

The Democratic Party, the Biden campaign crisis and the billionaire “donor” class

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The crisis of the Biden election campaign has shed light on a fundamental question—the domination of a financial oligarchy over political life in the United States.

It is remarkable how unabashed the corporate media, the political operatives and the candidates themselves are in discussing the decisive role played by a few hundred ultra-rich “donors” in deciding whether or not Biden remains at the top of the Democratic Party ticket, and, if not, who replaces him.

That the fate of a country of over 330 million people, and, arguably, the entire planet, should in the end be decided by oligarchs who invest in politicians like they speculate in stocks, bonds and cryptocurrencies no longer seems a source of embarrassment, let alone concern, in these circles. The oligarchic principle is so pervasive a fact of political life that the political/media establishment, thoroughly insulated from the concerns of the masses of people, takes it for granted.

A sampling of headlines from major news outlets following President Joe Biden’s June 27 debate debacle gives a sense of this phenomenon:

- “I’m going to be fighting harder,” Biden tells donors after disastrous debate (July 1, NPR)
- “Biden is Like Yoda.” Inside the Big Money Battle to Salvage the Democratic Ticket (July 3, *Wall Street Journal*)
- Big Donors Turn on Biden. Quietly (July 3, *New York Times*)
- Disney heiress, wealthy Democratic donors say they won’t finance the party until Joe Biden drops out (July 4, CNBC)
- Major Democratic Donors Devise Plans to Pressure Biden to Step Aside (July 4, *New York Times*)
- Democratic donors divided on what comes next, buying Biden more time (July 5, NBC News)
- The Week When Big Biden Donors Started Defecting (July 6, *Wall Street Journal*)
- Media, Tech Titans Head to Sun Valley With Biden Future in Doubt (July 8, Bloomberg)
- Biden Tries to Soothe His Top Fund-Raisers on a Private Call (July 8, *New York Times*)
- George Clooney, a Major Biden Fund-Raiser, Urges Him to Drop Out (July 10, *New York Times*)
- How Hollywood’s Big Donors Broke With Biden (July 14, *New York Times*)

The sums of money involved in the presidential campaigns of Biden and his Republican opponent Donald Trump are truly staggering. According to Open Secrets, as of the beginning of July the total amount raised by the two campaigns combined was over \$777 million. This figure takes into account both “candidate committee money” and “outside money.”

The totals for each campaign are almost identical, with Biden having raised \$389,262,000 and Trump having raised \$388,237,000. The campaign of Robert Kennedy Jr. has raised \$98,356,000, and, if added to the totals for the two main candidates, brings the campaign cash take to more than \$875 million.

Based on media reports, it is clear that the bulk of Biden’s activity, no doubt punctuated by cat naps, has consisted of private meetings, online and in-person, with groups of wealthy donors. The president staged a public rally in Raleigh, North Carolina on the day after the June 27 debate. That was his only major public event for the entire week, until his televised interview the following Friday, July 5, with George Stephanopoulos.

His main activity during the week consisted of efforts to shore up his major donor base and limit defections. On Friday night, June 28, Biden met with donors in the New York City area. The following day, Saturday, June 29, he attended a fundraiser at the home of hedge fund manager Barry Rosenstein in East Hampton, New York.

The Biden campaign boasted that weekend that it had raised \$127 million in June, including \$38 million in the last four days of the month. Its cash-on-hand had grown to \$240 million, up from \$212 million at the end of May.

The *New York Times* reported on July 3 about a separate, pre-planned breakfast meeting held Friday morning, June 28, of the Democratic super PAC American Bridge at a resort in Aspen, Colorado. Of the nearly 50 Democratic donors who gathered at the Hotel Jerome, nearly everyone raised their hand when an attendee asked how many thought Biden should step aside as a result of his senile debate performance, according to the *Times*.

Another section of oligarchs, however, is continuing to support Biden, including Reid Hoffman, the billionaire founder of LinkedIn, who is seeking to rally Silicon Valley donors behind the president.

