

FEARS INCREASE ABOUT BIDEN'S CHANCES IN A CORONAVIRUS WORLD

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The national Democratic Party establishment is no longer desperate. It's merely nervous.

When former Vice President Joe Biden dispatched Vermont socialist Sen. Bernie Sanders with a string of blow out primary victories, the party leadership heaved a sigh of relief, confident they'd avoided an election day disaster.

Suddenly, in late February, the COVID-19 pandemic gained a foothold in the United States and Biden's campaign playbook was swept into the recycling bin.

The devastating and deadly virus produced a seismic shift in the political environment, the ultimate effects of which are still unknown, other than immediately de-railing what was certain to be an all-out Biden assault on the president.

At a time when the former vice president should be deep into his campaign, he's been pushed to the sidelines as a spectator, looking on in frustration as Trump dominates the media and commands the attention of a frightened nation seeking reassurance in the face of the most serious public health crisis to strike in a century.

Biden has struggled to shoehorn himself into the debate, but his efforts have come to naught or turned into embarrassment.

His early effort to deliver a message to the American people from a makeshift television studio in the basement of his home was disastrous. He fumbled his lines and seemed befuddled reading from a teleprompter, underscoring the perception he was a 77-year-old man in early decline and not up to the intellectual and physical demands placed on the leader of the free world.

While Trump has benefitted from the natural public response to rally around its leadership in times of great peril, Biden is caught in a conundrum – criticize the president and risk coming across as a crass partisan sniper, or mute his planned offensive and risk appearing as a reluctant supporter of the Trump administration's actions.

Biden has chosen the passive approach, remaining largely out of public view while engaging in a few interviews whose impact is quickly negated by the fast-moving developments of the pandemic.

The virtual national lockdown has precluded indefinitely the packed arena rallies and fund-raising extravaganzas which draw hordes of national media and give Biden a platform to assail Trump's record.

Gone are the traditional campaign staples – parades, picnics, airport tarmac rope lines with their reaching hands, press plane news availabilities, policy speeches to national business, labor and public interest groups. When and if they will reappear is uncertain.

Even the party's national convention – the three or four days devoted to celebrating the candidate – will likely be a virtual presentation, reaching a fraction of the usual network and cable television audience.

Many Democrats worry Biden has failed to raise his visibility, more aggressively speak out and emphasize his differences with Trump's response to the pandemic. Missed opportunities will haunt him, they believe, as Americans deal with their concerns and fears into the summer months.

Others counsel patience, convinced that Biden will have ample time to make his case once the crisis ebbs, daily life returns to normal and Americans focus on the presidential contest.

Those advising a measured approach believe the downside of appearing to embrace political opportunism outweighs any lost campaign time, and Biden can still portray himself as placing the overall public good ahead of self-serving partisan considerations.

Left unsaid is a concern that Biden will stumble in any effort to address the pandemic and debate the intricacies and nuances of the medical, scientific and economic considerations involved. A misstep or rhetorically clumsy attempt to make a point could be devastating, raising questions yet again about his ability to grasp the essence of an issue and articulate a coherent and cogent response.

It will be easier to raise the level of aggression at a time when hospitals are not overflowing, medical equipment is not in short supply and business and commercial activity is on the upswing.

The strain of nervousness currently running through the establishment won't vanish overnight. It won't ease until Biden confronts Trump in a traditional campaign setting, forces the president onto the defensive and establishes himself as a viable alternative.

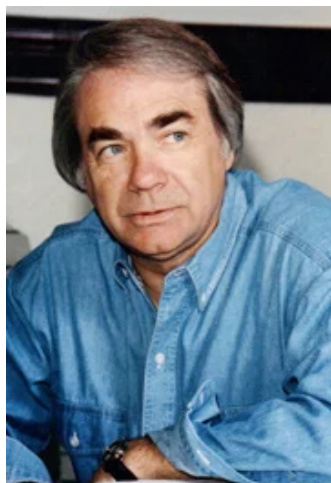
It may not be a perfect plan, but at the moment the nation is in an imperfect place. And, it's certainly preferable to the Sanders-inspired desperation.

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