

Joe Biden, With a Bit of Willy Loman and a Little of King Lear, Wins His Last Battle in the Choice of Kamala Harris

By Conrad Black

It must be conceded that for what it is worth, Joe Biden has won the last round he had to fight as leader of the Democratic Party. A week ago, it was clear from the antics of President Obama and Speaker Pelosi and was at least somewhat inferable from the behavior of the Clintons, that the restless Democrats were only half-satisfied with the withdrawal of President Biden from the election contest.



Vice President Harris embraces President Biden after a speech on healthcare at Raleigh, North Carolina, March. 26, 2024. AP/Matt Kelley, file

The next step was to require an open convention, have Mr. Biden release his delegates and let all of the plausible replacement candidates come down the runway for

the consideration of the Democratic convention in Chicago next month. It would have been the first convention since the

Republicans in 1968 where the winner was not a foregone conclusion.

In that dramatic and tragic year, it will be recalled that President Nixon defeated Nelson Rockefeller and Ronald Reagan and the Democratic nominee was Vice President Humphrey, following the retirement of President Lyndon Johnson and the assassination of Senator Robert Kennedy.

Such a process might have electrified the voters by injecting a note of suspense that has not existed in American presidential politics other than in some of the close elections for many years. It would have enabled the Democrats to elevate someone who was not closely identifiable with the many failures of the outgoing administration.

Many will again recall that in 2008 Senator McCain successfully reminded Senator Obama that he was "not running against President Bush" and that he, Mr. McCain, disagreed as vocally as Mr. Obama had with various positions of the George W. Bush administration, which was then perilously close to the low levels of public esteem recently excavated by the Biden administration.

Yet in what will presumably be the last important act in what I believe is the longest electoral career of any president in American history, having successfully sought federal office in six consecutive decades, the president prevailed over his otherwise successful rivals, many of whom he probably correctly believes betrayed him personally, by assuring that his own choice, Vice President Harris, would succeed him.

Ms. Harris was his choice because four years ago he had pledged that he would select a non-white woman as vice president and the Democratic Party was not an inexhaustible storehouse of presentable candidates who met that description. The only seriously visible one was the completely infeasible Stacy Abrams of Georgia.

Ms. Abrams' lawsuit had at least enabled the Biden campaign to lay hands upon enough harvested ballots in that state to overcome a slender Republican majority in Georgia. Ms. Harris had failed so badly in the initial stages of the campaign that she withdrew prior to the Iowa caucuses and the first primaries. She has, at intervals, risen like a rocket without obvious sources of locomotion.

As one who has frequently been critical of this president and believes that he has been an unsuccessful president and who never understood why he had been recruited for the office of vice president in the first place since there were many evidently more capable Democrats available, I doff my hat to him in sincere admiration for extracting this tactical victory at the expense of his chief enabler as a presidential candidate who also presciently warned against "Joe Biden's ability to f- things up," (President Obama).

That he has done, and a vice president who conspicuously failed to win the confidence of more than approximately one third of Americans in three and a half years in office will be the candidate. The Democratic Party, doing the best it can with half a loaf, has fallen in behind her with commendable party discipline. It has activated the contemptible echo chamber of the national political press to rewrite her *curriculum vitae*.

And to relaunch Ms. Harris as someone who was never in charge of the southern border, never whitewashed the riots and racially motivated murders of 2020, did not have any of a long sequence of filmed and notorious gaffes and blunders, and did not spend approximately half of her national television air time as vice president cackling like a Wagnerian Norn.

It won't work. The country will not vote for a candidate who has been so conspicuously mistaken, has never run anything except a notoriously chaotic and unhappy vice presidential office, has authored an endless sequence of completely

unacceptable policy positions, and is inextricably linked to a profoundly failed administration.

Yet with the press and the heavy-pocketed limousine-left Democratic donor base pushing her forward, she may make a respectable race of what would have been a disorderly rout of the incumbent president. The trajectory is well illustrated by a sequence of columns by the estimable Peggy Noonan in the Wall Street Journal.

Ms. Noonan moved from an appreciation of President Trump's ability to be the spokesman for the grievances of the working and lower middle classes to regarding him as "a tumor metastasizing in the Oval Office," to somebody who deserved to lose to, and did unquestionably lose to a decent, authentic, moderate Democrat, who before long was a disappointment but could certainly resurrect himself, while the Republicans should recognize that Trump's support was evaporating and should desert him.

And when Mr. Biden didn't resurrect himself and Trump's support did not desert him there were still ways for Mr. Biden to win until there were not and then the only hope was an open Democratic convention, which, although it will not happen, can still nominate a possible winner in the form of the previously unelectable Ms. Harris. We are all entitled to change our minds as the facts evolve.

There is some drama in the trajectory of Joe Biden's career, a bit of Willie Loman and little of King Lear. He was tenacious of office, promoted above his abilities, was a figurehead standing on top of a misconceived far left platform who briefly held the Democrats together, and was then betrayed by his supporters, but he wins his last battle and it would be unseemly to begrudge that to him.

The Trump era was unjustly interrupted and most of the political anger in the nation will subside when it resumes;

four years from now it will be a much less agitated America that turns the page into a new era.

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