



Will Democratic Rebels Dethrone Nancy?

After adding at least 37 seats and taking control of the House by running on change, congressional Democrats appear to be about to elect as their future leaders three of the oldest faces in the party.

Nancy Pelosi of California and Steny Hoyer of Maryland have led the House Democrats for 16 years. For 12 years, they have been joined in the leadership triumvirate by Jim Clyburn of South Carolina.



If these three emerge as speaker, majority leader and majority whip, all three Democratic leaders will be older than our oldest president, Ronald Reagan, was when he went home after two terms.

By 2020's election, all three House leaders would be over 80.

Was this gerontocracy what America voted for when it awarded Democrats control of the U.S. House?

Hardly. Some Democrats won in 2018 by pledging not to vote for Pelosi as speaker, so unpopular is she in their districts. And if all who said they want new leadership were to vote for new leaders on the House floor Jan. 3 — when the speaker will be chosen — Pelosi would fall short. The race for speaker could then break wide-open.

Some 16 Democrats vowed Monday to oppose Pelosi on the House floor, one shy of being enough to block her return to the speakership after eight years.

In a letter that went public, the 16 declared: "Our majority came on the backs of candidates who said that they would support new leadership because voters in hard-won districts, and across the country, want to see real change in Washington. We promised to change the status quo, and we intend to deliver on that promise."

The likelihood of the rebellion succeeding, however, remains slim, for no credible challenger to Pelosi has yet announced.

What explains the timidity in the Democratic caucus?

Pelosi punishes enemies. Democrats calling for new leaders have already been branded as sexists with the hashtag "#FiveWhiteGuys."

Yet evidence is mounting that a Pelosi speakership would prove to be an unhappy close to her remarkable career.

One week after the election, 150 protesters from the Sunrise Movement and Justice Democrats blocked



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Pelosi's House office to demand action on climate change. They were joined by the youngest member of the incoming Congress, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

Pelosi declared herself "inspired" by the protesters, 51 of whom were arrested. She urged police to let them exercise their democratic rights and pledged to revive the House Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming, which Republicans abolished.

Dismissing the committee as "toothless," the protesters demanded that Pelosi's party commit to bringing an end to the use of all fossil fuels and to accepting no more campaign contributions from the oil and gas industry.

Not going to happen with Pelosi as speaker. For when it comes to the leftist agenda of liberal Democrats from safe districts — Medicare for all, abolish ICE, impeach Trump — Pelosi would pigeonhole such measures to avoid the party's being dragged too far to the left for 2020.

And if the House were to pass radical measures, the bills would die in the Senate or be vetoed by the president.

Moreover, within Pelosi's party in the House, the various factions are going to be demanding a new distribution of the seats of power, of which there are only so many to go around.

Democratic women, who won more seats than ever, will want more, as will the Congressional Black Caucus and the Hispanics. It will most likely be white male Democrats, that shrinking cohort, who will be the principal losers in the new House.

That adage about Democrats being a collection of warring tribes gathered together in anticipation of common plunder has never seemed truer.

What, then, does the new year promise?

As it becomes apparent that there is little common ground for bipartisan legislation on Capitol Hill — except perhaps on infrastructure, and that would take a long time to enact — the cable news channels will look elsewhere for the type of action that causes ratings to soar. That action will inevitably come in the clashes between Trump and his enemies and the media that sustain them.

Out of the House — with Adam Schiff, Elijah Cummings, Maxine Waters and Jerrold Nadler as new chairs — will come a blizzard of subpoenas and a series of confrontations with witnesses.

From special counsel Robert Mueller's office will almost surely come new indictments, trials and the long-anticipated report, which will go to the Justice Department, where Matthew Whitaker is acting attorney general.

Then there is the presidential race of 2020, where the Democratic Party has yet another gerontocracy problem.

By spring, there could be 20 Democrats who will have announced for president. And five of the most prominent mentioned — Hillary Clinton, Bernie Sanders, John Kerry, Joe Biden and Mike Bloomberg — are also over 70, with Elizabeth Warren turning 70 in June.

While some candidates will be granted airtime because they are famous, the lesser-known will follow the single sure path to the cable studios and the weekend TV shows — the trashing of Trump.

Trading barbs is not Nancy Pelosi's kind of fight.

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