

Weekly Commentary 30

The presidential debates – Biden is not going to a second term

Did you watch the presidential debate last night?

See for yourself how Joe Biden has lost it.

I don't mean how he is going to lose the election. That too, but that's not until Nov when it will happen. What you will see on full display is a man who has lost all signs of vitality and presidential demeanour. All you can see is a decrepit old man who looks sickly, cannot finish sentences he started and if he were drooling, I would have thought they should call an ambulance. If he had displayed his usual temper, and better control over his facial expressions, he would have been acceptable as a presidential debater. Instead, he displayed all the signs of what every American voter (and all of us worried about who is the man having a finger on the nuclear button) is concerned with. As I watched him, I was convinced that this is a man who at 81 is no longer fit enough to do the job. Not now, and certainly not for another four years. All that viewers saw was a frail old man, rasping away and not making sense of his own sentences. It was pathetic.

The Democrats are now panicking. If he is the candidate against Trump, Biden will lose. And there is no alternative from the party who can step in and change the course of the blue-vs-red contest.

Even Obama has this to say of Biden's car crash debate with Trump

“Bad debate nights happen,” Obama, 62, wrote on X Friday afternoon, breaking his silence hours after the first presidential debate of 2024. The former president admitted that his 81-year-old friend did not put on a performance to persuade voters he should be commander-in-chief.

The press was scathing in how they described Biden's performance. Here is a report from Politico:

Dems freak out over Biden's debate performance: 'Biden is toast'

One prominent operative texted, “Time for an open convention.”

President Joe Biden's performance was widely panned online and will likely reinforce the impression that he's lost a step.

By [LISA KASHINSKY](#), [ADAM CANCRYN](#) and [EUGENE DANIELS](#)

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All Joe Biden needed to do was deliver a repeat performance of his State of the Union address (when he displayed his characteristic impatience and anger, spewing fire and brimstone).

Instead, he stammered. He stumbled. And, with fewer than five months to November, he played straight into Democrats' worst fears — that he's fumbling away this election to Donald Trump.

The alarm bells for Democrats started ringing the second Biden started speaking in a haltingly hoarse voice. Minutes into the debate, he struggled to mount an effective defense of the economy on his watch and flubbed the description of key health initiatives he's made central to his reelection bid, saying "we finally beat Medicare" and incorrectly stating how much his administration lowered the price of insulin. He talked himself into a corner on Afghanistan, bringing up his administration's botched withdrawal unprompted. He repeatedly mixed up "billion" and "million," and found himself stuck for long stretches of the 90-minute debate playing defense.

And when he wasn't speaking, he stood frozen behind his podium, mouth agape, his eyes wide and unblinking for long stretches of time.

"Biden is toast — calling it now," said Jay Surdukowski, an attorney and Democratic activist from New Hampshire who co-chaired former Maryland Gov. Martin O'Malley's 2016 presidential campaign in the state.

In text messages with POLITICO, Democrats expressed confusion and concern as they watched the first minutes of the event. One former Biden White House and campaign aide called it "terrible," adding that they have had to ask themselves over and over: "What did he just say? This is crazy."

"Not good," Rep. Jared Huffman (D-Calif.) wrote.

POLITICO spoke to about a dozen Democrats, some of whom were granted anonymity to discuss Biden's performance.

Biden's team was quick to defend the president's performance. First they said he had a cold (and that he was negative for Covid-19). Then they insisted Trump was hurting himself by insulting Biden's presidential record.

Biden did grow stronger throughout the night, at one point seizing on Trump's reported dismissal of fallen soldiers as "suckers and losers" to skewer the former president as the real "sucker" and "loser." At others, he hammered Trump's criminal conviction in New York.

"The only person on this stage who's a convicted felon is the man I'm looking at right now," Biden said.

But first impressions matter — particularly to voters just tuning into the election and who were more likely to watch the first debate than the second that's scheduled for September. And instead of setting the tone of the next phase of the presidential campaign, Biden's shaky performance reignited fears among Democrats that the

octogenarian whose mental acuity and physical fitness have stood as voters' chief concerns about returning him to the White House might not even be able to carry the party through to November.

