

# DON'T LET A BIDEN SUCCESSION CRISIS CREATE A SUCCESSION CRISIS

It took no time for the pundits calling for Joe Biden to drop out of the race to reveal their fundamental childishness by asking for someone – Gavin Newsom, Gretchen Whitmer, JB Pritzker, Josh Shapiro – whose selection would create as many problems as they might, hypothetically, solve.

Nicholas Kristof, pulling a paycheck from the same people who demanded Biden step down because he didn't do *their job* – “hold Mr. Trump accountable for his lies, his failures and his chilling plans” – well enough, even suggested the 71-year old guy running for a must-win Senate seat should take Joe's place.

Biden can resolve this by withdrawing from the race. There isn't time to hold new primaries, but he could throw the choice of a successor to the Democratic National Convention in Chicago. The Democratic Party has some prominent figures who I think would be in a good position to defeat Trump in November, among them Gov. Gretchen Whitmer of Michigan, **Senator Sherrod Brown of Ohio** and Gina Raimondo, the secretary of commerce. And there are many others. [my emphasis]

These are not serious people, or even very smart about politics.

For both political and legal reasons, it would be doable to swap Biden for Kamala Harris, and for the same political and legal reasons, swapping Biden for anyone else is highly likely to do at least as much harm as good.

There are a number of people making this point succinctly. Jamelle Bouie has said it in a lot of ways worth following. Dan Drezner says it here.

But even these guys are making what I view to be a potentially catastrophic mistake. They think Biden should both step down from the race *and resign* the presidency, as Drezner lays out this way.

Here's the thing, though: if Biden were to decide to step aside in the wake of a poor debate performance, the inevitable question would be whether he should step aside immediately. As previously noted, he is only going to keep aging, and the federal government cannot function well with a 10-4 presidency.

Biden resigning this summer would generate three political advantages. First, Kamala Harris being sworn in as the first lady president would be, to quote Biden, a big fucking deal. It would be a suitable final act in Biden's distinguished political biography. Second, it would make the November election a choice between former president Trump and President Harris. The move would put Harris at Trump's level and eliminate experience as a Trump argument during the campaign. Finally, Harris being president would remove the inherent awkwardness that sitting vice presidents have faced when running for the top job: being unable to disagree or disavow the sitting president's policies. Anything that makes it easier for Kamala Harris to not resemble Al Gore is a good thing.

I think these calls for Biden to *resign* are as facile as the calls for Gretchen Whitmer to march into the convention and take over (much as I might like that to happen).

That's true for one big reason: It turns out with a House packed with rabid supporters of Trump and led by a better-spoken but equally rabid supporter of this fascist project, having a Vice President is an important failsafe for democracy.

That's true for two reasons. First, remember what happened on January 6, 2021? Big mob, chants of "hang the VP," tweets encouraging the mob to do so? The VP may not have a big portfolio on most days. But she does on the day that, recent history warns us, is a fragile moment of our democracy. Certainly, it's possible Democrats could convince Republicans to let Patty Murray do *that* job, as Chuck Grassley was prepared to do back in 2021.

But the bigger problem is the target you would put on Kamala Harris' back if she became a President, running for re-election, without a Vice President as her designated successor. Trump has *already* made it clear he plans to return to power by any means necessary. Trump has already spent years frothing up his followers to a frenzy that could (and has) tipped into violence with little notice. Indeed, more than a handful of Trump's supporters *have* embraced violence, some after getting riled up on Truth Social, others after little more than an incendiary Fox News rant.

The Secret Service did a piss poor job of protecting Kamala Harris on January 6. Let's not tempt fate or Trump's rabid brown shirts to make Mike Johnson President.

Besides, very few of the pundits screaming to replace Biden are focused on governance. This Franklin Foer piece, for example, engages in paragraph after paragraph of projection about the motives of Biden's top aides, argues that it's not enough to be a good President, Biden also has to campaign competently.

When I talk with aides on the inside, they never question Biden's governing capacity. Perhaps this is their own

wishful thinking. Perhaps they are better able to see how the benefits of experience overwhelm his inability to recall a name. But it's also the product of a delusion among the Democratic elite about what constitutes effective leadership. **Governing competently is different from campaigning competently.** The ability to think strategically about China, or to negotiate a complicated piece of bipartisan legislation, is not the limit of politics. It's not enough to deliver technocratic accomplishments or to prudently manage a chaotic global scene—a politician must also connect with the voters, and convince them that they're in good hands. And the Biden presidency has always required explaining away the fact that the public wasn't buying what he was selling, even when the goods seemed particularly attractive. [my emphasis]

The noxious NYT op-ed calling on Biden to step down because he doesn't do their job well enough is likewise focused on Biden as campaigner.

The president appeared on Thursday night as the shadow of a great public servant. He struggled to explain what he would accomplish in a second term. He struggled to respond to Mr. Trump's provocations. He struggled to hold Mr. Trump accountable for his lies, his failures and his chilling plans. More than once, he struggled to make it to the end of a sentence.

Mr. Biden has been an admirable president. Under his leadership, the nation has prospered and begun to address a range of long-term challenges, and the wounds ripped open by Mr. Trump have begun to heal. But the greatest public service Mr. Biden can now perform is to announce that he will not continue to run for re-election.

As it stands, the president is engaged in a reckless gamble. There are Democratic leaders better equipped to present clear, compelling and energetic alternatives to a second Trump presidency. There is no reason for the party to risk the stability and security of the country by forcing voters to choose between Mr. Trump's deficiencies and those of Mr. Biden.

[snip]

[T]he United States needs a stronger opponent to the presumptive Republican nominee. To make a call for a new Democratic nominee this late in a campaign is a decision not taken lightly, but it reflects the scale and seriousness of Mr. Trump's challenge to the values and institutions of this country and the inadequacy of Mr. Biden to confront him.

And it makes sense. As I argued, when Biden responded to a focus on his age in January, he correctly said he was doing one amazingly taxing job well, that of being President. But in recent weeks, he has *also* been in the thick of an equally taxing job, flying around the country and glad-handing potential voters, many of whom carry germs that don't normally make their way into the Oval Office. He has also had the stress of his son getting convicted in a trial that would never have happened if he weren't the son of President Joe Biden. This is best understood, in my mind, as a question about whether Biden can do the two jobs required of him.

Aside from his Israeli policy, Biden is, most Democratic voters (and even NYT's editorial board) will concede, a remarkably successful President. Via whatever means, he has managed to do that job well, even at the ripe age of 81.

If he's doing his day job well but there are questions about whether he has the stamina to do

a second full-time job on top of the first one, the answer is not to send him out to pasture on both.

This is a perceived or real stamina problem, not – at least thus far – a competence problem.

Which means there's no reason to create another succession crisis in an attempt to save democracy.

The goal here is not just to prevent Trump from winning the election. The goal is to prevent Trump from attaining the Presidency again, via whatever means he plans to pursue. And for that reason, it is highly unwise to add points of potential failure he can exploit where, thus far, there are none.