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Biden About To 'Feel the Burn' From Progressives

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By Carl Golden

For the millions who "felt the Bern" in 2016 and again this year only to be bitterly disappointed both times, it's now time to subject former Vice President Joe Biden to the heat and passion of the progressive movement.

The committed army of Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders is convinced it is well positioned to move Biden further to the left and demand full throated support to the socialist senator's agenda.

Despite endorsements from Sanders, Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren and former President Barack Obama, Biden remains a figure of some suspicion in the progressive movement, who feel he's overly cozy with corporate and big business interests - two of Sanders' favorite targets.

Doubters cite Biden's reluctance to endorse "Medicare for All" - perhaps the core principle of the progressive movement - as evidence that he does not fully share their vision of government responsibility. His support for reducing the age for Medicare eligibility from 65 to 60 is, in their view, totally inadequate and indicative of Biden's propensity for compromise and consensus rather than bold strokes.

Other issues remain unresolved as well - a wealth tax, forgiving student loan debt, free higher education, addressing income inequality, citizenship for undocumented immigrants, an aggressive response to climate change, and an end to the activities of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency.

While Biden has indicated he is open to discussing the progressive agenda, his acceptance of it is highly problematic. His history is a dedication to bipartisanship, negotiating and bargaining, giving some to get some, a willingness to settle for incremental victories to achieve long term goals.

His approach is scoffed at as old school, out-of-touch politics, bespeaking a timidity that is no longer relevant. The progressives insist that purity of ideology and action is the sole path to constructing a government suitable to today's needs.

Progressives are still smarting from what they are convinced was a deck stacked against them in 2016. And, they believe the same party establishment that conspired to secure the nomination for Hillary Clinton feared Sanders' growing strength and closed ranks behind the former vice president.

Party leaders foresaw disaster in a Sanders candidacy. They believed he would be dragged down and take the rest of the ticket with him by his strident advocacy of trillion dollar spending and massive, radical social policies.

Trump, they feared, would destroy Sanders in a debate format, portraying him as a left-wing fringe candidate bent on destroying the economy in pursuit of a domineering socialist government.

Sanders would never gain acceptance in large swaths of the country, turning voters against the Democratic Party and overcoming whatever misgivings they held about Trump.

Biden is now faced with the task of bringing the progressives to his side, asking them to moderate their demands in the interest of victory and to exercise patience and forbearance in fulfilling their goals. There is leverage in numbers, and Biden must deal with their movement or risk wholesale defections from his candidacy.

They will, of course, not turn to the president. Bernie's supporters may dislike Biden, but they detest Trump as the embodiment of all evil in American politics and government.

Party leaders will attempt to convince them that deserting Biden means they will get Trump. The prospect of four more years of a Trump Administration may be a more compelling argument than any effort to change minds on policy issues.

Biden must thread this ideological needle, maintaining his commitment to the moderate middle course philosophy which captured the nomination while soothing the wounds of those whose dreams were dashed twice at the hands of pragmatic establishment figures.

The progressive movement will likely not wither away but will retain some level of influence. When push comes to shove over direction and vision, though, it will be a thorn in the side rather than a dagger at the throat.

Biden may momentarily "feel the Bern," but the splash of victory will extinguish it.

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