"Time for an open convention," one prominent operative texted.

Biden's team had tried to engineer the debate in his favor — pushing for it to be early and without an audience. And the president agreed to hold the event in part to calm Democratic nerves over whether he could win in November.

Afterward they didn't try to cover up his poor performance, but instead tried to emphasize that Trump remained a threat to American interests at home and abroad.

"It was a slow start, that's obvious to everyone. I'm not going to debate that point," Vice President Kamala Harris told CNN's Anderson Cooper an hour after the debate wrapped. "I'm talking about the choice in November. I'm talking about one of the most important elections in our collective lifetime. And do we want to look at what November will bring and go on a course for America that is about a destruction of democracy?"

While some Democrats were quick to brush aside Biden's blunders — Rep. Haley Stevens (D-Mich.) said Biden "isn't a TV showman, he's a workhorse" — the trajectory of the race appears dramatically changed.

"My job right now is to be really honest. Joe Biden had one thing he had to do tonight. And he didn't do it," former Sen. Claire McCaskill (D-Mo.) told MSNBC. "He had one thing he had to accomplish. And that was reassure America that he was up to the job at his age. And he failed at that tonight."

Already, some Democrats were openly saying that Biden should end his campaign. One major Democratic donor and Biden supporter said simply: **"Biden needs to drop out. No question about it."**

Biden struggled at times to articulate strong arguments on some of his campaign's biggest selling points, bungling his health care record and stumbling through a response on his support for abortion rights.

"I support *Roe v. Wade*. You have three trimesters. First time is between a woman and a doctor. Second time is between a doctor and an extreme situation. Third time is between the doctor — I mean, between the woman and the state," he said.

Trump tripped, too. He called former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's daughter, a documentary filmmaker, a "fil-i-maker." He accused Democrats of wanting to "take the life" of a child "after birth." He inflated the country's economic strength under his presidency.

He reiterated his defense of the Jan. 6 insurrectionists, launching into a lengthy diatribe against the convictions of hundreds of Trump supporters who stormed the Capitol in an effort to overturn the 2020 election. And asked repeatedly if he would accept the results of the election no matter the winner, Trump refused to give a

straight answer — eventually specifying that he'd only do so “if the election is fair and free.”

But Trump largely did what Republicans had begged him to do: show a modicum of restraint while also laying bare Biden's weaknesses. The former president, who delights in calling Biden “sleepy” and “crooked” at every turn, waited a full 20 minutes to draw attention to the Democrat's initially shaky performance.

“I really don't know what he said at the end of that sentence,” **(it's true, neither did I)** Trump said, after Biden stuttered through an answer to a question about immigration. “I don't think he knows what he said, either.”

And in a relatively staid debate, **it was Biden who fell short of even the lowest of expectations.**

“Biden seems to have needed a few minutes to warm up,” said one veteran Democratic operative. “Poor guy needs a tea. Maybe a whiskey.” Another suggested that Biden get a throat lozenge.

Both Biden and Trump, who is just three years younger than the incumbent, faced questions toward the end of the debate about their fitness for another four years of the presidency.

Biden, with a cough, urged voters to judge his competence based on his record, attacking Trump as “three years younger and a lot less competent.”

“Look at the record. Look at what I've done,” he said, reprising a line he's often deployed on the campaign trail.

Trump then offered his own meandering case for his aptitude, claiming to have “aced” a pair of cognitive tests and pointing to golf tournament championships he's won at his own golf course as evidence of his physical stamina.

The exchange quickly devolved into a game of one-upmanship — “I'm happy to play golf if you carry your own bag,” Biden shot back at one point. But by that point, many viewers' opinions were likely long cemented.

Fergus Cullen, a former New Hampshire GOP chair and “Never Trumper” who is considering voting for Biden, had warned that Democrats would need to reconsider their ticket if the president delivered a poor performance on Thursday.

