

# Joe Biden: Mediocrity Personified

He has been wrong on just about every issue for decades.

by Conrad Black



**It is hard not to feel some sympathy for Joe Biden**, up to a point. He is said by almost everyone who knows him to be personally likeable. As a simple member of the public, I have never forgiven him for his treatment, as Senate Judiciary Committee chairman, of President Reagan's nominee for the Supreme Court in 1987, Robert Bork. Biden implicitly endorsed Senator Edward Kennedy's statement on the Senate floor that "Robert Bork's America is a land where women are forced into back-alley abortions," a land of segregation, lawless rogue police, government censorship of writers and artists, and inaccessibility of federal courts to meritorious litigants, where the teaching of evolution was banned. He railed against President Reagan for trying to "reach out from the muck of Irangate [and] reach into the muck of Watergate." Every

sentence of Kennedy's statement was false, and Bork accurately wrote that Biden's own brief on his nomination was "world class in the category of scurrility."

Their assault on Robert Bork is surpassed as shameful defamation in the modern history of the Senate only by Joseph R. McCarthy's accusation against General George C. Marshall in 1951 of "a conspiracy so immense as to dwarf any previous venture in the history of man" (in supposedly giving Eastern Europe to Stalin and China to the Communists). It was made more grievous in Kennedy's case by the fact that it emanated from someone almost certainly guilty of manslaughter in the Chappaquiddick tragedy. At the same time as the shameful Bork hearings were under way, Biden was a presidential candidate and was exposed as having cribbed a line from the failed British Labour-party leader Neil Kinnock, who spoke of being "the first Kinnock in a thousand generations" (taking him back to the Cro-Magnon era) to go to university. The British were not impressed when Kinnock said it, and Americans were less impressed when Biden tossed it out as if it had been a profound aperçu of his own.

There is a substantive problem with Joe Biden. He has recently apologized for insufficient support of Anita Hill when she appeared at the last minute to oppose the confirmation of President George H. W. Bush's nominee for the Supreme Court, Clarence Thomas, in 1991 (presaging the Christine Blasey Ford appearance at the Kavanaugh hearings last year). Bork was really the beginning, and Thomas the second episode, as Democrats turned Republican nominations to the Supreme Court into torture chambers of doubtfully sourced character assassination; Biden was one of the architects of this perversion of the constitutional process of advice and consent. He asked committee members to consider issues of credibility with Ms. Hill and now apparently recants. If Biden now believes that Justice Thomas, who has served with distinction on the high court for 28 years, actually was

guilty of sexually harassing Anita Hill, he should say so.

He was badgered onto the defensive by Senator Kamala Harris in an early debate this year for not supporting the use of school buses to achieve racial balance in school districts all over the country, taking children out of their neighborhoods, whatever their parents might think of it. This was one of the principal reasons that George McGovern lost the 1972 presidential election to Richard Nixon by 18 million votes. Instead of telling Harris her idea was insane, he waffled. Robert Gates, former director of central intelligence in the first Bush administration and secretary of defense with both President George W. Bush and President Obama, wrote in his memoirs that then-Vice President Biden was a very amiable man but was "wrong on nearly every foreign policy and national security issue in the past four decades." Coming from a bipartisan person of such extensive experience in national-security matters, this is a serious reflection on a supposed front-runner to be president.

Everyone's religion is a personal matter, but Joe Biden is an ostentatious Roman Catholic who appears to disbelieve practically every tenet of his church except, presumably, that God exists, Jesus Christ was divine, and he told St. Peter to found a church. Apart from that, it's open house. That there was a creation, that all life is sacred, that abortions, whether a matter of right or not, are the extinction of life, the notion that marriage was created as an institution between a man and a woman: Whenever anything touching on these or similarly important issues arises, he emits a damp little mantra about "I don't believe in imposing my views in others." That's commendable, but legislators are expected and preferred to have beliefs and act on them. With Joe Biden, there has always been the unpleasant feeling that he doesn't believe in much, what he believes in one day could change tomorrow, and when he takes a stand, he's often mistaken. In this campaign, he has tried to retain the light touch and the constant smile.

He smiled through his vice-presidential debate with Alaska governor Sarah Palin in 2008, too. She was generally reviled by the Democratic media as another Republican dunce, Dan Quayle in drag, but by most reckoning, she won the debate. All but the most unfailingly articulate people make verbal slips at times, but Joe Biden's foot-in-mouth affliction has become an amusing international parlor game.

In this campaign, he attempted to defang the evident Ukrainian ethical questions, amplified by his own televised boast of having got a Ukrainian prosecutor fired, with a disdainful dismissal in *The New Yorker*, the highbrow softball park of the Democratic party. (Its editor, David Remnick, isn't but could be the head of a committee to add Barack Obama to Mount Rushmore.) Perhaps the prosecutor was corrupt and firing him was a good move, as Biden says, but \$50,000 a month to the vice president's son as a director in an energy business he knew nothing about in Ukraine won't pass a smell test even if the monitor is a CNN commentator wearing a gas mask. If they did nothing inappropriate, the Bidens should thank President Trump for wishing to elicit that fact.

Asking about Biden's conduct in Ukraine is called digging up dirt, while hurling malicious falsehoods at the president is "investigating." Democratic House chairmen Schiff and Nadler and the shrieking heads at CNN and MSNBC traduce and slander the president constantly. But when Rudolph Giuliani, the former two-term mayor of New York and U.S. attorney, acting as the president's lawyer, makes allegations based on his research on behalf of his client, Biden has the gigantic vanity to ask publicly that he be kept off the air. Biden has been telling the press that is trying to protect him that they should go after Trump, as if they had done anything else for the last three years. Behind their usual unctuous, mindless arm-flapping (the one criterion for the Democratic nomination where Beto O'Rourke leads), the other candidates are delighted that Biden's candidacy is fading. He has been a significant

impediment to merging the Democratic party with the Flat Earth Society and the Leon Trotsky League.

One slip that Biden made in one of the Democratic debates, stating that “no one who has not committed a violent crime should be in prison,” was, in fact a brilliant accidental insight. No nonviolent first offender, other than a perpetrator of egregious crimes, such as Bernard Madoff, should be imprisoned; they should be punished in other, more efficient and less costly ways, such as obligatory spartan living and contributed work. Prison, for nonviolent first offenders, is more of a problem than a solution. Joe Biden’s greatest contribution to this campaign may be that he motivates President Trump to take a radical positive justice-reform measure, such as releasing all nonviolent first offenders who have served half their sentences or more, and incentivizing the states to do the same. That would touch millions of homes, an inordinate number of them minority families. It would be good policy and good politics, especially in this time of full employment.

A miracle – something Joe Biden probably actually believes in, since it’s not politically incorrect – is all that can prevent Joe Biden from sliding back toward what he was in his pre-vice presidential campaigns: a candidate polling at 1 or 2 percent, like most of those running now.

First published in