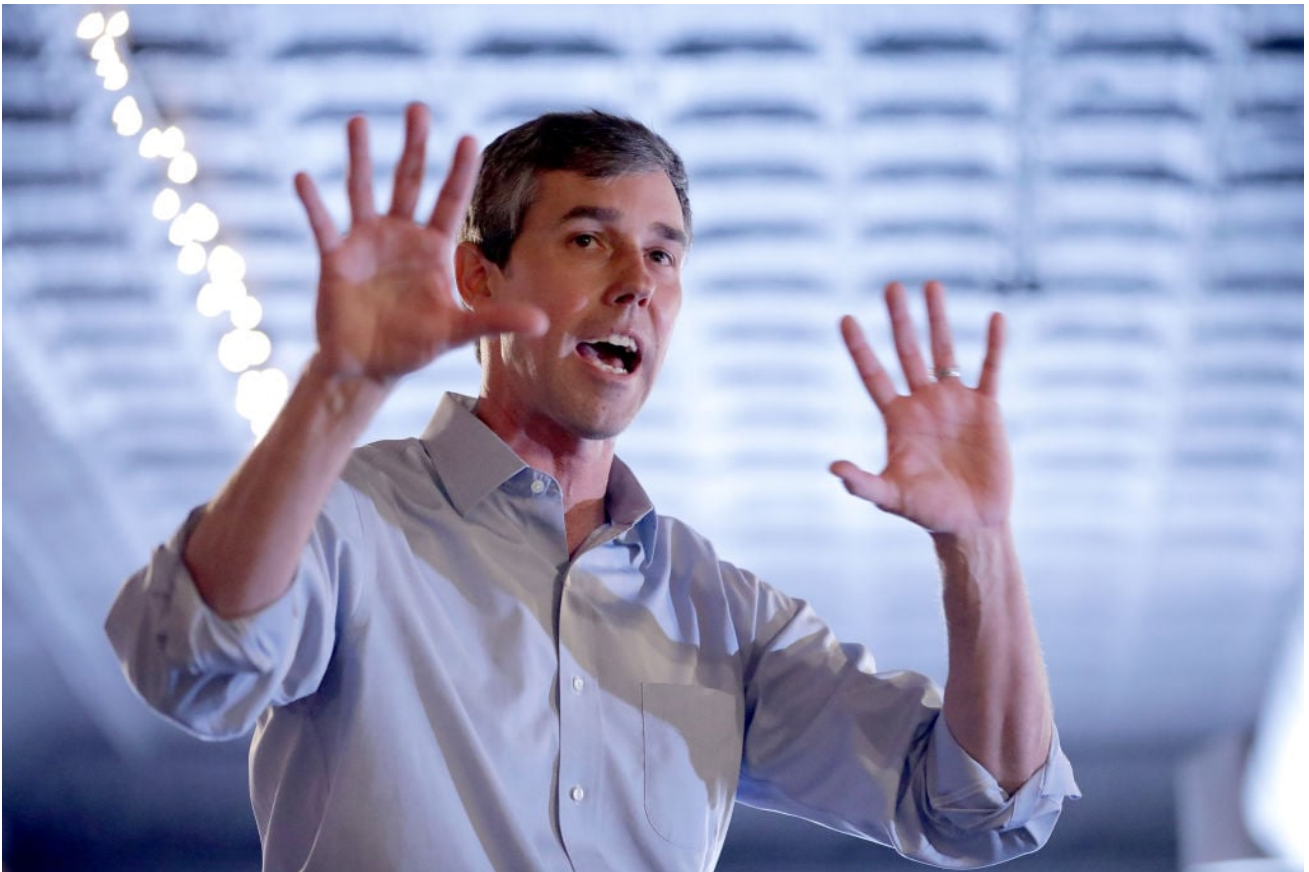


Stick a Fork in O'Rourke

The boutique candidate will quickly get eaten up by the media.

by Conrad Black



If, as I wrote last week, Joe Biden may save the Democratic party from a horrible debacle at the polls next year, Beto O'Rourke may be doing the whole process a good turn now. Biden, despite his efforts to masquerade as the vanguard of what is now called progressivism, is politically sane and, if nominated, might hold his shaggy legions back from holus-bolus embrace of the many suicide potions being offered to the Democratic contestants. To date, the most lethal intoxicants that have been extolled by some of the candidates are legalized infanticide, open borders, reparations to African and other minority Americans, nationalized health care, a fascistic and Luddite green policy, and top personal-tax rates above 70 per cent. So far, this cocktail, which is such an assault on the sanity of an electorate that it could reduce

the Democrats to splinters, has scared off Michael Bloomberg, Sherrod Brown, and Hillary Clinton (though she is probably contemplating her legal future with some well-founded consternation too).

But another candidate-benefactor is also in sight, and so hyperactive and in his way irresistible that it is hard to get him out of your sight. Beto O'Rourke is stoking up one the great bonfires of modern political history; he is a phenomenon of these strange times so unique that no one could have imagined him. Even the Trump-hating media, desperate to find a Democrat who can win, in despair at the collapse of the impeachment bubble, demoralized and hung over from pelagic overconsumption of sour Kool Aid, are taking a break from their sacred mission to destroy Trump. They are not turning their swords into ploughshares, but some sort of quasi-Biblical grace of change is occurring.