After the debate, Cullen said: “Anyone who has watched a parent grow old, frail, and foggy recognizes what they are seeing and knows it only gets worse, at an accelerating rate, from here.”

Nicholas Wu and Josh Siegel contributed to this report.

There was no headline, anywhere, that spoke of Biden being in a position to go on to a second term. Here is a whole bunch of headlines which I invite readers of this

commentary to google and then read:

Who won the debate? Biden's incoherent performance worsens age fears - BBC News

Debate takeaways: Trump confident, even when wrong, Biden halting, even with facts on his side | AP News

Democrats scramble after Biden's wobbly debate against Trump | Reuters

Biden debate performance alarms U.S. allies worried by Trump win – NBC News

The World Saw Biden Deteriorating. Democrats Ignored the Warnings. - The Wall Street Journal.

The White House Brushed Off Questions About Biden's Age. Then the Debate Happened : The NYTimes.

82% don't think Biden should run for president: NYPost

Joe Biden vows to stay in fight with Trump as pressure to quit mounts – The Economist

In other words, it was unanimous across the media landscape that the debate was an unmitigated disaster for Biden. But as it was CNN who organized the debate last night and two of their anchors moderated the debate, it would be interesting to see what they have to say, beyond the headlines:

Analysis: Biden's disastrous debate pitches his reelection bid into crisis | CNN Politics

Biden's disastrous debate pitches his reelection bid into crisis

by [Stephen Collinson](#), CNN

Updated 4:00 PM EDT, Fri June 28, 2024

If Joe Biden loses November's election, **history will record that it took just 10 minutes to destroy a presidency.**

It was clear a political disaster was about to unfold as soon as the 81-year-old commander in chief stiffly shuffled on stage in Atlanta to stand eight feet from ex-President Donald Trump at what may turn into the most fateful presidential debate in history.

Objectively, Biden produced the weakest performance since John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon started the tradition of televised debates in 1960 — then, as on Thursday, in a television studio with no audience.

Minutes into the showdown, hosted by CNN, a full-blown Democratic panic was underway at the idea of heading into the election with such a diminished figure at the top of the ticket.

Biden's chief debate coach, Ron Klain, famously argues that “while you can lose a debate at any time, you can only win it in the first 30 minutes.” By that standard, the president's showing was devastating. The tone of the evening was set well before the half hour.

It is too early to say how voters will respond and whether the president can rescue himself. But Biden barely beat Trump in key battleground states in the middle of a pandemic in 2020. His approval rating was below 40% before the debate, when he was at best neck-and-neck with his rival in the polls. It would only take a few thousand voters to desert him to put Trump back in the White House.

There has been no public sign that Biden is unable to fulfill the duties of the presidency, which include tough decisions on national security. He has just returned from two grueling foreign trips, for instance. But on Thursday's evidence, his ability to communicate with the country — and even to sell his own vision for a second term — is severely compromised.

If the debate was the president's best chance to turn around a tight race with Trump, which has him in deep peril of losing reelection, it was a failure. Biden ended the night with the Democratic Party in crisis with serious conversations taking place behind the scenes among senior figures over whether his candidacy is now sustainable, two months before the Democratic National Convention.

The president aimed for an immediate rebound at a post-debate rally in North Carolina Friday, appearing rested, defiant and animated in what was a clear attempt to a quiet a storm of questions about whether he should shelve his reelection race.

“I know I'm not a young man, to state the obvious,” Biden told a crowd that chanted “four more years, four more years.” The president added, “I don't walk as easy as I used to. I don't speak as smoothly as I used to. I don't debate as well as I used to.” Biden went on, raising his voice, “But I know what I do know. I know how to tell the truth. I know right from wrong. And I know how to do this job.”

“I know what millions of Americans know: When you get knocked down, you get back up.”

Biden's much improved performance in a scripted stump speech before a friendly audience however only further exposed his failures on Thursday night when he had his best chance to counter Trump before tens of millions of television viewers.

