask for questions, some kid would invariably yell out and asked me how I liked (drinking) the Tang. They thought of me as an astronaut. It took four years of steady campaigning in Ohio to change that to where it came up once in a while but not constantly.

And he recalls how the publisher of one of Ohio's largest newspapers greeted him in 1970 with "I believe in professionalism. What makes you think that an astronaut should be elected to the United States Senate?" The publisher refused to support him in 1970; but he changed his mind 4 years later. John Glenn lost that first Senate race in 1970. And he won in 1974. I would argue that the change in public persona was an important factor. But that transition is still incomplete—even in Ohio. The most striking thing travelling there in 1980 was how much time he spent signing autographs. "It adds 15 minutes to every stop," said his campaign manager, "Still, it's not as bad as it was in 1974. He's a little more the Senator now, and a little less the astronaut." It has
been a slow process of liberation in Ohio; and it will be slower still
in the much larger national arenas. That is why Glenn needs so much
campaign time.

This was the main conclusion I drew from my campaign swing in November.

One example: In Mississippi, one of the legendary black civil rights
leaders, Aaron Henry was being interviewed by NBC TV. He said of Glenn
"He is not well known among the constituencies I am part of." Taken
aback, the interviewer asked "You say John Glenn has no name recognition?"
And Henry said "Yes, we don't care nothing about people riding up there
around the moon. We want to know what has he done for black folks down
here." For a Senator who joined his colleague Ed Brooke, a black, in
sponsoring and fighting for a resolution bringing equal pay and equal
status to blacks employed inside the Senate--"the last plantation"--
Henry's attitude is part of an old frustration. "I'll stack my civil
rights record up against any one else's in the Congress" says Glenn
"But when I went to talk to the NAACP, they didn't know my record. They
had no idea what I'd done." It was a familiar lament, about his
constituency building problem. And he added, "These other Senators who
had issued 40 press releases on what they had done got all the credit.

I didn't. I get the satisfaction but not the credit. Credit will come back to haunt me." Were he more of a natural politician, he could doubtless help himself by speeding up the transition from astronaut to potential President. But such is the legacy of his past that the process will take a lot of time, much more than he or his campaigners recognized.

Listen to the voters. In an article last week about Democratic sentiment in New Hampshire, one voter is quoted as saying "I like Mondale because he knows his way around Washington—you know experience. Mondale has it all over that other fellow, Glenn, in that." A second one says, "Mondale has it, I guess, because he has a little experience. And that Glenn—I can't see it—all he can do is fly an airplane or a space ship."

Glenn himself is quoted as saying. "Our biggest job in New Hampshire is dealing with this idea of experience... I'm head and shoulders above anyone else...If I can get this message across, I know what will happen."

It is possible. A third voter says, "Before he came here today, all I knew about Glenn was that he went to the moon. But now I think he's much
more impressive." The preponderance of the article's "evidence" tells us he has not yet solved his presentational problem. The pessimistic view is that he has neither the skill nor the time to do so. The optimistic view is that with enough time he could do it--as, indeed, he did in Ohio.

The realistic view, I think, is that he has not given himself time enough to do it--the more so because of his uncertain political skill. His constituency-building task will, therefore, remain uncompleted.

So John Glenn finds himself caught in a kind of paradox--he is a genuine national hero badly in need of greater voter recognition. But that paradox contributes to an even larger paradox for him. We look upon our lengthy, grueling nomination steeplechase as a test of a person's fitness for the presidency. And we say of the survivor that he has demonstrated stamina and skills and qualities that are necessary to be a good President. If John Glenn does not survive, we will conclude that he could not demonstrate his fitness for the presidency. But suppose we never looked at him during the process, as a potential president. How can we conclude that he won't be a good President without ever considering him seriously in that role? Glenn is, of course, not the only candidate enveloped in
that paradox. Most of them are. It is just a little more excruciating for Glenn who started fast and has stalled out. In the end, the problem involves the nominating process itself. Is a person's ability to survive the nomination process the best test of his ability to govern the country? If so, is it the only test? If not, is there a better test? Those are questions for another Pi Sigma Alpha class to ponder.