

Twenty Months Before the Election Trump Is the Candidate To Beat



by Conrad Black

The latest polls again show President Trump pulling ahead of Governor DeSantis for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination. It now appears that all of the other candidates are effectively running for vice president; it is a strong field.

Mr. Trump's position has undoubtedly been hampered by the failure to present the issue of the fairness of the 2020 election result correctly. It is clear that prior to that election, Mr. Trump should have met with Republican state legislators intensively in the swing states of Arizona,

Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin and urged them to override state Supreme Court or executive changes to voting and vote counting rules.

Mr. Trump saw and frequently publicly denounced the dangers of sending out large numbers of unsolicited ballots and having them collected and cast by people other than those whose votes they ostensibly were. A moron could see that it was a matrix for massive electoral fraud that would be impossible to undo after election day.

These votes could not be verified and if the issue had been presented forcefully, the majority would have seen the nonsense and the hypocrisy of the Democrats' claim that verification was discrimination against African-American voters. The absurdity of this argument was shown in Georgia.

As the then president should have conducted a serious counter-offensive against ballot-harvesting, he should simultaneously have led a maximum Republican ballot-harvesting counter operation to ensure that Republicans were as competitive as possible in this field, where the Democrats' union support gives them an advantage.

As it was, he was a sitting duck. The former president has a legitimate grievance but he also has himself to blame for serious tactical errors that facilitated the Democrats exploitation of exceptional rules, under the cover of promoting voter turn-out in the midst of a pandemic. The Republican difficulties were compounded by the easily-ridiculed efforts of Rudolph Giuliani.

The former New York mayor conducted himself with his customary vigor, but he was objecting to mistreatment of individual voters, which even if entirely proved could not have seriously influenced the election result. If 50,000 votes had flipped to Mr. Trump from Mr. Biden in Pennsylvania and any two of Arizona, Georgia, and Wisconsin, Mr. Trump would have won the

election.

Instead of making the public relations argument on ballot harvesting from the beginning, hammering it constantly and challenging it comprehensively, the entire Republican operation looked like an amateur sour grapes operation, a crybaby scream-in.

This was the media-confected background for the events at the United States Capitol on January 6, 2021. Mr. Trump had a legitimate grievance; he explained his grievance quite comprehensively to the huge crowd that listened to him on the Ellipse, and he urged them to act peacefully.

Almost certainly, the House Speaker, Nancy Pelosi, and Washington's mayor, Muriel Bowser, deliberately declined Mr. Trump's offer of additional security and his warnings because they saw the potential damage that blaming hooliganism on Mr. Trump could do to him after what at that point appeared to be a traditional cliff-hanger of an election.

Because Mr. Trump was late on January 6 urging his followers to leave the Capitol, the Democrats and their media echo chamber, and the returning Republican Never-Trumpers like Senate leader McConnell, were able to stir up an immense and fraudulent charge of attempted insurrection against him.

It is a testament to the imperishability of Donald Trump's political popularity that despite an election in which he was outspent two to one, 95 percent of the national political press opposed him, often in the most acidulous and defamatory fashion, and he was constantly reviled as perfidious and dangerously lawless, all problems amplified by some of his own tactical errors, that he retains his following.

It would be an unwise political observer who discounted his possibility of reelection. There has never in American history been a renegade that has taken over one of the major political parties and been so durable and mounted such a formidable

challenge to the political establishment as has Donald Trump.

William Jennings Bryan led the bimetallic forces of rural discontent to three Democratic presidential nominations but was comfortably defeated by pillars of the then incumbent Republican establishment, William McKinley and William Howard Taft.

Mr. Trump seems to have learned from the episode and is trying to regain the initiative by his promises to conduct a massive voter registration drive and counteroffensive in ballot harvesting. Most of the vulnerable states have amended their voting and vote counting rules and we saw their success in Georgia.

It will never be known exactly how much advantage the Democrats derived from the special Covid arrangements of 2020, but those advantages will not be replicated in 2024. Mr. Trump has been very effective, as have most of the prominent Republicans, in exposing and denouncing the countless policy failures of the Biden administration.

While there is no precedent for dumping an incumbent elected president seeking renomination, nor was there any precedent for suddenly rescuing a failed candidacy of a superannuated also-ran and parachuting him into the nomination because the frontrunner (Senator Sanders) was judged too extreme, and despite another generally well-regarded candidate spending \$937 million to gain five delegates from American Samoa (Michael Bloomberg). There had been no precedent for Mr. Trump either: a man who changed parties seven times in 13 years and had never sought or held any public office, elected or unelected, or held any military command.

The dismissal of many of his worst enemies in the media, (Jeff Zucker, Brian Stelter, Chris Wallace, et al), the cleanup of Twitter, and his own much less undisciplined recourse to hyperbole and inflammatory attacks on other candidates have

all reduced the extreme toxicity of his political personality to millions of otherwise rational American voters.

The greatest danger to his candidacy at this point would be if Mr. Trump went too far catering to the paleoconservative isolationists over Ukraine. As long as he emphasizes increasing arms supplies to Ukraine while jaw-boning with the Russians about a peace that does not completely humiliate Russia and begins the restoration of civilized relations with the West, and doesn't fall into the trap of the Neanderthal isolationists who want to simply cut arms sales to Ukraine like Joe Biden and his fellow Democrats did to South Vietnam 50 years ago, Mr. Trump should not lose on the issue.

It is encouraging that the candidates have so far avoided excessive mudslinging. Mr. Trump wrenched the Republican Party loose from country clubs and the perennial loser status of the post-Reagan Party. He probably has a greater reservoir of support among Republican voters than Governor DeSantis.

The smart move would be to renominate Mr. Trump now on the understanding that Mr. Trump would support Mr. DeSantis in four years, when he will be 50. I don't believe the Democrats will renominate either Mr. Biden or Kamala Harris; they can find some reasonably presentable and relatively new face, but they will not be able to defend the record of this administration. Twenty months before election day, I still say Mr. Trump comes back.

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