Trump's task on Thursday was to avoid playing into Biden's claims that he's "unhinged" and is therefore unfit to return to the Oval Office. He largely did so as he got out of the way while the president was damaging his own campaign. The presumptive Republican nominee's unaccustomed restraint, however, did wear thin later in the debate.

But in one devastating moment, after yet another Biden waffle, he said: "I really don't know what he said at the end of that sentence. I don't think he knows what he said, either." (Touche!)

The ex-president didn't avoid his own disqualifying issues. He was uncouth and divisive. He spouted outrageous falsehoods about his own presidency, his attempt to steal the last election, and sometimes lapsed into gibberish himself, especially when asked about climate change. He blatantly lied about his role in the mob attack by his supporters on the US Capitol on January 6, 2021.

The twice-impeached convicted felon repeatedly declined to say that he would accept the result of the 2024 election if he lost and made sweeping, vague and often illogical claims that US enemies overseas would bend to his will just because of his personality. The former president also struggled to parry Biden's arguments that he'd slash taxes for rich Americans and leave workers struggling, and he was wobbly on policy, just as he was in the White House.

By the time the aged rivals slipped into a bitter debate about who was the best golfer, it was not hard to understand why voters have long told pollsters that they want no part of the choice they have been offered this year.

Why Biden's showing could be so consequential

But Biden has rooted his reelection in the idea that he is the last thing standing between America and a second Trump presidency that would destroy democracy and usher in an unprecedented era of American autocracy. Voters who take him at his word could not help but be alarmed at his abject debate showing.

Biden's voice was weak, at times reduced to a whisper. Early on, the president's answers drifted into incoherence. He missed openings to jab Trump on abortion — the top Democratic talking point — and meandered into highlighting his own biggest political liability, immigration. "We finally beat Medicare," Biden said at one point, lapsing into confused silence. It was the kind of debate gaffe that Democrats had hoped to avoid. Worse, while Trump spoke, Biden often watched, his mouth gaping open, exacerbating an impression of a president cruelly diminished. His bravura battering of Trump in a debate four years ago was a distant memory.

To see a president struggle before millions of people watching on television all around the world was tough to see. As a matter of humanity, the personification of the ravages of age that await everyone was painful. Biden's campaign revealed during the debate that he had been suffering from a cold. But by that time, the damage had already been done.

Biden had entered the debate facing a somber test — to prove to the majority of Americans who believe he is too old to serve that he is vital, energetic and up to fulfilling his duties in a second term that would end when he is 86. Instead, the president ended up validating those fears and potentially convincing many more voters that his faculties have decayed. The

stumbling performance raised questions about the strategic choice Biden's campaign made in pushing for a debate with Trump. It also completely undercut attempts by the White House and the campaign to talk up Biden's heartiness behind the scenes. Memories of the president's barnstorming State of the Union address in March, when he put many fears about his age to rest, have now been obliterated.

'Painful'

Often, presidential debates are remembered for visual moments that become embedded in the collective public consciousness in subsequent days. Troublingly for Biden, a viewer only paying attention to visual clues would surely have formed the impression that Trump was the more robust personality. And the history of presidential elections suggests that the candidate who seems strong often beats the one who is weak.

"It's painful. I love Joe Biden," said Van Jones, a CNN political commentator. "He's a good man, he loves his country, he's doing the best that he can. But he had a chance ... tonight to restore confidence of the country and of the base and he failed to do that. And I think there are a lot of people who are going to want to see him take a different course now."

Vice President Kamala Harris led attempts to turn the focus away from the optics of Biden's performance to the threat posed by his Republican opponent.

"Yes, there was a slow start, but it was a strong finish," Harris told CNN's Anderson Cooper following the debate. "And what became very clear through the course of the night is that Joe Biden is fighting on behalf of the American people. On substance, on policy, on performance, Joe Biden is extraordinarily strong."

"People can debate on style points. But ultimately, this election and who is the president of the United States has to be about substance. And the contrast is clear. Look at what happened during the course of the debate. Donald Trump lied over and over and over again as he is wont to do," she said.

