

Mayor Mike Courts the Democrats

His achievements are clear, but his appeal to primary voters is fuzzy at best.

by Conrad Black



Michael Bloomberg is gaining some ground in the Democratic presidential field, but in so doing he is complicating his life as the potential nominee against President Trump. His cock-a-hoop support of solar energy is nonsense, and the country won't take much persuading to see that. There may be some hidden metric of rounding up Democratic primary voters by pitching something that creeps toward the Ocasio-Cortez–Sanders Green Terror, but the country doesn't buy into it. Public perception of solar energy hasn't risen much since Ronald Reagan helped sink Jerry Brown's campaign for the U.S. Senate from California in 1982 against Pete Wilson by suggesting that he might appear in Washington with a solar

panel on his forehead. The country doesn't like pollution, but it doesn't like quack boondoggles either.

More problematic was Bloomberg's flippant tweet as President Trump addressed the March for Life on January 25, that in doing so Trump insulted all American women (although most of the marchers were women). That issue has evolved also. It is as if Bloomberg, though living in the country's largest city, was oblivious, as Washington notoriously is, of how most Americans view these questions. All polls now indicate that the percentages of Americans who support abortion in any circumstances, and those who oppose all abortions, are approximately equal, at between 20 and 25 percent, and that those who support the legality of abortions in some cases and not others is between 25 and 30 percent. The rest, about 30 percent, are undecided – not uninterested in the issue, only unsure.

Bloomberg has chained himself to *Roe v. Wade*, and a rather shopworn view of this emotive subject, stating that it is an issue of the right of every woman to decide what goes on in her own body. He is still trying to emancipate women from domineering, enthusiastically procreative men, a rather bygone caricature and one that completely ignores what is now generally seen as the larger question, which is: When do the unborn attain to the rights of people? There are champions of every possible answer to that question, from the moment of conception to the moment of live birth at full term, and some Democrats have endorsed live-birth abortion, i.e. infanticide. This is clearly a political suicide mission, as the overwhelming majority of Americans, Bloomberg presumably included, will not approve the murder of newborn children, as if by an edict of King Herod.

What has happened in other countries, such as the United Kingdom, is a compromise based on presenting non-partisan, free-vote measures outlawing and admitting abortions at every stage of pregnancy, with and without allowance for the

mother's health and whether the pregnancy resulted from coerced sex. There is extensive debate, with no party constraint; all legislators vote their consciences, and what generally emerges (and did in the U.K.), is acceptability of abortion to the fetal age of five months and for exceptional reasons after that, when most babies, if given the necessary care, can survive normally even if born four months prematurely. It is fine for Bloomberg, if this is what he believes, or even if he doesn't particularly believe it but thinks it is good politics, to oppose the right-to-life organizations because most of their members disapprove of abortion in most or all cases. But to say that the president is affronting American women by attending the march is foolish as an assertion and politically maladroit. It implies that the interests of women and children they conceive are necessarily opposed and that abortions should be permissible and officially facilitated in all cases and at every stage of pregnancy. A solid majority of Americans oppose that view, outnumbering those who agree with Bloomberg by more than two to one. But whatever the opinions involved, it is, as Hillary Clinton used to say, "so yesterday" to equate reservations about abortion to hostility to women. This is just mindless 1970s sloganeering.

Bloomberg is not well known for his views on national and foreign-policy issues, and he may have to revise his thinking and refine his arguments if he gets into serious contention for the Democratic presidential nomination. The public outside New York (almost 95 percent of the population, a fact that would astonish and dismay many New Yorkers) would probably best remember him for trying to facilitate construction of a mosque adjacent to the ruins of the World Trade Center, for his intervention in New Yorkers' eating habits by portraying himself as a fitness buff and requiring display of the calories in various fast foods, and even for banning automobiles from Times Square, which caused a serious disruption of traffic flows. The country also noticed his

flip-flop on stop-and-frisk, a successful crime-reduction measure he should not have renounced.

Bloomberg has had a remarkable career, and if nominated, he would come in about even with Trump on prior career accomplishments, and well ahead of any previous presidents except those who were decisive in founding the country (Washington, Jefferson, Madison), or led great armies victoriously in just wars (Grant, Eisenhower), and possibly Herbert Hoover for his relief work in Europe during and after World War I. Bloomberg built from scratch a business in which his interest is now valued at about \$35 billion, and was one of just four three-term mayors in New York since the consolidation of the boroughs in 1895 (with Fiorello La Guardia, Robert Wagner, and Ed Koch). The city was clearly tiring of him by his third term, when he spent \$170 per vote to win a narrow victory over an undistinguished candidate. The mayoralty of New York necessarily requires sharp focus on local issues in an intense political climate, and it doesn't promote a national or global view or national political popularity. Bloomberg generally comes across as a humorless and authoritarian executive – not necessarily disqualifying for a president, but sub-optimal for a candidate.

Bloomberg worked hard to be secretary of state, first with Jeb Bush and then with Hillary Clinton, undergoing the grace of conversion to the Democrats when Jeb's ship sank. In the present race, he is not just a late arrival in the Democratic party but is overtly trying to buy the nomination. He has no followers to start with apart from some in New York and is suffering the problem of all politicians of the last 85 years who have been elected in New York and try to make the jump to Washington. Thomas E. Dewey, a crusading district attorney and governor, was twice an unsuccessful Republican candidate for president; Governors Averill Harriman, Nelson Rockefeller, and George Pataki and Mayor John Lindsay tried for the nomination rather half-heartedly and without success. Hillary famously

tried unsuccessfully too. The last New York politician to come up through the offices of that state and on to national office was Franklin D. Roosevelt. Robert Kennedy might have done it, but he was a special case (and a carpetbagger at that), and Bloomberg is no FDR or RFK. He will, if nominated, have only the ragged army of Trump-haters to lead against the fierce and fervent legions of the president's supporters.

Michael Bloomberg is right that the field of Democratic candidates is unimpressive. Sanders is a declared Marxist and Warren an undeclared Marxist who has real problems with the truth. Joe Biden is very unexciting and bedraggled, as well as increasingly scandal-ridden, and former mayor Buttigieg of South Bend, Ind., is not credible. There are scenarios in which Bloomberg, if he runs well in the Super Tuesday states, especially California and Texas, becomes a hot contender. The party establishment has sandbagged Sanders before and will, if necessary, do it again. If Biden fades, Bloomberg could go down to the wire against Klobuchar, but in that case, he will have to seem a more plausible candidate for the whole country and not just another rich New Yorker tossing off glib reflections on ecology, abortion, and other complicated issues. He has a considerable ego (for good reasons) but will not be a quick or easy sell west of the Hudson. He will not easily catch up with the 25 years the incumbent has spent building his brand throughout the country, nor will the Trump record, liberated at last from the mighty Democratic tainting operation, be an easy target to run against.

First published in