Calling Jamie Dimon

The article noted that “some company leaders and Democratic political operatives” had contacted Jamie Dimon, the CEO of JPMorgan Chase, to “gauge his interest in replacing Mr. Biden.” The *Wall Street Journal* reported on the same effort in a July 3 article, writing, “One person said that while Dimon would enjoy the job of president, he doesn’t want to run in an election.”

Dimon, with an estimated net worth of \$400 million, heads the biggest bank in the world, with \$3.7 trillion in assets. The idea, evidently, is to skip the middleman and put the real boss directly in charge.

On Monday evening, July 1, Biden Campaign Chair Jennifer O’Malley Dillon held a call with some 500 top fundraisers, members of the campaign’s National Finance Committee, in an attempt, largely unsuccessful, to settle nerves and limit the damage caused by the debate.

Biden appeared in person at a fundraiser on Tuesday, July 2, in McLean, Virginia at which he pointed to the \$38 million raised by his campaign since the debate and said, “I’m feeling good about what’s happening.”

But in the ensuing days, a number of multimillionaire and billionaire donors publicly announced they were pausing donations to the Democrats’ presidential campaign until Biden agreed to step aside. The list included Abigail Disney, an heiress to the Disney fortune, Netflix co-founder Reed Hastings, Los Angeles developer Rick Caruso, and Gideon Stein, president of the Moriah Fund, who said he was withholding \$3.5 million in planned donations.

The *New York Times* reported July 4 that a group of ultra-rich Democratic donors, “wielding their fortunes as both carrot and stick,” were working to raise \$100 million for an escrow fund, titled the Next Generation PAC, to support a replacement candidate.

Within this group, the newspaper noted, various donors were “jockeying to position their preferred successor.” The effort was being spearheaded by cryptocurrency billionaire Mike Novogratz and Hollywood filmmaker Andrew Jarecki, according to the *Times*.

NBC reported that Bill Harris, the former CEO of Intuit and PayPal, was offering to put up \$2 million to underwrite a series of debates among potential Biden successors.

Kamala Harris hedges her bets

Vice President Kamala Harris, publicly in lockstep with Biden’s determination to remain in the race, is evidently hedging her bets in private. The *Times* wrote: “People close to Ms. Harris have reached out to influential business leaders to assess how she could go about building her donor base ...”

On the evening of Monday, July 8, Biden campaign chair O’Malley Dillon reconvened the National Finance Committee in an attempt to stanch the bleeding that had only been made worse by the previous week’s call-in. This time, Biden was summoned to participate.

A *New York Times* article on July 8 described in some detail the manner in which the oligarchs put the commander-in-chief through his paces in something akin to a job interview. That morning Biden had issued a letter to congressional Democrats defiantly declaring that he was remaining in the race and demanding an end to speculation about his withdrawing. He called in to the “Morning Joe” television program and denounced Democratic Party and Washington “elites,” who were, he claimed, leading the campaign to force him out.

That did not prevent him from submitting in private to a grilling by the donor elite that very evening. Biden spent four minutes reading prepared remarks and another 14 responding to four questions. Indicative of the pervasive cynicism, one donor, according to the *Times*, “implored Biden to combat the media narrative by bringing back ‘Scranton Joe,’ his blue-collar persona from Pennsylvania.”

Meanwhile, three Democratic governors who have been floated as potential replacements for Biden—Michigan’s Gretchen Whitmer, Pennsylvania’s Josh Shapiro and Maryland’s Wes Moore—were all slated to attend a conference of media and tech moguls last week at the Sun Valley resort in Idaho. Billionaire attendees included Meta Platforms CEO Mark Zuckerberg, Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, OpenAI CEO Sam Altman, Walt Disney’s Bob Iger, Comcast’s Brian Roberts, Warner Bros. Discovery’s David Zaslav and Kenichiro Yoshida of Sony Group.



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