

Why are the Democrats losing? Hubris.

Keith Naughton

The Democratic political class cannot believe they might lose again to Donald Trump. “How could anyone vote for that man?” they complain. “He is just so gauche!” In a way, they have a point. Trump is gauche. His recent perambulations about Arnold Palmer are the latest in a long line of baffling utterances and improvisations. But mixed in with the weirdness is some smart campaigning.

Trump’s McDonald’s stunt was a very sharp move (not genius, but pretty good for a standard political stunt). And of course, it sent Democrats on tilt at how undignified and cheap Trump was (again).

The Democratic elites are so appalled by Trump they cannot bring themselves to give him any credit for anything. But the fact is, the former president has good instincts at self-promotion, unlike Kamala Harris or Joe Biden. **Trump’s delay, delay, delay legal strategy worked. Trump has the issue environment on his side. And Trump is currently the favorite to win.**

At heart, Democrats’ biggest problem is that their insularity is much worse than that of their Republican counterparts. Yes, both parties are living in their own ideological media bubbles. But it’s worse for the Democrats. Within their bubble, denial has reigned supreme as they have pursued their own hobbyhorses. Instead of addressing voters’ concerns, the Democratic political class and their friends in the establishment media continue to focus on Trump’s threat to democracy, his odd behavior and their own supposed victim status. In short, the **Democrats are running on issues they care about, not issues that voters care about.** The Harris campaign has become comfort food for an anxious, bewildered political class.

None of this is news. The public is well aware of Trump’s strangeness and decline. The public knows what happened on January 6 and does not approve. Trump being Trump has held him back. But that only goes so far. **For the last two years, voters have been telling Democrats that inflation is their top concern.** President Biden and the Democratic political class have **conspicuously ignored them**. In the most recent YouGov poll, 96 percent of respondents called inflation “very” or “somewhat” important. In October 2023 it was 95 percent, and in October 2022 it was 95 percent. **In each survey, inflation was the top issue by a very long way.**

Nor did voters want Biden to run again. In October 2022, only 21 percent of voters and just 10 percent of independents wanted Biden back on the ballot. A year later, those figures were 27 percent and 16 percent, respectively. By April 2024, about when YouGov stopped asking the question, **Democrats had rallied somewhat to Biden, lifting him to 30 percent.** But independents were still opposed to a Biden run, at 70 percent against to 16 percent in favor. All through that time, Biden suffered highly negative approval ratings, and large majorities considered the country to be on the wrong track.

But the **Biden administration and the Democratic political establishment ignored the public**. There was no task force on inflation. No proposals to rein in fiscal expansion or to pull back on regulations (both contributors to inflation). Worse, **the Democrats closed ranks around their doddering leader** until his debate debacle made his candidacy impossible — and **even then, elements in the establishment wanted him to stay on the ballot.**

Instead, the Democratic political class was and is focused on form and style rather than substance. **Nothing is ever their fault**; everyone who backs Trump is delusional, part of a cult or just stupid. Case in point is a recent op-ed in the Washington Post savaging Elon Musk for his relatively recent decision to get involved in politics. **Musk was involved in the creation of one of the world’s most successful online payment systems.** He turned niche automaker Tesla into a world-beating electric vehicle company and rescued America’s space program with SpaceX. **Yet he is now reviled. Musk spending for Trump is evil,** but George Soros, who made his fortune gambling in international currency markets, is good. No matter how much better you are, you’re the jerk if you’re for Trump.

For millions of Americans, high inflation has meant unaffordable rents, the inability to buy a house, diminished savings and deferred retirement. These are real and difficult challenges individuals and families must confront every day. **However, under Trump, inflation was low, housing was more affordable and real household**

incomes were rising. For the majority of Americans, **voting their economic interest means voting for Trump.** For people who cannot afford form, substance matters.

Insularity breeds hubris, which has compounded the Democrats' problems. Cutting themselves off from dissenting voices and political reality convinced them they could not possibly lose to Trump again. ***The result has been bad policy and political judgments.***

Two errors stand out: **the new EPA car emissions rule and the choice of Tim Walz** as Kamala Harris's running mate.

- Issued in March, the new EPA rule would drastically cut the number of internal combustion engine cars by 2032. This decision is ***effectively the death knell for thousands of automotive jobs in the Midwest***, including especially in the swing state of Michigan. Of all the times to stick it to American autoworkers, could Team Biden have chosen a worse one? What were they thinking? Trump is now hammering on the issue and attacking the UAW leadership for endorsing Kamala Harris. ***And it's having an effect***, with Trump climbing into the lead in most recent polls.
- Harris took her turn ***in overconfidence*** at the Democratic National Convention. In the midst of a relief rally in the polls, Harris figured she had all the momentum to win in August. So ***she ignored both the continued tightness of the polls and the still-poor issue environment.*** Instead of choosing Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro (D) as her running mate — a three-time statewide election winner by comfortable margins — Harris backed off in the face of concerted attacks on Shapiro as insufficiently opposed to school choice and too supportive of Israel. (How's that working out?) ***Her last-minute pivot to Walz has proven a complete dud.*** Often stumbling on the stump, he can't even get his own family to vote for him. Walz might shore up a state that has not voted Republican since Richard Nixon, but the Minnesota governor ***does nothing in must-win Pennsylvania.*** Although vice presidential nominees don't add much, it would have been worth picking the popular Shapiro if he were able to swing even just 0.6 percent of the vote from Trump to Harris in Pennsylvania, since that would be greater than Biden's 2020 margin.

In the end, 2024 is about two campaigns featuring mediocre candidates who refuse to listen to the voters, stumbling toward the finish line. But if Kamala Harris and the Democrats lose, they have only themselves to blame.