

Bill Kaplan: Vote Joe Biden for change

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Joe Biden has always been a fighter, getting up after being knocked down. Tragically, he did it as a newly-elected senator after his wife and daughter died in a car accident. And, again years later when his son died from cancer. Moreover, as he grappled with stuttering, Biden learned to face down bullies. So Biden never wavered after initial losses (Iowa, New Hampshire). He got back up, knowing better days lay ahead.

First came a blowout win in South Carolina's Democratic presidential primary. Then Super Tuesday, Biden won 10 out of 14 states. "The scale of his win was big geographically ... as well as demographically" (Politico). Biden won in the South, New England, the Midwest, as well as Oklahoma and Texas. Black voters played a critical role, 56 percent to 19 percent. "His success among white voters was less expected and allowed him to extend his strength well beyond the South" (NYT). He won among women and suburban voters. Finally, in Minnesota Biden won small towns and rural counties (Center for Rural Strategies).

Biden's message of change and achievable reforms as opposed to pie in the sky resonated across the country. Regular folks know Biden is a lunch-bucket Democrat, running on pocketbook issues, while restoring the "soul of the nation". Voters also picked Biden because he can defeat Trump and bring Trump voters back to the Democratic Party. About 9.2 million voters supported Obama, then flipped for Trump (Washington Post), including tens of thousands of Wisconsin voters in rural areas (Craig Gilbert, MJS). Biden can win them back, while maintaining the diverse Democratic Party coalition.

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Voters can feel Biden's empathy and see he's for real. Trump will run on divisions, seeing "political advantage in a divisive appeal to working-class white voters" (NYT). Trump will try to use raw racism to win the 2020 election, but Biden knows how to take Trump on. Trump and the reactionary GOP-led Senate will not go quietly. However, Biden has a huge advantage. He will be welcomed by Democrats across the nation to help down-ballot races. I have never forgotten Wisconsin Democratic Senator Gaylord Nelson's advice: "Democrats must run successfully across the nation in order for the Democratic Party to be a national party".

To govern, Democrats must win at all levels: the House, the Senate, states (governors and legislators) and most of all the White House. A big defeat of Trump and his GOP followers might return Republicans to their senses. Governing requires compromise, negotiation, acceptance of conventional facts and recognition of the opposition party. Trump and the GOP-led Senate reject this foundation of governing. This must end to move forward.

Finally, Biden's prepared. He helped clean up the Great Recession mess, saving the auto industry. Biden is ready to help rural America develop economically, giving small farmers a leg up. Fair trade and not trade wars. He stands with the middle class, people of color, women and LGBT. All of America, including Wisconsin, will see change. Vote for Biden on Tuesday, April 7.

- Kaplan wrote a guest column from Washington, D.C., for the Wisconsin State Journal from 1995 - 2009.