

Trump's Position Atop GOP Field for 2024 a Reminder That He Is Less a Party Man Than a Political Movement



by Conrad Black

All the anti-Trump scenarios in both parties crash against the rocks of the unique facts of this election campaign that nobody seems to wish to recognize. A very large number of Americans think that in the last election, due to concerns that millions of unverifiable – and possibly harvested – unsolicited mail-in ballots were not cast by the people who supposedly signed them, it is quite likely that President Trump was cheated out of the election.

This fact is not rendered less important by Mr. Trump's mistake in allowing Mayor Giuliani's frazzled election challenges to seem to be his principal legal argument. The

question about the authenticity of the election result is aggravated by the judiciary's abdication as a coequal branch in refusing to judge the merits of any of the 19 constitutional suits challenging the swing-state amendments of voting and vote-counting procedures enacted otherwise than by the state legislatures as the Constitution requires.

Scores of millions of Americans think this, and they are not just dyed-in-the-wool Trump supporters; they think he was wronged last time and deserves another chance. Also largely overlooked is that Mr. Trump is not a party man – he changed parties seven times in thirteen years – but is a political movement.

It is a trans-party alliance of people who are realistic in foreign policy, climate-skeptical but pro-environment, tough on crime and demand a leak-proof border, want low taxes and favor incentivized private sector economic growth using the tax system to induce investment in disadvantaged areas, and oppose unnecessary public-sector jobs and Biden-style wealth redistribution.

Mr. Trump believes that taking money from people who have earned it to give it to people who haven't in exchange for their votes is bad economics and bad politics, and an inconveniently large number of people, (for the Democrats), agrees with him. The Trump movement is superimposed over most of the Republicans and the great majority of the GOP prefer Trump to their ancient cozy Democratic foes.

Senator McConnell makes no secret that he prefers Mr. Biden to Mr. Trump, but most Republicans and most of Mr. McConnell's fellow Kentuckians don't agree with him. It doesn't matter who else is seeking the Republican nomination; Mr. Trump has the support of most Republicans. Governor DeSantis has done his best, presenting Trumpism without Mr. Trump, but it isn't working and he has struck out with a six-week limit on abortions.

The Democrats' ultimate weapon, a legal Swiss cheese of indictments tactically delayed and spaced to tie the candidate up while he is pilloried as a multiple felon, has blown up in their faces. The majority of the country, including many Democrats, see this as the naked corruption of the justice system that it is. Only the most fanatical Trump-haters, (and there are tens of millions of them), approve of this hideous mutation of the justice system. Most do not, whatever their reservations about Trump.

The Democratic campaign to continue the argument that Mr. Trump is uniquely dishonest and a criminal recidivist who could not be trusted in any executive position, public or private, is not assisted by the increasingly alarming revelations of the sticky-fingered greed and hypocrisy of the Biden family. Democrats falsely claim that there is no damaging evidence against the president, and the attorney general can be relied upon not to enforce any of the Congress' subpoenas, but it doesn't make the Democrats very credible as righteous moralists.

All this combines to create what is emerging as the principal feature of next year's election: regardless of whether Mr. Trump's trials actually occur prior to the election, and regardless of the outcome of those trials-he'll appeal any convictions, the election will be, first of all a referendum on the political abuse of the justice system.

Ultimately, the Democrats cannot win on that issue, and the Republicans can't lose, and their position will be strengthened by hanging around the neck of the Democrats that in addition to corrupted justice, they are also the party of high crime, high taxes, and millions of unskilled illegal immigrants, with the American government as the unwitting enabling partner of the murderous Mexican gangs.

Unless they have lost all sense of self-preservation, the Democrats will persuade Mr. Biden to announce his retirement

around the end of the year. They may even get someone who, unlike Governor Newsom of California, does not bear the stigmata of all the failings of the Biden administration.

The fiasco of the second Republican candidates' debate has driven the anti-Trump forces, clinging like limpets to their entrenched positions in the Republican Party, to new paroxysms of fantasy to bar the return of the ogre. The debate was a cacophonous sequence of candidates speaking over each other and projecting their own, now familiar traits as best they could. The former New Jersey governor, Chris Christie, is wringing everything he can from his sour grapes as he attacks Mr. Trump, calling him "Donald Duck" while smirking in self-delight at his witty aperçu. With any luck, this may be the last we see of him in this campaign.

Vice President Pence is unexceptionable, but his attempt to represent his rejection of Mr. Trump's request that he reject some of the presidential electors from closely contested swing states on January 20, 2021 as the most courageous public act of any American since George Washington crossed the Delaware, is becoming tiresome. Mr. Pence would never have been heard of outside of Indiana if Mr. Trump hadn't chosen him as vice president.

Vivek Ramaswamy is becoming an annoying Jack-in-the-Box; he's intelligent, but endlessly interrupts the others, and he is becoming bizarre with his swept-up hair that almost makes him look like Don "Only in America" King. His strongest claim for serious attention is his commendable assertion that Mr. Trump was "an excellent president." The South Carolina solon, Tim Scott, is likable and a good senator. He is running for vice president and would be a good vice president, but he is not needed in more presidential debates this year.

The former UN ambassador, Nikki Haley, and Mr. DeSantis are more effective and the Florida governor, by refusing to be discouraged by his poor showing in the polls to date is

proving that in addition to being an outstanding governor of an important state, he has a dogged quality of dignified perseverance and unflappability that could endear him to voters. He is not especially likable as a candidate, but he is solid and not obnoxious like several of his rivals.

The anti-Trump Republicans for a long time demanded that everyone except the front runner against Mr. Trump get out of the race to prevent the former president from romping to victory. The problem with that tactic is that as candidates withdraw or fall out, (and Governor Hutchinson will not be missed), Mr. Trump picks up most of their votes. There is now a call for a debate between Ms. Haley and Mr. DeSantis as the two principal alternatives to Trump, replete with divinations by Karl Rove and other eminent anti-Trump Republicans that Mr. Trump is in difficulty in Iowa or New Hampshire.

This is a new definition of "difficulty," based on leading by not much more than 30 points. (The debate between Mr. DeSantis and Mr. Newsom at the end of November may be useful.) The next gambit of the anti-Trumpers, already gathering some steam, is the move to draft Governor Youngkin.

This is a non-starter: Mr. Youngkin, as Mr. DeSantis should have done, has focused on 2028 and if he attempted to make the run now, he would split the votes of the other anti-Trump candidates with Mr. Trump and would not end up with more than one third of the delegates at the Republican convention. Every week it becomes more difficult to see how the Democrats retain the White House.

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