Biden's best moments came too late

Harris is correct in her assessment of Trump's cascade of untruths. And as the debate wore on, the president did seem to get a little stronger. He was especially animated when he spoke about Trump's threat to democracy. He was scathing about the ex-president's failure to admit defeat four years ago. "You can't stand the loss," Biden said. "Something snapped in you when you lost the last time." And in an extraordinary moment in a debate before millions of television viewers, Biden highlighted Trump's conviction in his hush money trial in New York.

"How many billions of dollars do you owe in civil penalties for molesting a woman in public? For doing a whole range of things? Of having sex with a porn star on the night – while your wife was pregnant?" Biden asked Trump. "You have the morals of an alley cat."

The former president was found guilty last month of 34 counts of falsifying business records in his criminal hush money trial. Last year, a jury found him liable for sexual abuse in a civil defamation suit. And Trump, his adult sons and the Trump Organization lost a huge civil fraud trial, also in New York.

But the problem for Biden was that his best moments of the night came deep into the 90-minute showdown, by which time most viewers would have formed strong impressions.

And at times, he appeared unable to defend his record or effectively expose Trump's torrent of falsehoods and distortions of his own first-term legacy. The president only briefly flashed his beaming smile, which he had effectively used to debunk Trump's absurd arguments in their debate four years ago and when he rhetorically dismembered Republican vice presidential nominee Paul Ryan during the 2012 vice presidential debate.

If the cacophony of behind-the-scenes venting by Democrats coalesces into more serious questions about Biden's capacity, the crisis around him will deepen. But it is hard to see any easy way — apart from a decision by the president not to accept the party nomination — that there could be any change to the Democratic ticket.

And any decision to try and replace a president who has successfully run the table in Democratic nominating contests would be unprecedented in the modern age and might end up dividing the party — a step that in itself could help Trump become only the second president to win a non-consecutive second term.

There has been little effort by the Biden White House to promote Harris as the president's heir — and she has significant political problems of her own. And no Democrat with future presidential possibilities — for instance, California Gov. Gavin Newsom or Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer — took the risk of challenging an incumbent who once presented himself as a bridge to the future of the party.

Biden is not the first president to have a bad debate — although his ordeal on Thursday far surpasses the misfires by Barack Obama and Ronald Reagan. Both those presidents bounced back the next time they got the chance on the debate stage and went on to win a second term. But while a second debate with Trump is scheduled for September, it is hard to find a tactical rationale for the ex-president to offer his rival a do-over.

One Democratic operative summed up the president's debate for CNN's Kasie Hunt with a word that now threatens to encapsulate his entire reelection bid unless Biden can turn the story around.

“Horrific,” the person said.

The British papers also weighed in, with one article in the FT and another in the Economist urging Biden to give up

Joe Biden vows to stay in fight with Trump as pressure to quit mounts

US president's team says he will take part in September debate despite disastrous Thursday performance Joe Biden vows to stay in fight with Trump as pressure to quit mounts

Lauren Fedor in Atlanta, Demetri Sevastopulo in Washington and James Fontanella-Khan in New York4 HOURS AGO

The US president told supporters at a campaign rally in Raleigh, North Carolina, that he was there for “one reason, because I intend to win this state in November”. The crowd responded with a chant for “four more years”. In comments that sought to address his poor performance in Thursday’s debate, Biden said: “I know I’m not a young man, to state the obvious. I don’t walk as easy as I used to . . . I don’t debate as well as I used to.” He added: “But I know what I do know, I know how to tell the truth . . . I know how to do this job . . . When you get knocked down you get back up.”

The president’s comments came as Democrats reported widening panic in the party on Friday after a “disastrous” debate performance, with supporters concluding Biden would struggle to beat Trump at the ballot box in November.

“The only way it could have been more disastrous was if he had fallen off the stage. Big donors are saying . . . he has to go,” one Democratic operative said. “If Biden stays in, we will have to watch him on a trapeze wire until November.”

