It's easy for a little guy to get lost in a crazed crowd.

No, not Rand "Really, it's Randal, not like Ayn" Paul, or Donald "Stop Calling Me Rumpo" Trump, or even Rick "Don't Ask Anything or Look Me Up Anywhere" Santorum. No, we're talking about Pennsylvania's Punxsutawney Phil here, whose annual foray into the spotlight got overrun by a stampede of frothy-mouthed Iowa mammals, mostly baboons escaping their GOP handlers.

While portents of the American future were being expounded upon in definitive, if overly waffling, back-and-fill, sunny-then-wintry descriptive terms by politcos, high atop their own self-made gabbling pedestals and berms, Phil drew his own single-minded throng at Gobbler's Knob, awaiting his forecasted divinations of the nation's weather, and the possibility of any ray of positiveness, or, at the least, Spring.

Phil, unlike the gathered hopeful stumpers in Iowa, had the unexcelled good sense in his appearance to simply blink sensibly and keep his snout shut. Phil showed even higher intelligence by attempting to make a break for it, and leave the crowd far, far behind, rather than hang around, pander to it endlessly, try to round all the bases, and generally exasperate everyone while actually wearing out his welcome.

His fan club interpreted for him, as Phil is not fluent in English -- something which would have shot dead his chances in Iowa as a possible GOP candidate (given the party's stand on immigration and deep, restive, ongoing grumbles about a national language amendment). Phil's silence, on the other hand, may have garnered Phil the victory tally from grateful caucus participants, thankful for his restful, silent approach to campaigning.

However, there was no shadow-spotting during the appearance, say Phil's fans, therefore, with no shadow cast, an early Spring is thereby forecast -- simple, cut and dried, with no hanging chads, no coin-flips, and no committee requirements for the review of whether boxes had meant to be marked or not, nor the color of pen inks or pencil marks used on ballots, and no need for SCOTUS to barge in and stop a Phil count or deliberation (whatever that may said to have been, from the Justices' points of view, had it occurred).

No, it was all very straightforward, and well organized, once again. Tradition had been upheld, no feathers had been ruffled, and every network had a nice, warm-hearted photo-op moment with which to close news reports of skyrocketing gun deaths and newly-opening AK-47 plants across from schools and day-care facilities.

Which is why I was frankly not at all prepared for the email I received from Phil and his fans at the Groundhog Club.

You may need to sit down while I pass this along.

Phil can talk -- but, for some reason, it's Scottish, and very heavily brogued, I take it, or maybe Welsh, either of which shoots American Exceptionalism right in the chestnuts. So, to hush things up, the fans do the interpreting of Phil's motions, while Phil is himself kept otherwise busy, smacking and trying to retrieve his tongue from the roof of his mouth.

"Fresh white bread and peanut butter," I was told in the email, is the secret weapon. "Phil can't resist the stuff, and it keeps him quiet -- plus, it keeps his snout wriggling and wiggling, just like he was really talking."

Handy foodstuffs to have around, I imagine, during all those many close-ups during the 692 nitwit interviews on *The Good Morning* [enter city name here] *Show!* which Phil has to contend with on his big day, as he is dragged in and out of his tree-trunk cage, all morning long.

- What Phil *really* said, the Club told me by email, is that Phil didn't see his shadow, but added, "Only the Shadow knows how long this insane political season will blow!"

Phil, I took it, usually did not comment on politics, although I was given to understand he was more than a little ticked off by SCOTUS hijacking the vote count, and Democracy, back on 12/12/2000, and uncharacteristically chattered about it aloud, on the stump, once out of his cage, at Gobbler's Knob, the following February.

The Club's email also tells me that Phil is also a little annoyed that his big day gets stuck in the "only month you people can't pronounce," passing along Phil's apparent peevishness, "It's not *Feb-YOU-air-ee*, it's *Feb-ROO-air-ee*!"

- ("R" rolling is big stuff when you have such a profound and flattering ability to roll them as well as Phil does, so, I do not hold his observations against him. The sound file and short clip I was sent with him demonstrating was as astonishing as it was magnificent -- as deep and rumble-y as the happy velvety, purple-burbling of a V-8 inboard, gargling away in a lake, in an all-wood Chris Craft motorboat. I was even given his broad, self-satisfied smile, at the end of the video clip. Frankly, not that it's here nor there -- I simply never knew groundhogs had dimples.)

"The other reason Phil had us write, beside the R's business," the club members went on, "was, well, is there any way you can suggest some changes be made in the political chaos this year?"

I was intrigued and said so, writing back, "Such as?"

The club replied, "Phil's pretty fed up -- fuming, really -- about the nincompoops and addle-brained yahoos fielded this year by the GOP, and wants something to be done about it, right away."

"Gee, stand in line," I typed back, hoping it wasn't too insensitive.

"No-no, see," the answer came back, "Phil could not care less than he *already* does what people do to *themselves*," the club members explained. "But not many know how *sensitive* groundhogs' hearing really is."

Apparently -- and I had no idea about any of this before I was patiently told -- groundhogs go underground to escape noise and hubbub in general, and some sound frequencies in particular. They do their living in relative peace and quiet, underground, but some frequencies are nonetheless to groundhogs as fingernails on chalkboards are to humans, and can penetrate great depths.

"Please," the club members begged in their email on Phil's behalf, "at least get *Trump* to shut up."

I looked vacantly at the screen while focusing on the next line: "They all get to him, from the GOP -- and Hillary's not on his list of favorites, either -- but Trump's the worst blowhard of them all."

The club members' concern was real. "Phil's simply not been himself since Trump started bellowing. Phil's always been pretty laid-back and imperturbable, but he's been pacing back and forth, howling, trying to hold his ears..."

- (The club members explained the difficulty of having T-Rex sort-of arms and ears mounted up higher than their given palms can go -- worse, even, than having a back itch no hand can get to, I imagine.)

I told the club to thank Phil most appreciatively for contacting me, and said thank-you as well to the club members, for making me aware of Phil's grave situation. I said what anyone in my position would say, while still mostly dumbstruck at the interaction:

- *I'll do what I can.*

So, America: I've said what I came here to say. There's a valiant little guy in pain, down in a hole in the ground, in Pennsylvania, and now, it's up to you to roll up your sleeves and help.

Or, more specifically, I guess, it's up to *you*, New Hampshirites.... then *you*, in Nevada, and *you* , in South Carolina....

- (I say: Quick -- get him while he's still stunned, distracted, and off-balance by his Iowa banana-peel slips and skids, leaving him charging around the hallways, hair on fire, hollering about all the rampant fraud, the late-night coin-flipping, the bedeviling whispering about his Afghan hound coifs and how that doesn't really mean he's for Sharia Law, and so on...)

Hang in there, Phil -- we're pulling for you.

Afterthought

Meanwhile, can somebody look into a mass, volume-discount purchase of those little foam earplugs in the packets which you get, the ones that look like mint freebie giveaways, that you get before they load you into the "torpedo tube" of the MRI machine?

Hey, maybe they can be retrofit for Phil.

Plus, if nothing can be done -- *I mean, let's be realistic, we're dealing with a petulant, slippery, manipulative, self-important billionaire with an ego the size of multiple solar systems* -- there's always the possible thanks of a grateful nation, stuffing its ears with the things. People are already mulling over the benefits of living underground until this whole nightmare is over, you know.

... at least until the GOP stops shoving and dragging around that spiky plank, with all the bent nails in it, across the face of the blackboard, and the country itself, *over and over and over....*