

## Ditching Biden could prove disastrous | GUEST COMMENTARY



President Joe Biden speaks during a presidential debate with Republican presidential candidate former President Donald Trump, Thursday, June 27, 2024, in Atlanta. (AP Photo/Gerald Herbert)



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Prognosticating pundits within the Democratic Party have been in a panic since the first presidential debate, mapping out scenarios to determine who is most likely to defeat Donald Trump in order to avoid a disaster in November. If President Joe Biden succumbs to pressure to bow out of the race, however, it may prove a worse debacle for the Democrats than the controversial presidential debate itself.

For one thing, the pressure on the party's leaders will in no way be relieved if Biden leaves the race. To step down would represent an admission of critics' accusations that Biden is unfit for the presidency, putting top Democrats under scrutiny for why they defended the president.

Vice President Kamala Harris could find herself the target of a Republican-led congressional inquisition, facing denunciation for her role in supposedly covering up Biden's alleged health problems. Such a probe would certainly not give a fair hearing to Biden's current and former colleagues who have attested to his sharpness and vigor. Biden's former chief medical adviser Dr. Anthony Fauci just last week said he had "no doubt" Biden is capable of serving another term, adding that the president's debate performance can be explained by his cold, which may have required medication that left him "groggy" and caused his mumbling responses.

Vulnerable Democrats running in down-ballot elections would also face questions about why their party didn't pressure Biden to step down sooner. We'll see many Democrats forced to offer mea culpas while rebuking their own party, all in response to a hysterical reaction to one hiccup in a tough race. Does Biden's poor performance in one presidential debate truly warrant the Democratic Party's self-mutilation, even when there are no substantive facts to prove a diminution in the president's health and cognitive abilities?

What's more, impetuously casting aside one of the country's preeminent leaders of the last century — who was Delaware's longest-serving U.S. Senator and has served in the executive branch for nearly 12 years — will make the United States look like a buffoon on the stage of world politics. Can we afford this as we face an escalating Middle East conflagration and Russia's rabid efforts at territorial expansion? Perhaps myopia and small-mindedness have tragically occluded our understanding of the catastrophic geopolitical implications of a manufactured "Bidengate?"

Against the chorus of voices agitating for Biden's political demise are the "mid-Atlantic men of honor" — the three Democratic U.S. senators who've had the courage to stand by Biden: John Fetterman, Pa.; Ben Cardin, Md.; and Chris Coons, Del. They are supported by a handful of House Democrats, including Reps. Robert Garcia, Calif.; Frederica Wilson, Fla.; Ritchie Torres, N.Y.; and Nanette Barragan, Calif., chair of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus. There would be more support for Biden on the Hill if not for the shrill stories in the press and the alarming threats from donors.

Why have donors, the media, public officials and voters come unglued after seeing the president falter in his first debate against his rival? Perhaps it is because the unfamiliar is so frightening to us. Biden has broken the glass ceiling in becoming not just the oldest sitting president in history but one who is determined to serve another term. If he does, he will prove that age should not be a mandate to retire from what we do best. With age comes a weaker voice and a slower gait, but also wisdom and understanding. Sages throughout history were never young and neither was the ruling class — as it has always been understood that profundity, insight and comprehension were the natural pearls of aging. Can we embrace these gifts without prejudice? Queen Elizabeth II certainly did — she kept to her active schedule of public service right up until her death at age 96.

Biden at 81 is a young octogenarian whose busy schedule of travel, meetings and phone calls with heads of state would outpace anyone even half his age. Perhaps a more measured reaction to the president's debate performance will prevent this controversy from escalating into a "Bidengate," whose untold consequences may prove deleterious for the Democratic Party and the American public.

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