Top Democratic lawmakers, donors and party insiders were rattled on Thursday night after the president frequently stumbled over his words in the debate, gave rambling answers and in some instances appeared to lose his train of thought.

The debate, which CNN said was watched by 48mn television viewers and streamed by another 30mn, was considered a crucial opportunity for Biden to turn around his faltering re-election campaign, which has been weighed down by concerns about his age and the cost of living.

He trails Trump in most national and swing state opinion polls. Joe Biden and his wife, Jill Biden. **‘Ultimately it will be Jill who makes the decision’ whether he stays in race, said a Democratic donor**

Before Thursday’s debate, predictive polling models saw a close race, with FiveThirtyEight calling it a coin flip. **But political betting markets moved dramatically against Biden during and after the debate — and a Real Clear Politics average of betting odds on Friday showed Biden with just a 19 per cent chance of winning the presidency.**

On Friday night, a Morning Consult poll conducted after the debate showed that while Biden had not lost ground to Trump, three in five voters surveyed, including a plurality of Democrats, thought he should be replaced as the party’s candidate for president.

The Democratic operative said the easiest path forward for the party would be if Biden’s wife, Jill, or other longtime political advisers in his inner circle convinced him to drop out.

Other Democrats have quietly called for former President Barack Obama or former President Bill Clinton and Hillary Clinton, the former Democratic presidential nominee, to persuade Biden to step aside. But Obama squashed suggestions Biden should step aside on Friday in a statement posted to social media.

“Bad debate nights happen. Trust me, I know. But this election is still a choice between someone who has fought for ordinary folks his entire life and someone who only cares about himself,” Obama said. “Last night didn’t change that.”

Yet behind closed doors, many more remained sceptical. “There’s lots of gallows humour among Democratic members this morning. The talk about whether Biden continues is fully out in the open,” a Democratic congressman told the Financial Times on Friday morning.

“We need a new nominee,” said another Democratic lawmaker. A top New York financier said that a small number of influential donors had reached out to Ron Klain and Mike Donilon, two of Biden’s closest longtime advisers, urging the president to do “the right thing for the party and country”.

“Ultimately it will be Jill [Biden] who makes the decision,” said another top financier. “She’s the voice of reason and I can’t imagine she will want to go through four months of this . . . Joe will listen to her.”

The Biden team sought to project confidence on Friday, saying the president had raised \$14mn on Thursday and Friday morning. It said that the hour after the debate was the single best of grassroots, or small-dollar, fundraising since Biden launched his re-election bid.

After his rally in North Carolina on Friday, the president was set to attend several closed-door meetings with deep-pocketed donors, including a campaign event on Friday night in Manhattan and two on Saturday in the Hamptons and New Jersey. Trump is set to hold his own rally on Friday afternoon in Virginia, a state he lost to Biden by 10 points in 2020 but where the latest opinion polls show the two men in a statistical tie.

**Joe Biden should now give way to an alternative candidate
His last and greatest political act would help rescue America from an
emergency The Economist**

Jun 28th 2024

In November 2022 *The Economist* said that, after a lifetime of public service, Joe Biden should not seek re-election as president. In January this year we put our concerns on the cover. But even those worried about his age were not prepared for Thursday’s debate against Donald Trump. Over 90 agonising minutes, Mr Biden was befuddled and incoherent—too infirm, frankly, to cope with another four years in the world’s hardest job.

Mr Biden says he is standing again to help ordinary Americans and to save democracy from Mr Trump’s vengeful demagoguery. And the former president’s scowling, evasive and truth-defying appearance on the debate stage did nothing to diminish the urgency of those two aims. Yet **if Mr Biden really cares about his mission, then his last and greatest public service should be to stand aside for another Democratic nominee.**

There are a lot of arguments for resisting such a drastic step, but the main one is that the election is barely four months away. That may be enough time for Mr Biden to recover in the polls. But with the Democratic convention in August, it would be too brief for the party to find another candidate who could campaign and win. Replacing him could divide Democrats at a time when they need to stay united. Those assertions may have been convincing once. Not any more.