All of the Democratic candidates and the entire political process are being taken over and occupied by the invasion of the whole public space by Robert Francis O'Rourke. No one has ever heard or seen anything like this candidate: a hyperactive limb-flailing imbecile, babbling compulsively in a torrent of extremist nonsense barely couched in comprehensible syntax. No idea is too stupid to be endorsed in terms of absolute finality: "If we do not abolish all fossil fuels within twelve years, everything on the planet will be dead. The scientists are 100 percent united on this. Just as Americans of the past had to fight at Normandy, we have to fight this now, and save our planet."

It does not require an immensely sophisticated political scientist to see that there are a few problems with that sequence, as there are with all Beto's sentences, and with his much more numerous and even more idiotic non-sentences. The invasion of Normandy in 1944 has become a metaphor for urgent, brave, and imaginative action—very deservedly, as it was the greatest single military operation in history: moving ten

divisions in the teeth of the German army and air force from England to France in one day, beginning the liberation of Western Europe. It is now being bandied about as an operation to be emulated even in the most mundane circumstances: D-Day was invoked in an advertisement for an automobile dealership that I heard on the radio last week. As an Anglo-Canadian, I hope I will be pardoned for mentioning that a majority of the beaches, and of the personnel who descended on northern France that day, by sea and by air, were British and Canadians, who also provided most of the 7,000 ships, and about half of the nearly 15,000 aircraft, and under General Dwight Eisenhower as supreme commander, all of the individual service chiefs. (The maritime commander, Admiral Bertram Ramsay, had masterminded the miraculous evacuation from Dunkirk four years before, and the defense against invasion threats after that, and brought the men back at D-Day and in succeeding months, in overwhelming strength.)

It is an operation to praise, but when Beto O'Rourke is comparing the Battle of Normandy to saving the earth from carbon use as he waves his arms around in an Iowa high school, the electoral process is becoming worryingly unserious. (Cory Booker, who is no prize for intellectual depth either, was using the same metaphor in a similar Iowa setting, but spared us the frenetic hand signals.) O'Rourke's great and presumably unsought contribution to this campaign is that he is going to attract the fire of all the media, very soon. They are already shifting. The immense, grunting media monsters, snorting fire and pawing the ground and trying in their Jurassic minds to think of how to lay this president low, have picked up the succulent scent of a ludicrous and clangorous political imposture ardently seeking its own destruction. The media of America will not allow this asinine mockery of a presidential campaign to go another week before it picks up this wild, scrawny, noisy, incoherent nincompoop and shreds him. Somehow, he raised \$8.5 million running for the U.S. Senate in Texas, and came close to ousting Ted Cruz. A special psychiatric

counsel should be appointed to find out what peculiar mass mental infirmity afflicted millions of Texans to consider this quack.

Let us be clear: This isn't a matter of policy differences. This man is a boob, a dolt. He is vulgar and ungrammatical, knows nothing, and makes no sense. He can't keep his mouth shut for five seconds and he is wired like an early helicopter with a vertical rotor on its tail: he can't gabble out his nonsense without waving his arms around. He knows everything, meaning nothing, is incapable of making a correct factual statement, and throws in the f-word for emphasis, even where there is nothing to emphasize. Yet he is performing a valuable role: This is the candidate the media have been looking for. They savagely attacked Donald Trump three years ago because they thought he was a rich vulgarian blowhard who couldn't speak in sentences, didn't know anything, couldn't run a two-car funeral, stole his money, and colluded illegally with a foreign power. There was never any truth to any of that, apart from Trump's boorishness at times, which has almost completely ended. But Trump had some weak moments.

Now we have the coruscation, the magic deliverance of the process. Almost everything they said about Trump, except the source of his money and any foreign connection (which was a pack of lies in respect of Trump anyway), applies to Beto. The mighty and malicious meat-grinder of the American national political media, twitching and drooling in anticipation, is turning toward Beto, scarcely believing the noisy and juicy helplessness of this victim. Individual wildebeests don't taunt prides of lions, any more than swimmers cock their noses at nearby crocodiles. This is one for the record books. George Romney didn't quite realize the implications of saying he had been "brainwashed" in Vietnam. (LBJ said he must have gone quietly into a corner and "brainwashed himself.") Gary Hart had a bit of a political death wish and set them a chase in 1984. Howard Dean didn't mean to behave like a raving dunce in

2004; he just couldn't help himself. Senator Fred Thompson didn't really want to run in 2008 and folded with a little dignity.

Beto has asked, screamed and flailed, gesticulated, run long distances, and jumped through hoops for the attention he is about to get. Anyone who launches his campaign in *Vanity Fair*, the most vulgar magazine in the western world, has arrived at the gallows voluntarily ahead of the executioner. In a month, there will be nothing left of him but a few feathers floating in the spring air. And now for the emollient and curative aspect of the Beto moment. The national political media are a savage beast, and they are now an extremely vicious beast because they have been beaten badly by President Trump. They are going to have to cover his implicit exoneration and the intense questioning and in some cases indictments of those who manipulated them. The famished devouring of this delicious self-proffered victim will not sate their antagonisms or slake their blood-lust, but it will be a tasty sorbet, a textbook candidate demolition to show they can still do it when they get the target right. And there is nothing like a good clean public execution to calm everyone down.

With Beto under their belts, they will have the chance to deescalate with dignity, if not honor, as they prepare themselves for the president's likely reelection.

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