

Biden's Shot at Success

Joe Biden has one great chance to emancipate himself from the extremists in his own party and work with moderate Trump supporters and NeverTrumpers among the Republicans.

by Conrad Black



There is a pathway to significant success for a President Biden. It is hard to detect, given the questionable nature of his apparent election, fragmented party, likely inability to enact anything that he currently supports in the Congress, and the probable Democratic loss of the majority in the House in the midterm elections, as well as his evident frailties.

Biden was retrieved from imminent candidate mortality by the party elders to spare the Democrats a Bernie Sanders candidacy and was saddled with most of Sanders' quasi-Marxist program. But in his most impressive remark in the presidential debates, Biden said that in policy terms, "I am the party." It was a

forceful, and in a way, a reassuring statement.

Joe Biden, in his 48 years in Washington, has been on all sides of almost every issue. If he has never been strong, so too has he never been an extremist. He is not a true believer in the radical leftist program that he officially stood upon and from which he has in effect already departed. In any case, such a program has absolutely no chance of being adopted by a Congress with such a strong Republican presence as the next one.

Since there is also no practical likelihood of his attempting a second term as president, the only way that Biden could build a record of achievement is to work with the Republicans in Congress along with whatever moderate Democrats remain. His party would run away from under him, or at least the Sandersite wing of approximately 40 percent of them would run. But they would have nowhere to go.

Biden would be left with an inadequately numerous following to govern, but as the un-vexed occupant of the White House supported by a responsible block of Democrats, he might be able to invoke the broad national consensus for less contentious politics and for a reasonable level of bipartisan cooperation, to agree to vital legislation with centrist Republicans led by Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) and House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-Calif.).

If Joe Biden is confirmed as the elected president, he may rank as the least charismatic figure elected to that post in its history. But he has his strengths. He is a survivor, he is generally well-liked by all those who worked with him in the Senate and the Obama Administration, and he certainly knows better than any president since Lyndon Johnson how to work out bipartisan legislative compromises.

It is hazardous, and in most cases odious, to mind-read public men by supposition and imputation. With that said, it may be

reasonably assumed that a President Biden, having waited so long, and striven so hard, with a conspicuous failure to be taken seriously for president for decades, would have the same desire as all previous occupants of that great office to be a successful president. This is not a goal that he could achieve by standing on, to take a word he apparently accidentally improvised, "OBidenism."

On all his past record, Biden is comfortably somewhat to the right of the man whom he served as vice president. President Obama moved from his moorings with Bill Ayers spending Walter Annenberg's money teaching Marxism in Chicago and attending Jeremiah Wright's outrageous church, steadily yet not a great distance, toward the center, and went only as far to the Left as he thought he could do successfully. But there has always been an aspect of Obama that seemed to be an unfulfilled aspirant to a more profound social democracy than the United States was prepared to accept.

This impression is not undermined by the extensive book that he has just published. Further, and at the risk of straying into delicate areas, there has been about Obama and his wife an imperishable and not incomprehensible sense of reproach of white America, even though the Caucasian majority of Americans twice conferred upon him the highest and most influential office within the gift of any free people on earth.

Yet Obama and his wife sometimes convey the impression that if they are not sufficiently critical of America they are somehow inauthentic African Americans. This is only an amateurish but sincere intuition and is not meant disrespectfully; indeed if that is accurate, it makes even greater the former president's achievement in attaining and executing that office.

With Biden, we appear to have a conventional, traditional, liberal Democrat and centrist, a very mature offspring of the working-class politics of the Democratic Party of Roosevelt, Truman, Stevenson, Kennedy, Johnson, and Humphrey. That is Joe

Biden's political cradle and youth, and nothing that has occurred in the 48 years since his first election to the Senate indicates that he has seriously shifted his loyalties or beliefs, malleable as they have often been under the pressure of current events and trends.

All those Democratic leaders at times worked closely with Republicans. FDR came closer than anyone in American history to coalition government by bringing prominent Republicans Henry L. Stimson, Frank Knox (who had been the Republican candidate for vice president four years before), Edward Stettinius (who served as secretary of war, the navy, and state), William J. Donovan, John G. Winant, Patrick Hurley, and Nelson Rockefeller, into his administration. He seriously considered offering his Republican opponent in 1940, Wendell L. Willkie, the vice presidential nomination when he sought his fourth term.

Presidents Truman and Kennedy worked well with Republicans in the Senate and from the White House, and President Johnson famously recruited Republican Senate leader Everett Dirksen to join him in passing the historic Civil and Voting Rights Acts of 1965. It is a proud tradition and they were distinguished statesmen, and it is reassuring that the apparent president-elect reveres that tradition.

The presidency has undoubtedly suffered somewhat from the fact that none of the seven presidents following Gerald Ford had any congressional experience except for George H. W. Bush's two terms as a congressman and his time as Ronald Reagan's vice president. It is more or less of a cliché to say that America needs a cooling down of political antipathies and a reacquaintance with bipartisanship. Senator Joe Biden was not a particularly remarkable legislator and he had some serious low points, such as his shameful assaults on Robert Bork and Clarence Thomas when they were nominees to the Supreme Court in 1987 and 1991. Even in the late campaign, while he cannot be blamed for failing to turn the other cheek to the

denigrations of his opponent, Biden's repetition on election eve of the egregious falsehood that President Trump had ever referred to American war dead as "losers and suckers" was a disgrace.

But Biden is likely, improbably and in the twilight of his career, to be president. He has one great chance to emancipate himself from the extremists in his own party and work with moderate Trump supporters and NeverTrumpers among the Republicans to achieve a comprehensive and sensible healthcare bill, infrastructure renovation bill, prison and criminal and tort law reform bills, and to clean up the cesspool of corruption and hypocrisy that is now the presidential election system (even or perhaps especially because he has been a beneficiary of it). Any such program could make him, against all odds and most expectations, an important and successful president.

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