Trump is 'toast' after COVID pandemic, Floyd killing, Green Party presidential candidate says

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By Andrew Blake

President Trump's poor handling of the ongoing novel coronavirus pandemic and recent unrest caused by George Floyd's killing is on course to cost him reelection, a likely rival of his in the White House race told The Washington Times.

Howie Hawkins, the Green Party's presumptive nominee in November's presidential election, said he expects Mr. Trump's response to both crises are top among the reasons Americans will vote to stop him from securing a second term in office.

Mr. Hawkins, a longtime activist who co-founded the Green Party, acknowledged it will likely be Democratic challenger Joseph R. Biden if anybody who takes Mr. Trump's place, however.

The longshot White House hopeful spoke to The Times by phone from Syracuse, New York, where he has done much of his campaigning since the country essentially shut down in March due to the worldwide outbreak of COVID-19, the contagious disease caused by the coronavirus. Speaking as nationwide protests erupted over Floyd's racially charged killing in police custody, Mr. Hawkins predicted that outrage over the Trump administration's "insensitive" response to the unrest it sparked play a big part in hurting the president at the polls.

"First of all, I think Trump is toast," Mr. Hawkins told The Times. "Between the COVID crisis, his insensitive response to what's going on now and the economic situation – I mean, if Biden can't beat him then the Democrats can't do anything,"

Mr. Hawkins, 67, also said that recent protests held across the country following Floyd's killing are unlike practically any other he's seen in his last half-century of activism.

"The only thing I've seen on this scale is anti-Vietnam war, particularly 1969 and 1970, and anti-Iraq war leading up to the invasion in 2003," Mr. Hawkins told The Times, noting the only protests that he would compare to those held recently are demonstrations that happened after the National Guard fatally shot four students at Kent State in 1970.

"The other thing that's different this time is it's multi-racial," he added. "The anti-Vietnam war movement was mostly white, the civil rights movement and the urban uprisings in the 60s were predominantly black, and this is multi-racial, which I think is a hopeful harbinger for our future."

Mr. Hawkins, a Marine veteran who has unsuccessfully campaigned several times in the past for lower office, is currently leading the race for the Green Party's presidential nomination ahead of its national convention taking place next month. Greens have fared poorly against Republicans and Democrats in recent White House elections, however, albeit not without making considerable noise in some election cycles.

Ralph Nader received 2.74% of the popular vote in 2000, including a considerable number in Florida that caused some to suggest he spoiled the race for failed Democratic nominee Al Gore that year; More recently, Jill Stein, the Green Party's presidential candidate during the last White House contest in 2016, received around 1.4 million votes, or roughly 1.1% of total ballots cast that election.

Floyd, a black man, died May 25 after being restrained for nearly nine minutes by several members of the Minneapolis Police Department in Minnesota, sparking protests against systemic racism and police brutality to take place across the country in the days since. Mr. Trump has subsequently faced condemnations from critics over his administration's response to outrage over Floyd's killing, including notably his mobilization of the military on U.S. soil and threat to deploy troops against Americans in cities where riots have erupted amid that unrest.