

# For the 3 percenters, like Booker, a graceful exit will be appreciated

Posted Aug 21, 5:58 PM



By [Star-Ledger Guest Columnist](#)

**By Carl Golden**

In every election campaign, there comes a point when cruel reality intrudes, forcing candidate and staff to confront the growing likelihood that victory is out of reach and further expenditure of time, money and dedication to a cause is futile.

For all but five of the 22 candidates remaining in the race for the Democratic presidential nomination, that moment has arrived.

It is a personally wrenching decision, a public acknowledgement that one's beliefs and principles have failed to create a deep impression on the public mind and support has diminished to an unsustainable level.

For those Democrats who have consistently failed to exceed 3% in the [Real Clear Politics](#) polling average, continuing their quest is a willing suspension of disbelief.

Using the RCP 3% average as the benchmark measurement to remain in the race, 17 announced candidates would fail to make the cut, including New Jersey Sen. Cory Booker. Nine candidates -- Booker included -- have qualified for the next debate in September, despite failing to break 3%.

Of the remainder, several -- including sitting governors, and ex-Congress members -- have failed to achieve greater than 1%. If all below 3% conceded, the field would narrow to an eminently manageable five --- former vice president Joe Biden, Sens. Bernie Sanders of Vermont, Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts, and Kamala Harris of California, and South Bend, Indiana Mayor Pete Buttigieg.

their campaigns even though the hopes of a number of them will lie buried under snowdrifts in the state's cornfields.

Seemingly undeterred by the long odds against them, rationales for keeping their candidacies alive range from consideration as the vice presidential running mate, securing a cabinet or high level post in a Democratic administration, attempting to influence the party's direction and agenda, building an identification for a later run, or merely because it's fun and ego-boosting.

The size of the field has wrought havoc on the two debates held so far, chaotic and embarrassing exercises in personal insults, raised voices, discourteous interruptions, talking over one another, and -- sadly -- offering little of substance on issues.

The universal takeaways from these confrontations has been that of a party shoved further and further to the left, embracing out of the mainstream ideas that will come back to haunt the eventual nominee.

Debating proposals to decriminalize illegal border crossings, end private health care insurance, and spend trillions of dollars on social welfare programs plays directly into President Trump's wheelhouse.

While some Democrats understand the dangers in pursuing an overly ambitious progressive agenda, the lunge to the left has not been diminished.

Even though the "Moderates need not apply" sign has been posted outside national party headquarters, Biden -- the quintessential middle-lane contender -- has held the polling lead ever since he entered the race.

The former vice president has littered the landscape with misstatements and non-sequitur's, raising concerns about his intellectual agility but he's been able to overcome them by remaining the candidate most favored to defeat Trump.

Shrinking the field by persuasion, appeals to loyalty, or emphasizing the overwhelming need to turn Trump out of the White House may succeed, particularly after the Iowa caucuses and certainly after the New Hampshire primary.

Force will not. The party boss days are long gone, replaced by the cult of self-interested personality. Pressure will be met with counter pressure, stubbornness and animosity.

Voluntary withdrawal, leaving with dignity intact and pride in having given it one's best shot is the only way to cull the field and assuring that all involved will continue to talk to one another.

The immense personal difficulty in reaching the decision should not be minimized or dismissed. Belief in one's self is a powerful motivator, even though it occasionally clouds one's better judgment and blinds one to a reality seen and understood by others.

A gracious exit is preferable to the embarrassing pursuit of an unattainable prize.

The political environment can be an exciting and exhilarating place, but it can also be a cold and cruel place, bringing down well-meaning individuals possessed of noble aims.

By next spring, trees will be in bud, temperatures comfortable, songbirds in full throat and five Democrats still standing.

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