



Carl Golden, 7/8/2019 [Archive]

Democrats Risk Irrelevancy in Sprint to the Left

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By Carl Golden

As the roughly two dozen Democrats seeking their party's nomination for president continue to gleefully sink their teeth into one another, the portrait that has emerged is of a band of self-serving pols who've shed self-respect in favor of pandering to a vocal segment of the party base that has abandoned the country's mainstream.

The campaigns have become a panicky, headlong flight to the left embracing ideas that as recently as four years ago would have been dismissed as loony and a guarantee of electoral disaster.

Should this trend continue, consider the following possible outcomes:

- A party with no coherent message aside from "We despise Donald Trump."
- A nominee so bruised and battered by his or her own party that regaining credibility is problematic.
- A party so far to the left that it risks becoming an out of touch fringe group.
- A party in support of ideas which are anathema to most Americans and stand no chance of Congressional approval.
- A party in favor of spending trillions of dollars with no way to pay for it.

And lastly, but most devastating of all, the re-election of Donald Trump.

You know what's not a winning message? Making the case to the American people that entering the country illegally should be decriminalized (essentially, an open borders policy), pledging to provide free health coverage to undocumented immigrants and calling to abolish the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency (ICE).

Then there is the added burden of justifying forgiving \$1.4 trillion in student loan debt, eliminating private health insurance for 180 million Americans and requiring all public colleges to be free.

The party's lurch to the left began in earnest in 2016 with the surprising show of strength by Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, but the movement has picked up such strength that it has bypassed him and appears irreversible.

Four years ago, Sanders was an outlier. Today, he's in the party's mainstream and has been supplanted as leader of the rebellion by younger, more militant personalities.

The ideological dilemma is attributable in considerable measure to the unwieldy field of candidates each trying to one-up the others by suggesting that opposition to far left demands is a betrayal of party principles.

The rules governing the next round of candidates' debates will be more stringent, and failure to make the cut undermines viability in terms of support and financing. Leaving the race is not a requirement for them, but soldiering on after failing to meet their own party's conditions is pointless. Contributions will dry up and supporters will look elsewhere.

The second and third tier candidates are easily identified, even those with some prominence; e.g., Sens. Cory Booker of New Jersey, Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota and Kristen Gillibrand of New York, and former Rep. Beto O'Rourke of Texas.

All enjoy bases of support but have failed to poll above three points. All will likely succumb to frostbite in the corn fields of Iowa in February, if not sooner. The others who trail them are irrelevant, and common sense and sober judgment suggests abandoning their quests while their reputations are still more or less intact.

Whether the party can arrest the leftward sprint and settle on a nominee who can appeal to the moderate centrists in the party and the country is open to debate.

Of the top tier, only former Vice President Joe Biden holds the credentials and history of broad-based acceptance, the very qualities under siege from his closest competitors - Sens. Kamala Harris of California, Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts, and Sanders, along with South Bend, Ind., Mayor Pete Buttigieg.

The validity of the conventional wisdom that, for Democrats, success relies on running to the left in the primary and returning to the center in November will be sorely tested next year against an incumbent president who defies ideological description and marches to the beat of his own unique and unpredictable drummer.

Democrats are in striking distance of the White House and holding their majority in the House of Representatives, along with an outside shot at turning the Senate. Their leading candidates all poll very well in head to head matchups with Trump.

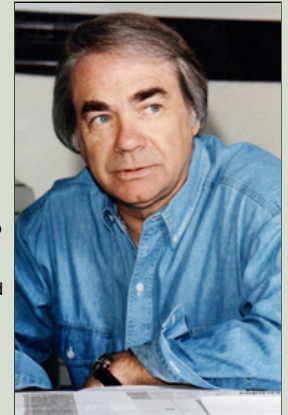
If, however, the move to the left has placed the center beyond reach, the party risks irrelevancy, fighting among themselves to claim leadership of a shrinking base disconnected from the national interest.

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