A modest proposal from Thomas Friedman

New York Times columnist urges Biden “national unity” cabinet

Patrick Martin
10 April 2020

Former Vice President Joe Biden is rapidly consolidating his position as the Democratic nominee-to-be, in the wake of Bernie Sanders’ announcement Wednesday that he is suspending his campaign.

Numerous right-wing politicians, Democratic and Republican, have rallied to his side, from Senator Michael F. Bennet, the Colorado Democrat whose brother runs the editorial page of the *New York Times*, to Republicans once enthusiastically loyal to Trump, including former White House communications director Anthony Scaramucci, and George Conway, husband of White House counselor Kellyann Conway, who has established a group of anti-Trump Republicans calling itself the Lincoln Project.

The American population as a whole is less enthusiastic about Biden. In May 2019, shortly after entering the presidential contest, Biden had a favorability rating of 49 percent. Nearly a year of campaigning, including 11 debates and a recent string of victories in key primaries, including South Carolina, Texas, Massachusetts, Michigan, Illinois and Florida, and Biden’s favorability rating has actually dropped six points, to 43 percent, only two percent ahead of Trump.

In the period leading up to Sanders’ withdrawal, the Biden campaign made a show of accommodation to the Vermont senator and his supporters. Press reports said that two longtime Biden advisers, Anita Dunn and Ron Klain, negotiated with Sanders’ top two aides, Jeff Weaver and Faiz Shakir, over health care, climate change and other issues.

In an appearance on The Late Show with Stephen Colbert, the evening of his withdrawal from the race, Sanders expressed the hope that Biden would move to the left to appeal to his supporters. “He’s not going to adopt my platform,” Sanders said. “I got that, alright? But if he can move in that direction, I think people will say: ‘You know what, this is a guy I think who we should support and would support’.”

Biden is a well-known quantity to the American financial oligarchy, a tried and trusted defender through his 36 years in the US Senate and eight years as Barack Obama’s vice president. At a fundraising event last year, he assured his well-heeled audience that “nothing would fundamentally change” if he were elected to replace Trump in the White House.

Wall Street signaled its approval for Biden in a mini-rally Wednesday afternoon, which began shortly after Sanders made his formal withdrawal from the race. Though long expected, this action nonetheless triggered a celebration on the stock exchange, as health insurance companies surged by five percent or more, now that the highest profile advocate of “Medicare for all” had been sidelined.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average shot up 500 points in a few hours. Biden is widely seen as the more market-friendly candidate, Chris Zaccarelli, chief investment officer for Independent Advisor Alliance, told the *Washington Post*in an email. The newspaper also noted, “After Biden’s stunning Super Tuesday victory, the Dow spiked 1,200 points.”

It should go without saying that the billionaires know their Biden, and that the remarks of Sanders are part of his continuing effort to pull the wool over the eyes of his supporters among working people and young people and divert the mounting social anger in America, under conditions of a massive public health crisis that has produced an economic breakdown, back into the Democratic Party.

Perhaps the most revealing exposure of the nature of the Biden candidacy comes in a commentary published

© World Socialist Web Site

Wednesday by *New York Times* op-ed columnist Thomas Friedman, under the headline, "What America Needs Next: A Biden National Unity Cabinet."

As usual with Friedman—an advocate of the Iraq War, the US bombing of Libya, and other imperialist war crimes, and, most recently, of Trump's "back-to-work" campaign in the midst of the coronavirus epidemic—crass political cynicism parades as "thinking bold thoughts."

Friedman denounces Trump, but his real concern is that the swelling popular hatred of this administration over its entire right-wing course, culminating in the COVID-19 disaster, could break beyond the bounds of official politics and threaten the two-party system and capitalism itself.

Hence his proposal that Biden head up a cabinet that would encompass the entire spectrum of bourgeois anti-Trump politics, "from Democrats on the Bernie Sanders left to Republicans on the Mitt Romney right."

The reason for this proposal, according to Friedman, is that it will be necessary for the next US government, following in the wake of the coronavirus disaster and the debacle of the Trump administration, to beat down popular demands for accountability, whether for the failure to detect and forestall the pandemic, or the plundering of national wealth through the corporate bailout.

He raises the prospect that a resurgence of coronavirus could lead to demands to "track and quarantine Covid-19 carriers" that could "rip our country apart" and destroy civil liberties, as well as "wrenching debates around who got bailed out and who didn't."

The personalities Friedman nominates for Biden's cabinet give a glimpse of the right-wing character of the future government the *Times* columnist envisions. These include a slew of billionaires, including Michael Bloomberg as treasury secretary, Bill Gates in charge of Health and Human Services, and Laurene Powell Jobs, widow of Steve Jobs, as secretary of education (exchanging a liberal billionaire for the current right-wing billionaire Betsy DeVos).

Joining them would be corporate CEOs like Walmart boss Doug McMillon and former American Express boss Kenneth Chenault, as well as top Republicans: Mitt Romney as secretary of state (a position the Utah senator formerly sought from Trump!), and Ohio Governor Michael DeWine as budget director.

This thoroughly right-wing crew would have a bit of a "left" fig leaf, according to Friedman: Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez as UN Ambassador; Sanders co-chair Ro Khanna to head the Department of Labor; and Elizabeth Warren to oversee "trillions of dollars in emergency coronavirus spending, to make sure it's done fairly and productively."

The last proposal would have Warren reprise the role she played in the Obama-Biden administration, when she served as left cover for the pro-corporate Wall Street bailout of 2008-2009.

Friedman would put New York Governor Andrew Cuomo in charge of the Department of Homeland Security and install top Clinton adviser Michele Flournoy as Pentagon chief (another huge step forward for gender equality!). He does not suggest a CIA director, although perhaps Friedman is modestly reserving that position for himself, given his longtime role as a conduit and cheerleader for the intelligence apparatus.

This political daydream ends on a thoroughly sinister note. Friedman admits that the coronavirus crisis has tested American society and found its government and health care system thoroughly deficient. He concludes, "If we fail to use this crisis to get healthy again—as a people and a government—it will not only be remembered for the vast death and destruction it wrought, but it will be remembered as the moment America ceded its global leadership to China."

So there it is. The real significance of the COVID-19 crisis, as far as this advocate and apologist for Wall Street and the Pentagon is concerned, is not the harrowing death toll, the vast human suffering, the colossal economic dislocation. It is the fact that American imperialism is losing significant ground to its global rivals. As far as the *Times* columnist is concerned, that is the real reason for a national-unity cabinet: to mobilize the resources of American capitalism for coming global struggles for dominance, up to and including world war.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site