Mr Biden's chances of winning in November have taken a savage knock. His team sought to debate Mr Trump because their man was trailing. Our forecast model has consistently given him a chance of victory of roughly one in three—worrying, but not hopeless. His staff had been limiting his exposure to interviews, even as they insisted that in private he remains sharp, vigorous and in total control.

To the shame of the White House and congressional Democrats, that assertion has now been exposed as a falsehood. The Republicans have long said that Mr Biden's powers are fading. The debate was his great chance to prove them wrong. Alas, in front of many millions of people, he did not just fail to rebut his opponents, he presented irrefutable evidence to back them up.

Mr Biden will struggle to undo the damage. If, as is likely, Mr Trump declines to take part in a second debate in September—what has he got to lose?—the sitting president may never again have such a good opportunity to change voters' minds. Nobody can speak on his behalf. Only a blitz of interviews and rallies could begin to blunt the distressing impression he created. You have only to say it to know that it will not happen.

Furthermore, even if Mr Biden were somehow to win in November, there are doubts that he could govern as he should over a full four-year term. Certainly, he now looks as if he will be less able to fulfil his self-appointed duty as democracy's champion. He will struggle to master the many issues that will confront the next occupant of the Oval Office, whoever it is. He will have staff, obviously, but as a bewildered figurehead led by his unelected minions, he will erode Americans' faith in their system of government, not restore it.

For many voters (albeit fewer than before the debate), Mr Biden may still be preferable to the alternative. Two men on that stage were unfit to be president, but only one of them was morally unfit. Given the threat Mr Trump poses to decency and democracy, it is reckless to entrust a man as frail as Mr Biden with the task of keeping him out of the Oval Office. Is there time for Mr Biden to give way to a better candidate?

That depends on the man himself. **Because he has already won the Democratic primary, only he can choose to stand aside.** Perhaps he can be persuaded by his wife, Jill, that doing so would best cement his legacy. Party grandees, including Barack Obama and Bill Clinton, should beseech her to do so. They have every reason to. The danger—the likelihood even—is not just of Mr Trump retaking the White House but of unified maga control of the White House and Congress, with a sympathetic Supreme Court. **In the face of his very public failure, Mr Biden's bullheaded refusal to step aside for the good of his party and his country would undermine the claim that his candidacy is an act of selfless, high-minded sacrifice.**

Should Mr Biden make way, mechanisms exist for the party to change candidates. Best would be for Mr Biden to stand aside right away and give the party time to arrange a hasty talent contest before the convention. Such a contest could be messy, so the party would need to show discipline. The delegates Mr Biden won in the primary would become unpledged and could vote for their preferred candidate in Chicago, making the outcome unpredictable. This could be divisive, but the threat posed by Mr Trump ought to concentrate the minds of elected officials and party grandees.

The party also has talent. The obvious choice to replace Mr Biden is his vice-president, Kamala Harris. Unfortunately, she does not inspire confidence and voters sense it. There are better options, including cabinet members such as Pete Buttigieg and Gina Raimondo and swing-state and red-state governors such as Josh Shapiro in Pennsylvania and Gretchen Whitmer in Michigan, and Andy Beshear in Kentucky. Blue-state governors, including Gavin Newsom of California and Jared Polis in Colorado, may fancy their chances. Raphael Warnock, a senator from Georgia, also deserves a look. If Mr Biden can summon the grace to invite this contest within his party, such candidates would at last be free to put themselves forward not as an act of treachery, but of patriotism.

Whoever wins would be able to make a strong pitch against Mr Trump. The new candidate would have just over ten weeks after the convention to do so. They would be helped by having all the attention of America's media upon them. And (if the party went for someone other than Ms Harris) they would take Mr Trump's best issues away from him. A new candidate would not have to make excuses for high inflation, or the porous southern border, or why Mr Biden's Justice Department has put his opponent on trial. Whom would Mr Trump rather face: Mr Biden or someone 30 years younger than him, with a clean record, who can look to the future?

