

The Democrats' fractured field

What happened?

The New Hampshire primary left the Democratic Party splintered between its moderate and left wings this week after Sen. Bernie Sanders notched a narrow victory over centrists Pete Buttigieg and Sen. Amy Klobuchar. Sanders won with nearly 26 percent of the vote, but that total was the weakest for a New Hampshire victor in party history. Moderates split between Buttigieg (24.4 percent); Klobuchar (19.8 percent) and Biden (8.4 percent). "This victory here is the beginning of the end for Donald Trump," a victorious Sanders told a joyful crowd.



Sanders celebrating first-place finish

Former front-runners Biden and Elizabeth Warren were in deep trouble after finishing fourth and fifth, respectively, and earning no delegates; they also trailed the top three finishers in Iowa. Both, however, vowed to fight on, with Biden departing New Hampshire even before the polls had closed in order to attend a "launch party" in South Carolina, where he is counting on strong support from the state's African-American community. A Biden adviser confided to *Politico.com* that the "horrendous" Iowa and New Hampshire results had demoralized the campaign. "I think we're going to make it to South Carolina," the adviser said, "but I just don't know." Meanwhile, Warren reacted to her lackluster finish with the prediction of a "long primary fight."

Klobuchar rose on the strength of vigorous campaigning and a strong debate performance last week, in which she criticized Buttigieg for his lack of experience and President Trump for "a complete lack of empathy" for working people barely making their rent. Buttigieg, the 38-year-old former mayor of South Bend, Ind., followed his first-place finish in Iowa with another strong performance. "We are here to stay," Buttigieg proclaimed as supporters cheered "President Pete!"

What the editorials said

New Hampshire's results "shuffled the deck," said *The Republican* of Massachusetts. Warren and Biden were big disappointments, and Sanders "underperformed" in a state he hoped to dominate, while "the biggest surprise" was Klobuchar. The danger for her and the other "non-Bernies" is that moderates will "split the pragmatic voters" and enable the 78-year-old Sanders to win with 30-something percent of the vote. Matters will grow only murkier once billionaire Mike Bloomberg officially joins the ballot on Super Tuesday, or March 3, when 14 states vote. (See Controversy.)

The Democratic primary could be history repeating itself, said *The Wall Street Journal*. In 2016, Donald Trump capitalized on a large Republican field to seize the nomination with a comparatively small, yet fervent, base. Now

comes Sanders, "the socialist from next door," with his similarly unshakable base of Millennial and left-wing support, hoping to exploit a divided field. As long as multiple centrist candidates remain, his "socialist plurality has the advantage."

What the columnists said

"Where the heck has this Amy Klobuchar been for the last year," asked Megan McArdle in *The Washington Post*. Ever since she went toe-to-toe with Bret Kavanaugh during his Supreme Court confirmation hearing, she seemed like the perfect antidote to President Trump.

She's a woman, a pragmatist from the Midwest, and "funny, warm, and sincere" on the stump. But it took until this past week for her to make "her case forcefully." The question now is "whether she has enough time left to get this done." Probably not, said Ed Kilgore in *NYMag.com*. Both she and Mayor Pete may "hit a wall in Nevada and South Carolina," the next two states, because they poured all of their resources into Iowa and New Hampshire. Neither Klobuchar nor Buttigieg are popular with minority voters, and will struggle over the next month to keep up with Sanders' "small-dollar donations machine" and Bloomberg's billions.

Sanders' front-runner status "should terrify" Americans who believe in liberty and free markets, said Brad Polumbo in *Washington Examiner.com*. The so-called democratic socialist has promised a profound reordering of the American economy that would nationalize health care, heavily regulate most industries, and nearly double federal spending. Even "a stubborn Congress" can't save the country from his radical agenda. Sanders has already promised to issue a host of executive orders "to kick-start a revolution" on everything from border security to climate change.

Now that Warren's campaign appears to be over, said John Judis in *TalkingPointsMemo.com*, many will point to her waffling on "Medicare for All" as her fatal mistake. But if "you make a

timeline" of her rise and fall, you'll see instead that her strength accumulated in October after Sanders suffered a heart attack. Once Sanders "regained his footing" and Buttigieg peeled away some of her educated, technocratic supporters, Warren began sinking.

