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USA

# **Biden Failure in Debate Leads to Crisis in Democratic Party, Pressure for a New Candidate**

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### **President Joseph Biden's disastrous failure in his televised debate with rival former president Donald J. Trump has led to a crisis in the Democratic Party as some call for the party to choose a new candidate.**

During the debate, seen by 51.3 million viewers, Democrats watched in anguish as the 81-year-old Biden, speaking in a voice that was sometimes just a loud whisper, appeared to be weak, halting, and sometimes confused. In one rambling incoherent response Biden ended by saying "we finally beat Medicare," a government health program that he has fought to defend and expand.

There was immediate panic in the party. Some Democratic Party leaders and financial donors have suggested that the party may need to find a new candidate. The New York Times, the country's premier newspaper, ran an editorial entitled: "To Serve His Country, President Biden Should Leave the Race." The Democratic Party National Convention, which will take place from August 19-22 in Chicago, ultimately chooses the party's candidate and if Biden is willing to step aside, could select someone to replace Biden. Biden himself has said that he is staying the course.

Trump won the debate in terms of performance, appearing to be strong in his typical style of bombast, braggadocio, and belligerence. He repeatedly called Biden the "worst president," "the worst commander-in-chief," a president who had created the "worst border," "the worst situation with China." He claimed falsely to have had during his presidency the best economy, the best environmental situation, the best programs to deal with COVID. He repeatedly returned to attacking Biden's border and immigration policies, saying Biden "...allowed millions of people to come in here from prisons, jails and mental institutions to come into our country and destroy our country."

Trump continued to stir up resentment against immigrants. He made preposterous accusations against Biden: "He's the one that killed people with the bad border, including hundreds of thousands of people dying, and also killing our citizens when they come in. We – we are living right now in a rat's nest. They're killing our people in New York, in California, in every state in the union, because we don't have borders anymore." The best debater would have been challenged to respond to Trump's attacks and lies, and Biden was far from his best.

In any case, Biden failed to counter voters' concerns that he is too old for another term as president and the question is, what happens in the next couple of weeks? Can the party's leaders—Barack Obama, former speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, current speaker Hakim Jeffries, Senate majority leader Chuck Schumer—and Biden's wife Jill, be persuaded to ask him to step aside?

Who might be alternative Democratic Party candidates? Several names have been mentioned. First, Vice-President Kamala Harris, though she is not seen as effective or popular, and as a Black woman might have the most difficulty in winning an election. Among the other possibilities are: California Governor Gavin Newsome, Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer, Governor J.B. Pritzker of Illinois, Senator Sherrod Brown of Ohio. If Biden were to step down, the 5,500 delegates from all 50 states and several territories (like Washington, D.C. and Puerto Rico) would choose the new candidate. Some 15% are superdelegates—former presidents, congressional leaders, big donors, longtime party functionaries, and some labor officials. There has been concern recently that the convention delegates do not adequately represent Blacks and Latinos. The progressive delegates, such as Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, will have little influence on choosing the party's candidate.

Will the Democrats stick with Biden? We should know in a couple of weeks.

30 June 2024

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