

Media fans speculation over possible Biden presidential bid

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A series of news reports this past week have suggested that Vice President Joseph Biden is considering entering the race for the 2016 Democratic Party presidential nomination against front-runner Hillary Clinton. There has been no word from Biden himself as to whether he would challenge Clinton for the nomination. Instead, the reports, largely based on anonymous sources, appear to be a media trial balloon to test the waters for a potential candidacy by the vice president.

Media speculation began Saturday with columnist Maureen Dowd of the *New York Times*, a well-connected purveyor of political gossip within elite political and media circles, and an inveterate enemy of the Clintons, going back to the impeachment crisis of 1998-99.

Dowd spent the greater part of her column questioning Clinton's electability, pointing to opinion polls suggesting she may trail Jeb Bush in "swing states" such as Ohio and Florida in a potential general election match-up, before reporting that Biden "has been having meetings at his Washington residence to explore the idea of taking on Hillary in Iowa and New Hampshire." Dowd went on to claim, without mentioning a source, that Biden's late son, Beau, while he was dying, had asked his father to run against Clinton for the presidency.

This was followed by a report in *Politico*, once again based on sources who spoke "on the condition of anonymity" that Biden is considering running, "but is not close to a decision." Other reports revealed that former Beau Biden political aide Josh Alcorn is said to have joined a super PAC called "Draft Biden."

None of these stories point to a single substantive issue separating Biden and Hillary Clinton. Both are long-standing and trusted servants of America's

financial elite, advocates of militarism abroad and austerity within the US. Biden positioned himself to the right of Clinton in his brief campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2008, but he may well present himself as to her "left" in 2016, a fact that only underscores the miniscule and largely media-created character of such differences in American bourgeois politics.

The reports only underscore the anti-democratic and manipulated nature of the US presidential election process. Both the Dowd column and a report in CBS News refer to Biden as a potential "backup" should the Clinton campaign become unviable. "[T]here is no backup if something blows up," Dowd writes. In the words of CBS, "Clinton's e-mail troubles and soft poll numbers in some areas have reignited questions about a backup."

Another possibility, put forward by Chuck Todd of NBC's *Meet the Press*, is that Clinton allies are behind the "leaks" on Biden's potential candidacy in order "to smoke him out"—either to force Biden to announce prematurely, without having secured substantial financial backing, or to publicly take himself out of the race. A Biden candidacy would also be directed at containing the campaign of Bernie Sanders, which, while seeking to channel popular opposition to war and social inequality back into the confines of the Democratic Party, has exposed the absence of popular support for Clinton.

The Biden speculation comes after a series of media-generated attacks on the Clinton campaign, spearheaded by both the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*, the leading organs of US liberalism and conservatism, respectively.

The Dowd column, which all but pleads for a Biden candidacy, adds further evidence that the *Times* may be

acting as a conduit for elements in the Obama administration who are moving against the Clinton campaign. Dowd has one unnamed “former top White House official” claiming odium between Obama and Hillary and Bill Clinton. “He has no idea how much the Clintons dislike him,” Dowd quotes the official as saying.

On Thursday, July 24, the *Times* created a media frenzy in a front-page report claiming that inspectors general from the State Department and intelligence agencies had requested a “criminal investigation” against Clinton to determine whether or not she “ mishandled sensitive government information” through office e-mail use while secretary of state.

This story was withdrawn in an “Editor’s Note” published on the second page of the Tuesday, July 28 print edition of the *Times*. The editors admitted that the article had been “based on multiple high-level government sources,” but did not give the identity of any of these Obama administration officials that had supplied false information.

On July 31 the Clinton campaign revealed that the *Times* had refused to publish, or even publicly acknowledge, a 2,000-word rebuttal of the “criminal referral” report, issued by its communications director, Jennifer Palmieri. The *Times* also refused interview requests from *Politico* about the Clinton rebuttal.

“We feel obliged to put into context just how egregious an error this story was,” Palmieri wrote in the letter to Dean Baquet, *Times* executive editor. “We remain perplexed by the *Times*’ slowness to acknowledge its errors after the fact, and some of the shaky justifications that *Times*’ editors have made.”

There is even less popular enthusiasm for a Biden candidacy than there is for Clinton. But this is not the decisive issue. As an analyst told Todd on Meet the Press, it is “the money question.” Will enough billionaires respond to the Biden rumors to make his candidacy credible?

Biden has twice sought and failed to achieve the Democratic Party nomination. In 1988 he withdrew after the campaign chair of the eventual nominee, Michael Dukakis, revealed that Biden had plagiarized portions of his campaign speeches from British Labour politician Neil Kinnock. In 2008 he quit after the Iowa caucuses where he garnered less than 1 percent of the vote. He then endorsed Barack Obama against chief

rival Hillary Clinton, for which he was rewarded with the vice presidency.



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