Biden's collapse was "a disaster for liberalism and the Democratic Party," said Jonathan Chait in *NYMag.com*. For almost a year now, the former vice president commanded the loyalty of Democrats nostalgic for the Obama years, and his popularity "stunted the growth" of other center-left candidates, including Klobuchar and Sen. Cory Booker (D-N.J.). Now "the sheer disarray of his opposition" makes Sanders the favorite, despite his embrace of "wildly unpopular policies and a wildly unpopular socialist label." Four more years of Trump now looms.

What next?

The likelihood of a contested Democratic nominating convention is rising, said Ronald Brownstein in *The Atlantic.com*. No candidate has demonstrated the ability to build "a coalition broad enough to span the party" and muster the 1,991-delegate majority necessary to crown a nominee prior to the July summit in Milwaukee. Sanders' 26 percent in New Hampshire was a far cry from the 61 percent he earned in 2016, and the weakest showing by a victor in that state since the 29 percent Jimmy Carter captured in 1976. And while Sanders showed strong support among young voters (42 percent of those under 45) and "very liberal Democrats" (48 percent), he demonstrated "little crossover appeal" among older and more affluent primary voters, said Chuck Todd in *NBCNews.com*. With the centrist vote split, it appears "we now have a delegate race on our hands" that could go all the way to the convention.

Illustration by Howard McWilliam.
Cover photos from AP, Reuters, Getty

Bloomberg: The Democrats' best Bernie alternative?

"Even a few weeks ago, I'd have told you he was wasting his money," said Matt Bai in *WashingtonPost.com*. But now the prospect of self-funded former New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg winning the Democratic presidential nomination "no longer seems so remote." Bernie Sanders' victory this week in New Hampshire—following a second-place finish in Iowa—has sent the Democrats' donor class and rank-and-file moderates into a "full-fledged panic." They are convinced that nominating a self-declared socialist would hand the election to President Trump in November. The apparent collapse of Joe Biden has left the center lane wide open, said Kyle Smith in *NationalReview.com*. The self-assured, highly accomplished Bloomberg is seen as a more plausible Trump slayer "than Pete Buttigieg, with his student-council earnestness and thin résumé." Amy Klobuchar's campaign, meanwhile, is low on money. Bloomberg has a net worth north of \$60 billion and could easily throw \$5 billion at the campaign without feeling it. He's already spent more than \$300 million on advertising, and is building a fearsome national campaign organization of 2,000 well-paid staffers armed with cutting-edge data technology. How poetic it would be if the Democratic race became a showdown between a self-made multibillionaire and "a declared enemy of capitalism."

That's "the crossroads" Democrats seem to be approaching, said Eric Levitz in *NYMag.com*. A Morning Consult poll finds Bloomberg has risen to third place in the 14 states holding Super Tuesday primaries on March 3. Still, since Bloomberg isn't on the ballot until then, Sanders will have a big head start in the delegate count. And could the Vermont senator have a more perfect foil than "a plutocrat literally trying to buy the presidency of the United States?" Bloomberg's record as an arrogant, tough-on-crime



Bloomberg's plan is working.

mayor is just now getting scrutiny, said Elliot Hannon in *Slate.com*. An audio recording surfaced this week of the then-mayor boasting that cops throwing young black men up "against the wall" and frisking them had cut crime rates. Based on statistics, Bloomberg added, the police "disproportionately stop whites too much and minorities too little."

Nonetheless, black voters "are warming to" Bloomberg, said Christina Greer in *TheDailyBeast.com*. A Quinnipiac poll this week showed him with 22 percent of black support, topping every Democrat except Biden at 27 percent. Why? Because African-Americans see beating the race-baiting Trump as an urgent priority. As a lifelong New Yorker, Bloomberg "isn't afraid to take on the Queens bully currently occupying the Oval Office," said Christopher Suprun in the New York *Daily News*. Both as a businessman and an elected official, Bloomberg has a record of competence and success that dwarfs Trump's—and both of them know it.

Do Democrats really want to replace Trump with another strongman billionaire? asked Harry Siegel, also in the *Daily News*. The similarities between the two wealthy egotists "are too glaring to ignore." Trump routinely trolls Democrats with "kidding not kidding" threats to stay in office after a second term; Bloomberg, as New York mayor, actually did it, using the 2008 financial crisis as a pretext to suspend the city's term-limit law. Democrats are rallying to Bloomberg for one reason only—"because he has enough money to blow Trump out of the water," said Robert Reich in *TheGuardian.com*. But desperate times call for desperate measures. If the "sociopathic tyrant" in the Oval Office can be evicted only by an oligarch like Michael Bloomberg, then "we will have to choose the oligarch."

