



## Jill Biden was a voice of reason



Vaseline  
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It was Dr. Jill Biden who first revealed to the public the horrific 6-day “debate camp” that immediately preceded last week’s pivotal showdown between President Joe Biden and former President Trump. Grueling preparation, sleep deprivation and a stress-related respiratory infection culminated in Biden’s poor performance, as seen by 51.3 million viewers.

For most Americans, naturally curious about how their president conducts himself in domestic and international gatherings, seeing an octogenarian—albeit healthy and productive—stumble over words, struggle to finish sentences and sometimes juggle two topics in a single sentence without a natural transition was a shock that left them reeling and rudderless. For those who embrace the Democratic platform of ideals, policies and values, the fear that Biden might lose to the Republican challenger was overwhelming.

Amid a flood of demands that Biden drop out of the race, lest he cause a crushing Democratic defeat not only in the presidential election but in subsequent gubernatorial and congressional elections across the country, Jill Biden stood firm. She put on her doctor of education hat—with an admirable track record of raising literacy rates by helping students overcome reading barriers and teaching teachers how to improve their students’ reading and writing skills—and she identified the root of her husband’s failure while answering questions from CNN’s Jake Tapper and Dana Bash.

### Jill Biden was right: ‘Debate Camp’ at Camp David was too much

Jill Biden pointed out that being cooped up in Camp David for nearly a week leading up to the debate, surrounded by staffers intent on cramming the president’s mind with facts, figures and minutiae, was no way to prepare for a debate. In fact, it turned out to do just the opposite. A good night’s sleep would have been wiser, especially given the unusually grueling international travel schedule and wars on two continents that will undoubtedly require the president to take phone calls in the middle of the night.

To the extent that this 24-hour “debate camp”—consisting of endless sessions of fact-memorization, memorization, and tactical advice on how to deal with jabs from the other side—needs to be rethought, it’s not a matter of simply shifting blame. On the contrary, it’s a stark look at the reality of the internal wars we impose on ourselves as we try to navigate this world and fulfill our ambition to create positive change.

Jill Biden is a runner, an athlete who understands the importance of achieving your goals. And a creative thinker in the education field, she launched a program to educate female students about breast health and the importance of early detection and treatment of breast cancer. She also stood by her husband when he pioneered the Violence Against Women’s Act, or VAWA, in the Senate, which allowed countless battered women to flee to safe havens to avoid further domestic violence. And more recently, she stood by him when, as president, he signed key provisions into the VAWA reauthorization that direct courts to seriously consider evidence of domestic violence and child abuse before making custody decisions.

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### Ratings and statistics are not always healthy benchmarks

Our fear is that we’ve descended into an age of clicks, likes, and tags — so much so that we can no longer judge performance, integrity, and dedication. And what that means is that instead of judging a person based on their track record, history, experience, and the like, we’re making impulsive judgments — whether it’s the takeout shop that delivered our food, the dentist who just performed a root canal, or the president who engaged in a heated debate without a good night’s sleep.

We are reminded of how relying on judgments can be misguided in other contexts, too, and with similarly damaging consequences. As researchers who have studied family court, for example, we have seen how quickly judges “judge” mothers who appear before them to plead for custody of their children. We have seen women falter terribly under cross-examination: they stutter, they show confusion, and they often cry. Yet their record of admirable care for their children is often negated by their performance in court. Many judges will even justify a custody award based on the mother’s performance in court rather than her performance as a parent. Not surprisingly, we have seen tragic errors made in such custody decisions, sometimes resulting in the child’s death at the hands of the abusive parent.

Ultimately, we must recognize that “ratings” can be misleading and can lead to bad decisions. Jill Biden has pointed out the conditions of “debate camp” that must be addressed or we will descend into a world of misleading ratings that undermine a strong and impressive presidential record. And the consequences of that could be serious.

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