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Right Now, It Looks Like Trump Will Win in 2020

First: No. It's not too early to discuss the 2020 election. The Iowa caucuses are only a year and a half away. Any presidential hopeful who hasn't begun chatting up donors by now will find it nearly impossible to mount a viable campaign.

At this point insert the usual caveats that anything can happen, no knows anything, scandals happen, politicians get sick, a year is an eternity in politics.

Let's speculate!

On the Right: Donald Trump will almost certainly be the Republican nominee.

Impeachment? Republicans are knee-jerk loyal AF, so Democrats would have to initiate proceedings. House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi says impeachment "is not somewhere I think we should go." Also, note the word "minority." Democrats can't do jack without taking back the House — far from a sure thing.

A serious Republican primary challenge? Most incumbent Republican presidents have nothing to worry about there but Donald Trump is not most presidents. You can imagine a right-wing version of Ted Kennedy's devastating 1980 challenge to Jimmy Carter.

The GOP doesn't have superdelegates so it's harder for the RNC to fix the race the way Democrats did for Clinton in 2016. Still, I don't think a serious (as opposed to symbolic) challenge will materialize from the three currently most-talked-about. Jeff Flake can't raise enough dough. (Trump, on the other hand, already has a whopping \$88 million.) Mitt Romney could self-fund but seems too bogged down in Utah's primary race for Senate to have time to pivot for another presidential run in 2020. Ohio governor John Kasich is beloved by the Beltway media but not GOP primary voters. I could be wrong.

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But my political instincts say Trump will coast to renomination without a significant primary challenger.

On the Left: The Democratic nomination belongs to Bernie Sanders. If he wants it.

Neither the centrist-controlled Democratic National Committee nor its official mouthpiece the New York Times have learned anything from the debacle of 2016, when guaranteed-to-win Hillary Clinton lost to Trump because she and the party snubbed Bernie Sanders and the progressive wing of the party he represents. These days, they're floating Elizabeth Warren.

Until 2016 progressives saw Warren as a Bernie alternative but then she lost her leftie street cred by endorsing and supporting Clinton.

"On her Western swing, Ms. Warren sought to strike a unifying chord. At a tapas restaurant in Salt Lake City, she said Democrats had to close ranks in 2018 in order to recapture the White House. "Perhaps most appealing to Democratic leaders," wrote the Times, "Ms. Warren might please their activist base while staving off a candidate they fear would lose the general election. A candidate such as Mr. Sanders."

Throughout the campaign, polls showed that Bernie Sanders would have beat Trump.

My gut tells me Warren doesn't really want to run. If she does, she'll have charisma problems. As Boston magazine pointed out last year, even the people of Massachusetts aren't much into her. (Bernie Sanders has the highest home-state approval rating of any U.S. senator, 75%.)

Given a choice between Sanders and Warren, progressives will choose the reliable progressive over the accommodationist pragmatist. That said, Warren would make a fine veep option.

As mayor of Newark, then up-and-coming political star Cory Booker made headlines by rushing into a burning house to save a woman in 2012. But politics is a fickle mistress. In the "what have you done for us lately" category, Booker was chastised for tying right-wing Republican Mitch McConnell as the senator who received the most contributions from the big Wall Street banks who destroyed the economy in 2008-09. This won't affect his standing among the corporatists who supported Hillary Clinton despite her fundraising in the Hamptons. But it makes him anathema to the progressive Democratic base.

Once again, Joe Biden is being touted as a possible Democratic candidate. But he has signaled that, once again, he's funnin', not runnin'. Yeah, but what if he does?

Biden would have no choice but to compete for centrist votes against Booker and California's Kamala Harris. Though once known as more liberal, his vice presidency for

centrist Democrat Obama, his focus on building a Southern strategy for the primaries and his disconnection from the left makes him unlikely to appeal to the Berniecrats.

Harris, a law-and-order “lock ‘em up” former prosecutor and California senator, seems to be running a Clinton-style identity politics-based campaign based on her double history-making potential as a woman of color. While it’s true that she hasn’t always been a lock-step establishmentarian, she has gotten much closer to banks, cops and other elites than ordinary Americans as she has considered how to market her policy positions.

Harris is canny.

Some say slippery.

Harris is the biggest threat to Bernie. Harris supports “the concept of single-payer healthcare, and bills to incrementally raise the minimum wage to \$15 an hour, eliminate tuition and fees at four-year colleges and universities for families making up to \$125,000 and creating more campaign finance disclosure requirements for corporations, unions and super PACs.” Good stuff. Call her Berniedette?

But those are official positions. She doesn’t campaign on them. It’s like how Obama’s 2008 campaign website promised a public option on the Affordable Care Act/Obamacare, but he never talked about it and then never proposed it in his healthcare bill. Good positions don’t get far unless they’re articulated loudly and repeatedly.

The Democrats are a 50-50 party divided between progressives and liberals. Three serious liberals — Harris, Warren, Booker and whoever else pops up between now and then — divvy up the liberal half. Bernie Sanders has the progressive half all to himself. So he wins the nomination —if he wants it.

I think he does.

In the general election? This is sad, and bad for America’s baby Left, but I think it’s true: Trump defeats Sanders. Not because he’s a self-declared democratic socialist though you can be sure GOP attack ads will be full of stock footage of old Soviet May Day parades. Also not because he’s too far left: he really would have beaten Trump in 2016.

Trump defeats Sanders because of the innate advantages of incumbency, the historical hesitancy to change horses midstream, Sanders’ advancing age and the sad fact that the DNC will never push for him as hard as they would have for one of their own: a Wall Street-friendly corporatist.

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