Only in America

■ An Ohio minister says he plans to sue the NFL over its racy Super Bowl halftime show. Minister Dave Daubenmire claims Shakira and Jennifer Lopez's "soft-porn performance" may prevent him from "getting into the Kingdom of Heaven." Furthermore, said Daubenmire, when "you go on a porn website, you're not looking for 50-year-old women."

■ Vegan activists are staging sit-ins in Starbucks coffee shops to protest the higher price of drinks made with nondairy "milk." In New York, Starbucks charges \$4.78 for a regular latte, but \$5.30 for a latte made with soy, almond, or coconut milk. The higher price is a tax on veganism, said activist Julia Brueck, and is both racist—"since a majority of people of color can't digest lactose"—and "ableist, because it ignores food allergies."

Good week for:

Fornicators, after Virginia's House of Delegates passed a bill that would repeal the state's ban on sex between unmarried people, thereby providing more credibility to the state's tourism slogan, "Virginia is for lovers."

Teeing off, after a University of Missouri study found that playing golf just once a month reduces the risk of premature death by about half, likely because it provides stress relief, the stimulation of competition, and a bit of exercise.

Tailwinds, after a British Airways passenger jet made the trip from New York to London in slightly less than five hours, setting a new record for subsonic aircraft. Assisted by the transatlantic jet stream, the flight arrived 1 hour and 42 minutes early.

Bad week for:

Male grooming, after a photograph of a wind-blown President Trump on the White House lawn showed the graphic contrast between the pale skin at his hairline and the thick orange-bronze makeup on his face. "More Fake News," tweeted Trump.

The mood of Democrats, after 64 percent of New Hampshire Democrats said in a poll they would prefer that "a giant meteor strike the Earth, extinguishing all human life," rather than see Trump be re-elected.

Dialogue, after actor Michael Douglas, whose legendary father Kirk died last week at the age of 103, told a rally for former New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg that in the final moments of his life, his father whispered the words "Mike can get it done."



Barr must OK election probes

Attorney General William Barr notified Justice Department officials this week that they cannot open investigations into presidential candidates or their campaigns without his personal approval. The directive follows a report from Inspector General Michael Horowitz, in which Horowitz criticized the FBI for opening a probe into former Trump campaign associate Carter Page. Investigations into Senate and House campaigns and foreign campaign contributions will now require prior consultation with an assistant attorney general. Despite the new rules on investigations linked to political campaigns, Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) said this week that the Justice Department is vetting information Trump's personal attorney Rudy Giuliani provided about Hunter Biden's work in Ukraine.

Gaety, Reuters

Trump's victory lap: Let the vengeance begin

It was “the political equivalent of one of those mob-movie montages where the don’s enemies are gunned down to the accompaniment of an operatic score,” said Max Boot in *The Washington Post*. In the days following last week’s acquittal in the Senate on two articles of impeachment, an “unchastened, unchained, and unhinged” President Trump launched a blatant “campaign of revenge.” The ugliness began at the usually nonpartisan National Prayer Breakfast, where Trump dismissed a plea from Arthur C. Brooks, a renowned conservative and Catholic convert, for Americans to put aside partisan bitterness and heed Jesus’ call to love your enemies. “I don’t know if I agree with you,” Trump said as he took the podium, and unleashed a startling tirade against the “very dishonest and corrupt people” who voted to impeach him. He accused House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) of lying when she said that she had prayed for him. “I doubt she prays at all,” Trump sneered. In a clear shot at Sen. Mitt Romney—the lone Republican to vote for conviction—Trump condemned people who use their faith “as justification for doing what they know is wrong.” Later, Trump attacked impeachment manager Adam Schiff (D-Calif.) as a “vicious” and “horrible” person who had “not paid the price, yet.” Hours later, Trump fired Lt. Col. Alexander Vindman from the National Security Council (NSC) and U.S. Ambassador to the European Union Gordon Sondland for testifying at the House inquiry. Vindman, who earned a Purple Heart in Afghanistan, was escorted off the White House grounds with his twin brother, Yevgeny, an NSC lawyer who was guilty only by association.

“This is what happens when a sociopath gets away with something,” said Michael Gerson, also in *The Washington Post*. Trump’s “unholy outburst” at the prayer breakfast shows what grave danger America is in. Having survived the Russia investigation, and now House impeachment, he clearly “feels unchecked and uncheckable.” Clearly, “there are no guardrails” left, said Paul Brandus in *USA Today*. The day after Robert Mueller finished his investigation by giving muted House testimony, “this most lawless of presidents made that now infamous call to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky” in which he asked for “a favor”—an investigation of Democrats that would help Trump win the 2020 election. As the election approaches, what will an “unfettered” Trump do?