Thursday's debate was designed to answer the question of whether Mr Biden was fit to be president—and in this it succeeded. It has brought clarity to a race that currently offers Americans a choice between two candidates they do not want. Mr Biden and his party have been given the chance to avoid a dire fate for their country and the world. They should seize it.

Those of you who are following this commentary will remember that I have always had the opinion that Biden is long past his prime for the job. Now he wants to do it for another four years. Are you kidding?? It is so obvious from the debate that he has disqualified himself. Now it is time for the Democratic Party to weigh in and pull the plug on the Biden reelection gig.

Joe Biden's disastrous debate showing immediately triggered new questions from worried Democrats about whether he would leave the presidential race.

This is not going to be easy since Biden is already the Democrats' presumptive nominee and the overwhelming choice of primary voters. In other words, it won't be easy to get rid of him even if he should be confined to an old folks' home. He had faced little opposition during the primaries, and the fact that he won nearly all of the party's delegates means it's well nigh impossible that he'd be forced out of the race against his will. Maybe Nikki Haley thought this day was coming. But she lost the support of the donors. The only possibility is that Biden calls it a day himself.

The current primary system, which empowers primary voters over party brass, essentially sprang from discontent after Democrats selected Vice President Hubert Humphrey as their nominee in 1968. Nowadays, that cannot happen. Even after President Lyndon Johnson bowed out of the presidential race that year, recognizing his fading popularity and opposition to the war in Vietnam, Humphrey represented a continuation of Johnson's Vietnam policy at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago. There was rioting when protesters locked horns with police when Humphrey accepted the nomination.

In 2024 things would evolve differently if Biden were to quit the race. If he drops out of the campaign after most primaries or even during the convention, individual delegates would need to select the party's nominee on the convention floor or via a virtual roll call. In the Democratic Party, there are more than 3,900 delegates – almost all of them currently pledged to Biden – allocated as part of the primary process.

These delegates are approved by his campaign and all have pledged to vote for him. It would take massive defections from the president's own supporters to enable change. It would largely be Biden backers who would be responsible for picking the replacement.

It is pertinent to ask, who can replace Biden?

Vice President Kamala Harris? Would she be a top contender in such a scenario? But it is unlikely to be her as she is not liked. There would be other potential candidates who previously argued they could run a more effective campaign against former President Donald Trump.

Nikki Haley? Or California Gov. Gavin Newsom who can challenge Harris at the convention? This infighting would be divisive and ugly.

There are also the party elders: known as the "superdelegates." This is a group of about 700 senior party leaders and elected officials who are automatically delegates to the convention based on their position. Normally, they can't vote on the first ballot if they could swing the nomination, but they're free to vote on subsequent ballots.

What if a candidate left the race after the convention? Or drops dead?

Would the running mate automatically become the nominee?

An in-depth Congressional Research Service memo also notes that if an incumbent president becomes incapacitated after winning the party's nomination, party rules would determine who rises to become the party's nominee.

Neither party requires that the presidential candidate's running mate be elevated to the top of the ticket, though that would obviously be the most likely scenario.

Has a candidate ever left the race after the convention?

In 1972, the Democrat running for vice president, Sen. Thomas Eagleton, was forced to step aside after the convention after it was discovered that he was treated for mental illness. (Nowadays, who cares?)

What if, after the election, a president-elect becomes incapacitated or dies?
The answer depends on the timing.

Under the 20th Amendment, if a president-elect dies, his or her running mate, the vice president-elect, becomes president.

There could be some question, for instance, about when exactly a person becomes president-elect. Is it after the electors meet in December, or after Congress meets to count Electoral College votes on January 6?

In short, the current situation brings us into uncharted waters. It is so obvious that Biden won't last until Nov not to say until 2028, that it is beyond debate.

Why should there be this anguish over a man who should enjoy his retirement is just perplexing.

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