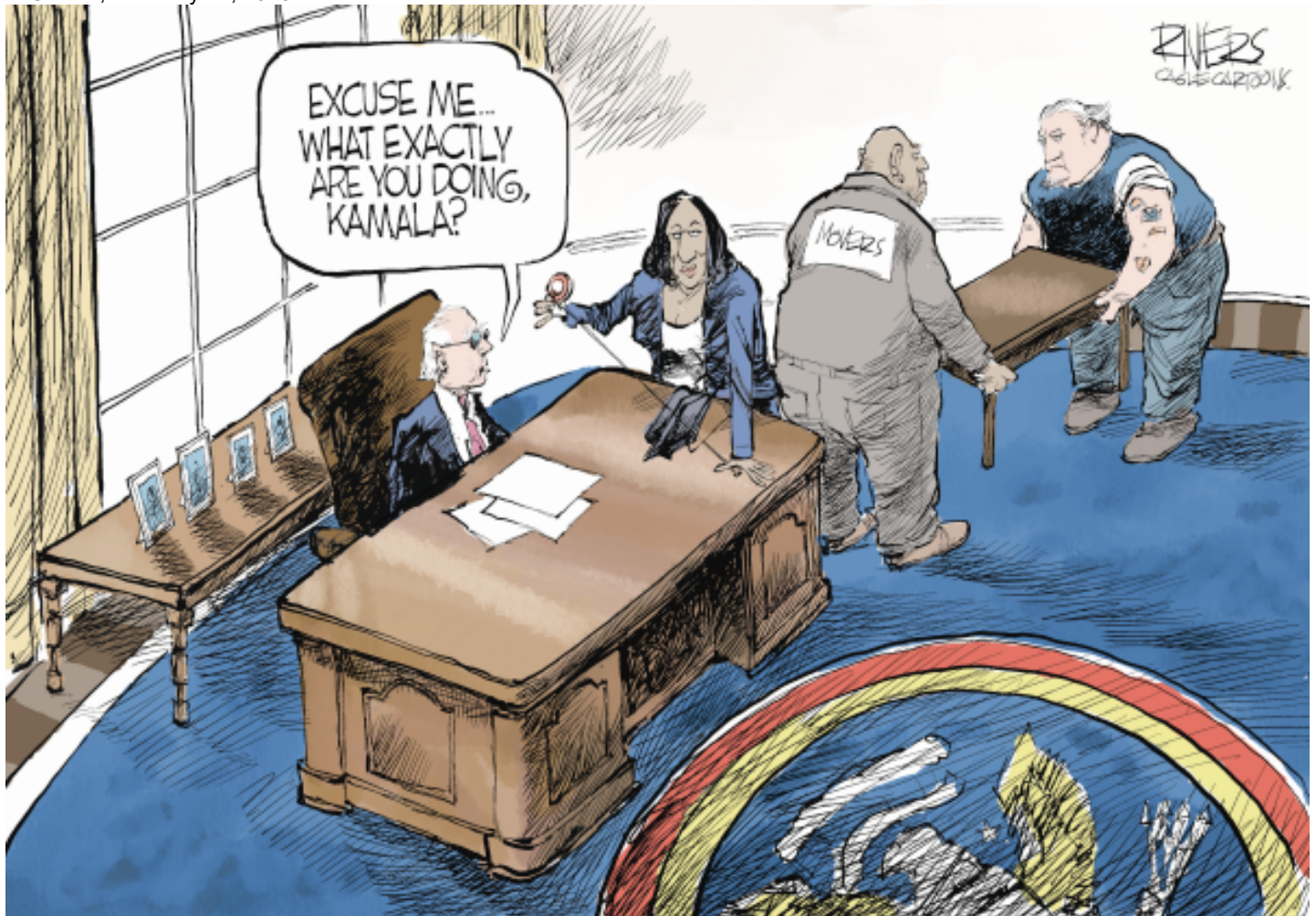


# DEMOCRATS FACE A BIDEN-HARRIS DILEMMA

Carl Golden, February 21, 2023



With public approval mired in the low forty percent range, with two thirds of Americans believing the nation is headed in the wrong direction and a majority of Democrats expressing a preference for a different candidate, President Biden's intention to seek re-election has frozen the field of possible competitors and created a long term political headache for his party.

Even as some polls show him losing to former President Donald Trump in a hypothetical matchup, the party has rallied behind Biden, pledging support and loyalty despite private concerns about his age and the stamina needed to endure the exhausting pace of a national campaign.

While Biden benefitted from the national lockdown wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 that allowed him the freedom to campaign from the basement of his home, a full bore campaign against a younger Republican opponent – potentially as much as 30 years his junior – would subject him to at least six months of mental and physical strain that would test the endurance limits of the fittest of people.

As concerning as his well-being may be to party leaders, of deeper worry to the hard-headed political movers and shakers is a health risk or incapacitation leading to a withdrawal and the elevation of Vice President Kamala Harris to presidential candidate.

Her tenure has been mediocre, and she has achieved a reputation as one of the least consequential vice presidents in modern history. At 38 percent, her approval ranking is below Biden's and she is not considered presidential material.

A Harris victory – as unlikely as that may be – would place in the nation's highest office an untested, ill-prepared individual who has demonstrated no ability to assume the leadership of the free world, deal effectively with Congress or rally the American people to her cause.

Her rambling and often incoherent responses to media questions, breaking into giggles at inopportune moments, and her frequent inability to grasp the essence of complex issues have eroded confidence in her capability to sit at the pinnacle of global power.

Her campaign for the presidential nomination in 2020 – wracked by disarray and collapsing even before the first primary contest took place – is a clear sign that an equally disastrous outcome is a virtual certainty should she step into that role in 2024.

With that history in mind, the party establishment confronts the dilemma and politically fraught terrain to be negotiated to deny Harris a candidacy should Biden be unable to continue.

Moreover, a victory for the Biden-Harris ticket raises the sensitive prospect of an incumbent president unable to complete his term and turning the office over to his vice president, establishing her as the heir apparent in 2028, reviving all the concerns about her shortcomings.

With little more than a year before the presidential campaign begins in earnest, speculation has been floated quietly that Biden may choose to forego re-election in time for party leaders to convince Harris to stand aside – a not insignificant task, to be sure – by offering her a high profile position, such as the next opening on the Supreme Court.

No matter the pains taken to act with the utmost delicacy, any move to bypass Harris either as a presidential candidate or as a successor to the office will produce a firestorm of criticism and accusations of gender and ethnic bias.

She broke that glass ceiling – a watershed event in America's politics – and her accomplishment should not be minimized, despite the unprecedented pandemic-driven limits on campaigning or the suggestion Biden's victory was a reaction to the chaos and upheavals of the Trump administration rather than a validation of his agenda.

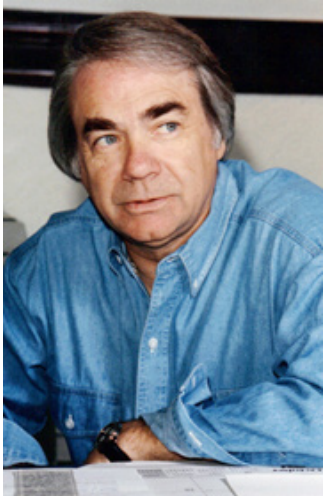
Both parties were dealt the same hand in 2020 and worked under the same restrictions and conditions. Biden and Harris won; that cannot be taken from them.

Biden may have frozen the field and thawing it will test the limits of party leaders, either through persuasion or serious hardball politics.

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