Not turning the other cheek

figure” in the middle of a “blatantly partisan conflict.” For that reason, he had informed his superiors that he planned to step down from the NSC. Trump’s only mistake was firing Vindman before he could leave and turning him into “a Democratic martyr.”

If you don’t find Trump’s vindictive “victory lap” disturbing, said Molly Jong-Fast in *The Bulwark.com*, you’re in denial. Contrast his vengeful behavior with Bill Clinton’s humble Rose Garden speech after his 1998 impeachment trial ended in acquittal. “I want to say again to the American people how profoundly sorry I am for what I said and did to trigger these events,” a chastened Clinton said. Trump, on the other hand, is still insisting that he did *nothing* wrong whatsoever in extorting Ukraine. It was therefore comical to hear Sen. Susan Collins (R-Maine) justify her acquittal vote by saying Trump had learned a “big lesson” from impeachment. Days later, she had to concede, “I may not be correct on that. It’s more aspirational on my part.”

Trump isn’t the only one out for blood, said Matt Ford in *New Republic.com*. Sens. Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa) and Ron Johnson (R-Wis.) have requested Hunter Biden’s travel records from the Secret Service for the period when his father, Joe, was vice president. The Treasury Department—which has gone to court to defy a congressional request for Trump’s tax returns—has already given Republican senators secret bank reports about Hunter Biden’s financial transactions. And Attorney General Bill Barr is scrutinizing information about the Bidens that Trump’s unhinged personal attorney, Rudy Giuliani, has been digging up on his Ukrainian fishing expedition. This really is like “the chilling final payback scenes of *The Godfather*,” said Maureen Dowd in *The New York Times*. Unlike Michael Corleone, however, Trump doesn’t pretend that retribution is “strictly business.” For Trump, “it’s strictly personal.”

Noted

■ The temperature in Antarctica reached its highest in recorded history on Feb. 6: a springlike 65 degrees. Scientists recently announced that January was the warmest month globally in recorded history. *The Washington Post*

■ At least 138 people whom the United States deported to El Salvador have been killed there, and dozens more were sexually assaulted, according to a report from Human Rights Watch. Most of the deaths took place within a year of their return, some within days. The gang-plagued country has one of the world’s highest murder rates, and the number of its citizens

seeking asylum in the United States grew nearly 10-fold between 2012 and 2017. Only about 18 percent are granted asylum. Associated Press

■ Astronomers say that SpaceX’s efforts to build an orbital satellite platform called Starlink has put 240 highly reflective satellites in the night sky, interfering with their telescopes’ ability to see into space. The satellites, sent aloft in recent months by the Elon Musk—



founded company to deliver high-speed internet all over the world, are so bright they can be seen with the naked eye, creating new “light pollution” everywhere. SpaceX plans to launch 30,000 more. *The Atlantic.com*

■ The Department of Homeland Security has spent almost \$1.3 million to buy access to commercial databases that track the movements of undocumented and legal immigrants using data transmitted from apps on their cellphones. The tracking information is apparently being used for enforcement purposes. *The Wall Street Journal*

Romney: Why the GOP is so angry

"Thank you, Mitt Romney," said Michael Gerson in *The Washington Post*. In defying his party by casting the sole Republican vote against acquittal in Donald Trump's impeachment trial, Romney "stood up for the role of individual conscience in our political life." Every other Senate Republican put expedience above principle, knowing that bucking Trump would invite the fury and threats now being rained down on Romney. For conservatives like me, who still believe in public integrity and individual conscience, his act of resistance had great meaning. "Here, finally, was a Republican senator willing to stand up to Trump's tactics of intimidation and bullying." Romney's lonely vote was deeply embarrassing to Trump's defenders, said Josh Marshall in *TalkingPointsMemo.com*. Republican unanimity has "a profound, opinion-shaping, normalizing effect." With his principled stand, Romney exposed his colleagues as cowards hiding behind tortured rationalizations.

Are we talking about the same Mitt Romney? asked Christopher Barron in *The Washington Examiner*. "To pretend that Mitt Romney is motivated by principle is to ignore the entirety of his political career." A hack who's "been on every side of almost every issue of consequence," from



Mitt: Motivated by principle?

gun control to abortion to gay rights, Romney is clearly guided by "political opportunity and public opinion," not conscience. "Let's be clear about exactly what happened here," said David Marcus in *TheFederalist.com*. Romney's maneuver makes him "the crown prince" of the Never Trumpers—a "backward-looking group" of old-guard, elitist Republicans who want to return to some "tired neoliberal globalism." With his vote, "Romney just made himself the most popular politician in the tiniest constituency in America."

