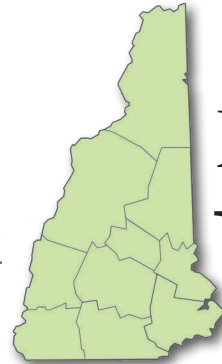


Replacing Biden is risky. Here's how you mitigate it.

THERE ARE serious concerns about the President's health, and whether he can serve as the party's candidate. Party leaders face a crucial decision: do they re-nominate the President and hope for the best, or do they go in a different direction? This was the dilemma faced by the Republican Party in 1884, as President Chester A.



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Arthur privately contended with Bright's Disease, which claimed his life in 1886. Due to his failing physical fitness and other issues, the delegates at the Republican National Convention ultimately chose to drop Arthur, though the man they chose, James G. Blaine, narrowly lost the election that November.

The outcome in 1884 doesn't bode well for Democrats in 2024; dumping an incumbent president from the ticket is risky. Furthermore, replacing President Joe Biden with an alternate nominee is undoubtedly a recipe for chaos. At this late stage, the only way to avoid a chaotic process to replace Biden is to elevate Vice President Kamala Harris. If the Democrats want another option, then they must accept the negative consequences of such a process. However, there is a way to mitigate those negative consequences: a one-term pledge.

The Democrats' conundrum today is much more complicated than for the 1884 Republicans. Back then, it was considered improper for candidates to campaign for themselves. Arthur could cover his condition by staying in the White House, appearing only at carefully managed official events. That is not an option available to

President Biden. And in 1884, it was easy for the Republican Convention to bypass Arthur. Primaries did not exist; delegates could vote for whomever they wanted. In 2024, Biden earned his delegates through the Democratic primaries. They are pledged to vote for him and only he can release them.

And in 2024, the stakes are far higher, with a majority of Americans believing the nation's democracy could be at risk, depending on the outcome of the election.

Selecting Biden's replacement is the tricky part. Elevating Vice President Harris is the least procedurally hazardous option. However, many have doubts about her strengths as a general election candidate. Several options have been suggested. Would the Democrats hold an open convention, letting the delegates decide the nominee, as they did back in 1884? Would polling data be used to narrow the field? Would they have debates, or a mini-primary as Congressman Jim Clyburn (D-S.C.)

has proposed?

Some opponents of replacing Biden have raised concerns that the disunity of the Democratic Party will be on full display during such a process. Moreover, it will invariably be a rushed, ramshackle effort that will look extremely undemocratic compared to proper presidential primaries. It risks fractionalization and alienation within the party, which it can hardly afford when the new candidate needs to pivot to a general election contest against Donald Trump.

Perhaps the 19th century offers a solution. Three 19th-century presidents made one-term pledges: James K. Polk, James Buchanan and Rutherford B. Hayes. These pledges publicly revolved around the idea that they could better serve the public if they weren't tempted to make political deals to secure re-nomination and reelection. They also assured rivals within the party that they would have another chance in four years, not eight. In other words,

one-term pledges could be a powerful tool to maintain party unity heading into a general election. Polk alluded to this when he accepted the Democratic nomination in 1844, stating that in doing so, he had taken "... the most effective means in my power of enabling the Democratic Party to make a free selection of a successor."

The Democratic leadership could make it clear that only those who pledge to serve a single term will be eligible for the nomination. This would mean whoever the Democrats choose would be a lame-duck relatively soon in their administration, but the same would be true of Biden or Trump. And if the rushed, and at best semi-democratic, process used to replace Biden leaves many dissatisfied with the outcome, it will be much easier for the public to swallow if they know it is only for one cycle. Then in 2028, there will be a normal, open, contested primary for the Democratic nomination.

Such a pledge may cause some of the higher-tier candidates to bow out, preferring the chance of two terms later. But perhaps whoever is willing to sacrifice some of their ambition for the good of the party at this moment of crisis is the kind of person who should be the nominee.

The ideal course for concerned Democrats would've been if Biden had chosen not to seek reelection at the outset. There are no easy solutions now. However, requiring a one-term pledge by a substitute candidate could mitigate the risks, and perhaps deliver the kind of person who would be worthy of the office.

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