



Is the Pandemic Killing Biden's Bid?

"This is the question that is going to dominate the election: How did you perform in the great crisis?"

So says GOP Congressman Tom Cole of Oklahoma in today's New York Times.

GOP National Committeeman Henry Barbour of Mississippi calls the crisis "a defining moment... The more (Trump) reassures Americans, gives them the facts and delivers results, the harder it will be for Joe Biden."



Indeed, it is not a stretch to say Trump's presidency will stand or fall on the resolution of the coronavirus crisis and how Trump is perceived as having led us in that battle. Recent polls appear to confirm that.

Though daily baited by a hostile media for being late to recognize the severity of the crisis, in one Gallup poll a week ago, Trump was at 49% approval, the apogee of his presidency, with 60% of the nation awarding him high marks for his handling of the pandemic.

What was the public's assessment of how Trump's antagonists in the media have performed in America's great medical crisis?

Of 10 institutions, with hospitals first, at 88% approval, the media came in dead last, the only institution whose disapproval, at 55%, exceeded the number of Americans with a favorable opinion of their performance.

The media are paying a price in lost reputation with the nation they claim to represent by reassuming the role of "adversary press" in a social crisis where, whatever one's view of Donald Trump, the country wants the president to succeed.

If Biden begins to mimic a hostile media, baiting Trump at every turn, pointing out conflicts in his views, Joe will invite the same fate the media seem to have brought upon themselves.

Since that Gallup poll, Trump has been seen daily by millions in the role of commander in chief. He speaks from the podium in the White House briefing room or the Rose Garden just outside the Oval Office. He is invariably flanked by respected leaders in medicine, science, business and economics. All appear as Trump allies, and Trump treats them as his field commanders in the war on the virus.

And Joe Biden? He pops up infrequently in interviews out of the basement of his Delaware home where, sheltering in place, he reads short scripted speeches from a teleprompter.

And Biden's presence has been wholly eclipsed by daily televised appearances of Gov. Andrew Cuomo, who is at the epicenter of the crisis in New York. Cuomo is taking on the aspect of both rival and partner to Trump.

What Trump is doing calls to mind Richard Nixon's "Rose Garden strategy" in 1972. Though goaded by



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the press, Nixon avoided attacking his opponent, George McGovern, and declined to engage him on issues. Instead, Nixon used the Rose Garden to highlight popular initiatives.

Candidate Nixon's campaign strategy in 1972 was not to campaign.

But if Biden cannot gather crowds to hear him in a time of social distancing, how does he get his message out? How does he attack Trump without appearing to undermine the president in his role as a wartime commander in chief, where America wants Trump to succeed?

How does a basement-bound Biden compete with Trump in the Oval Office, Cabinet Room, East Room and Rose Garden?

Whom does Biden call upon to rival Trump's instant access to respected leaders eager to come and stand beside the president in the most serious crisis since World War II?

How does Biden recapture the spotlight of Super Tuesday?

Sen. Bernie Sanders wants Biden to come out and debate. But that seems a no-win proposition.

Moreover, when Biden appears on camera, he often seems confused and forgetful, loses his train of thought and doesn't remember what he came to say. The sense that Biden is losing it is taking hold, and not only on the Republican right.

Democrats have to be looking closely at Cuomo's success, as they wonder how Biden will stand up in the debates with Trump six months from now.

And what lies ahead for Democrats when spring turns into summer?

The Tokyo Olympics, scheduled to begin July 24, have been postponed until 2021. The Democratic National Convention, scheduled for Milwaukee even earlier in July, has yet to be postponed.

But if Tokyo recognizes it would be a terrible risk to the health of athletes and spectators to have people come from all over the world to Japan this summer, would it not also be an intolerable risk to have Americans from all 50 states and U.S. territories arrive for a week of mingling in midsummer in Milwaukee?

For Biden to win this election, Trump must lose it.

And the one way Trump can lose it is the perception on the part of a majority of Americans that he has proven an ineffectual president in America's worst pandemic since the Spanish flu of 1918.

If Trump is seen as the victor over the virus, Biden is toast.

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