If Romney is so insignificant, asked Peter Wehner in *TheAtlantic.com*, why are Republicans so furious at him? Most of them know in their hearts that Trump crossed "a once unthinkable moral and ethical red line" in using taxpayer funds to pressure Ukraine into helping him in the 2020 election. Romney's integrity and courage in putting "country before party" shames them. But Romney's "extraordinary act" gives those on the Left something to think about as well. Democrats who delighted in vilifying Romney as a heartless plutocrat and wooden weirdo during his 2012 presidential campaign might ask themselves if they underestimated him, and if they "allowed their partisanship to overwhelm their sense of decency."

Limbaugh: Does he deserve to be honored?

For three decades, Rush Limbaugh has been "the voice of conservatism," said Matthew Continetti in *NationalReview.com*. The "shocking" diagnosis that he has stage 4 lung cancer, and President Trump's decision last week to award Limbaugh the Presidential Medal of Freedom, offer a chance to reflect on his unmatched influence. Limbaugh, 69, is a self-made college dropout who used talk radio to pick up the mantle of GOP thought leader from the giants William F. Buckley Jr. and Ronald Reagan. Amassing a weekly audience of 20 million, Limbaugh treated politics mainly "as a contest between liberal elites and the American public," entertaining listeners with "the irreverent and sometimes scandalous humor" of the great shock jocks. A fearless provocateur, he popularized such terms as "feminazi" and "the Drive-By media," and inspired a host of conservative radio firebrands and Fox News.

He also made politics vastly more "hateful," said Laura McGann in *Vox.com*. Limbaugh's extremely lucrative brand was built on "xenophobic and patently racist populism." His greatest hits include calling law student Sandra Fluke a "prostitute" for her support for government-funded birth control; mocking feminism as a trick "to

allow unattractive women access to mainstream society"; and mock-quoting then-Chinese President Hu Jintao saying, "Ching chang cho chow." He repeatedly likened black athletes to gang members, called Mexican immigrants "an invasion force," popularized a song calling President Obama "the Magic Negro," and joined Trump in spreading the "birther" conspiracy theory that Obama was born in Africa. Past recipients of the Medal of Honor include Mother Teresa, Nelson Mandela, and Elie Wiesel, said Raul Reyes in *TheHill.com*. For Trump to put this "mean-spirited bully" in these great humanitarians' august company is an insult to their memory.

Trump owes a lot to Limbaugh, said Jackson Katz in *NBCNews.com*. In fact, "Limbaugh's entire career can be seen as an extended prelude" to Trump's presidency. Both are thrice-married rich guys who took up the cause of embattled white males. Limbaugh's biggest contribution to Trumpism, said Paul Waldman in *WashingtonPost.com*, was to persuade his "dittoheads" to "only get information from conservative media, because everything else is a lie." Trump's presidency wouldn't be possible without Limbaugh's relentless assault on "the very idea of objective truth."

Wit & Wisdom

"When the going gets weird, the weird turn pro."
Writer Hunter S. Thompson, quoted in *The New York Times*

"Every man takes the limits of his own vision for the limits of the world."
Philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, quoted in *Lapham's Quarterly*

"Nothing dates harder and faster and more strangely than the future."
Author Neil Gaiman, quoted in *The Atlantic*

"We all hang by a thread, and there are many things we cannot choose about our lives. It's how we react to the inevitable that counts."
Author Mary Higgins Clark, quoted in *The Washington Post*

"Courage is the art of being the only one who knows you're scared to death."
Journalist Earl Wilson, quoted in *the Associated Press*

"I've never any pity for conceited people, because I think they carry their comfort about with them."
George Eliot, quoted in *Forbes*

"There is always some madness in love. But there is also always some reason in madness."
Friedrich Nietzsche, quoted in *Town and Country*

Poll watch

■ More than 90% of Americans say they would be willing to vote for their party's nominated candidate if he or she happened to be Jewish, black, Hispanic, Catholic, or a woman. 66% said they'd vote for a Muslim, and 60% for an atheist. Only 45% said they'd be willing to vote for a socialist.
Gallup

■ 68% of Americans say they are very or extremely motivated to vote this year, while 15% say they are not motivated.
AP News/NORCC