

The Washington Post

Democracy Dies in Darkness

Opinion For the good of the country, Biden and Harris should bow out of the 2024 election

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November 2, 2022 at 8:00 a.m. EDT

During this autumn's avalanche of political news, an enormous boulder bounced by, barely noticed. It demonstrated why Joe Biden should not seek another term. Democrats should promptly face that fact, and this one: An Everest of evidence shows that Vice President Harris is starkly unqualified to be considered as his successor.

The boulder: Meeting recently with some progressive activists, Biden said his \$426 billion student loan forgiveness was accomplished by "a law" that he had "just signed": "I got it passed by a vote or two." No. He. Did. Not.

Biden was not merely again embellishing his achievements. This is not just another of his verbal fender benders. There is no less-than-dismaying explanation for his complete confusion. What vote? Who voted?

After repeated unilateral extensions of the moratorium on loan repayments until election season, Biden unilaterally implemented the windfall for millions of voters. Congress was not involved in this cataract of money from the Treasury, in violation of the Constitution's appropriations clause.

It is frightening that Biden does not know, or remember, what he recently did regarding an immensely important policy. He must be presumed susceptible to future episodes of similar bewilderment. He should leave the public stage on Jan. 20, 2025.

So should his vice president. Thomas R. Marshall, Woodrow Wilson's vice president, joked, "Once there were two brothers. One ran away to sea; the other was elected vice president of the United States. And nothing was heard of either of them again." Kamala Harris has been heard from, sufficiently.

Transcripts of her verbal meanderings cannot convey their eerie strangeness. Videos of them should be watched. Meanwhile, here are her Proustian thoughts about broadband in Louisiana: "The governor and I and we were all doing a tour of the library here and talking about the significance of the passage of time. Right? The significance of the passage of time. So, when you think about it, there is great significance to the passage of time in terms of what we need to do to lay these wires, what we need to do to create these jobs. And there is such great significance to the passage of time when we think about a day in the life of our children ..."

What most excited her about the Inflation Reduction Act? "I have a particular fondness, I must tell you, for electric school buses. I love electric school buses. I really do ... I've been on these electric school buses ... 25 million children in our country, every day, go to school on those diesel-fueled school buses. And hundreds, thousands of school bus drivers are driving those buses. Which are then, these people — these children, these adults — are inhaling what is toxic air."

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Harris at an international conference: "We will work together, and continue to work together, to address these issues, to tackle these challenges, and to work together as we continue to work operating from the new norms, rules and agreements, that we will convene to work together." She added: "We will work together."

Harris in Poland: "I am here standing here on the northern flank, on the eastern flank, talking about what we have in terms of the eastern flank and our NATO allies ..."

Harris on space: "Space — it affects us all, and it connects us all." On whether Democrats "failed" by not codifying abortion rights in federal law: "I think that, to be very honest with you, I do believe that we should have rightly believed, but we certainly believe that certain issues are just settled." On equity: "Equitable treatment means we all end up in the same place." On the border: "We have a secure border in that that is a priority for any nation, including ours and our administration."

Enough. She sounds, as a critic has said, like someone giving a book report on a book she has not read. Her style betrays a self-satisfied exaggeration of her aptitudes. Lacking natural talent, she needs to prepare, but evidently doesn't. Complacency and arrogance make a ruinous compound.

Regarding Biden and Harris, the national Democratic Party faces two tests of stewardship: Its imprimatur cannot again be bestowed on either of them. Biden is not just past his prime; even adequacy is in his past. And this is Harris's prime.

In 2024, the Republican Party might present the nation with a presidential nominee whose unfitness has been demonstrated. After next Tuesday's sobering election results, Democrats should resolve not to insult and imperil the nation by doing likewise.