

Joe Biden Needs Opponents

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Image Courtesy of Defense Visual Information Distribution Service

I love Joe Biden. He and my dad were very close friends. On October 14, 2012, then-Vice President Biden abandoned the campaign trail to eulogize my father.

It's said that Joe Biden ran for president in 2020 out of a sense of duty to save the country from a second Trump term. That's the Joe Biden I know.

Early and often, I did a lot to assist him in that race, from financially contributing to helping with the Pennsylvania messaging. I think he's been a very good president.

The prospect of another Trump presidency is a national emergency. But there's no judicial shortcut to preventing Trump's reacquisition of the presidency. He must be defeated at the ballot box.

There's a long way to go until November 5, 2024, but a lot is clear now.

While Joe Biden may have been the only Democrat who could beat Donald Trump in 2020, he may be the only Democrat who can't beat Donald Trump in 2024. He's been persistently behind or tied with Trump in national polling.

Since early in his presidency, Joe Biden has been unpopular. Despite low unemployment, receding inflation, no war, and — to date — no debilitating scandal, President Biden's approval rating is mired around the low 40s, with no evident path to improvement.

The majority of Americans, including 75% of Democrats, don't want President Biden to run for re-election. Even many people who approve of his performance hope he doesn't run. Joe Biden is appreciated but unwanted.

Those who oppose Donald Trump must soberly consider that he's increasingly likely to be renominated. The DeSantis boomlet has withered following his landslide re-election victory in Florida in 2022. No one else demonstrates much potential to emerge.

Alvin Bragg, Jack Smith, and Fani Willis have done more to suppress the Republican primary field than Donald Trump could do alone. With each indictment, Trump's numbers among Republican voters improve. The perception of prosecutorial persecution is the defining dynamic of the 2024 Republican primary so far.

As the summer turns to fall, Democrats must confront the likelihood that Donald Trump will be president again unless they nominate a strong opponent.

The window to run is closing. The deadline to file for the Nevada primary is October 16. Other states' deadlines approach quickly thereafter. It takes a while to erect a campaign for president, raise money, and communicate a message.

Beyond President Biden, the potential Democratic field is strong, including a new generation of Democratic governors — Newsom of California, Whitmer of Michigan, Moore of Maryland and Shapiro of Pennsylvania — with impressive skills and electoral prowess.

Of this group, Gavin Newsom has come closest to running a shadow campaign. He's traveled the nation and aired ads articulating his vision. His debate with Sean Hannity on Fox News demonstrates he has the forensic ability and policy chops to run for president. His challenge to Ron DeSantis to debate suggests that he's eager to articulate the Democrats' voice in political combat with the Republicans.

Despite the huge public preference for a primary contest, there's a conspiracy of silence among Democratic officeholders, funders, and activists about the need for a race. There's a deep affection for the president. Some also likely fear criticism or retribution for validating the public preference. So Democratic leaders pretend everything is fine when it isn't. That should change.

Gavin Newsom should run for president. Yes, some people would be sore at him and say he's disloyal and should wait his turn. That would be part of the story for a while. But the lasting dynamic would likely be strong interest in his candidacy and the realization that Democrats will benefit from a vigorous contest for the nomination.

A Newsom candidacy would offer a viable choice to the many Democrats who want an alternative. Other well-qualified people might run, too. At some point, the president might choose not to run. Many believe he's not really committed to running, which is supported by his light political schedule and small campaign staff. In the final analysis, Joe Biden will likely be motivated by what's best for the country and not by his ego.

A meaningful Democratic primary contest is the best way to beat Donald Trump because strong primary contests usually produce strong general election candidacies. For Democrats to treat the president's renomination as an entitlement would reinforce the perception that he's too weak to be tested. Joe Biden needs opponents. If Joe Biden defeats a strong field, that would go a long way to beating back the argument that he's too old.

Defeating Donald Trump is essential. Nothing should be spared in that cause, including hard feelings. If Joe Biden had a patriotic duty to save the country from Donald Trump in 2020, then those Democrats with the right stuff have a duty to run right now. And we have a duty to encourage them.

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