

Biden denies sexual assault allegation, but Democrats' nervousness about his candidacy grows

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2 May 2020

On a television talk show Friday morning, Joe Biden, the leading candidate for the Democratic Party's 2020 presidential nomination, denied an allegation of sexual assault that has been leveled against him.

Tara Reade, a former Biden staffer, claims the incident occurred in 1993 when the former vice president was a Senator from Delaware. There were no witnesses, Reade never contacted the police and the statute of limitations has long since run out.

Biden told MSNBC interviewer Mika Brzezinski the allegation wasn't true, "I'm saying unequivocally that it never, never happened."

Pressure had mounted on Biden as the week went on to break his silence on the issue. It is unlikely, however, that his categorical denial will put the story to rest. On the one hand, the Republican Party and certain #MeToo elements will continue to pursue the issue for their own respective political ends.

Beyond that, however, the controversy has gained additional and significant traction due to nervousness within the Democratic Party and the American ruling elite generally about Biden's candidacy under conditions of an unprecedented social and economic crisis and the emergence of widespread popular opposition. Considerable skepticism exists about the ability of the 77-year-old Biden, who finds it difficult at times to respond coherently to reporters' questions, to confront an explosion of working-class anger.

Reade's persistence, the various forces fanning the controversy and Biden's silence on the issue until yesterday have played a role in keeping the issue alive. But, as noted, the critical factor is growing disquiet about the former vice president's political fitness in the context of the pandemic crisis and the disappearance of millions of jobs.

While *Politico* headlined a lengthy recent comment, "Tara Reade allegations rattle Biden's VP search," Jeff Bezos's *Washington Post* suddenly editorialized Thursday that "Biden himself should address the Tara Reade allegations and release relevant records." The editorial called on Biden to allow a search of his papers donated to the University of Delaware, on condition they not be opened until after his retirement, for any complaint Reade might have made.

The *Post* also urged "the candidate himself" to be more forthcoming: "Mr. Biden may have little to say besides what his campaign has already said—that he did not do this, and that this is not something he ever would do. Yet the way to signal he takes Ms. Reade's case seriously, and the cases of women like her seriously, is to go before the media and the public ready to listen and to reply." Biden's appearance on the talk show Friday morning was an attempt to satisfy that demand.

The fear of the ruling class about the storm to come remains a central issue. As the *New York Times*' Thomas Friedman observed in a column last month, "while most people are playing nice right now managing this virus, the wreckage, pain and anger it will leave behind will require

megadoses of solidarity and healing from the top." As the present crisis abates, conflicts will break out, Friedman predicted, over who was saved "by Washington's trillions of dollars" and who wasn't—"the societal stress is going to be enormous."

The Democratic hierarchy was preparing, although not without trepidation, to present a public display of unity behind Biden, a tried and trusted representative of the financial oligarchy. Replacing Donald Trump with Biden would not have any positive results for the mass of the population, but there are financial, political and foreign policy issues that divide the American ruling elite. The elements aligned with the Democrats are obliged under the present circumstances to determine whether Biden is a political asset or liability. Meanwhile, as the *Hill* reported Thursday, Hillary Clinton "waits for the call." Clinton, the publication writes, "continues to hover in the wings, ready to step forward should Joe Biden fail. Don't look now, but Joe is failing."

Of course, the filthiness of official American politics and the commitment of the media to appeal to the basest instincts and interests also play a role in the ongoing coverage of Reade's allegations, which seem to lack much credibility.

Tellingly, the Biden-Reade issue dominated the American news media in recent days, as the body count climbed and the brutal demands that employees go back to unsafe, perhaps lethal conditions in plants and other workplaces became more insistent.

In part, the promotion of the Reade accusations is a deliberate effort to divert attention from the social and economic calamity. However, it is a fact of political life in America that while the deaths of 65,000 people and the collapse of jobs and incomes have not shaken the Democrats, who are as callous and removed from the crisis as Donald Trump, a sex scandal is another matter.

Reade's allegations are treated seriously, not because of their intrinsic importance, but because of the social layers with whom they resonate, the upper middle class on which the Democrats rest and rely.

The *Times*, the *Washington Post* and other major media outlets ignored the claims for weeks, hoping they would disappear on their own. However, having fashioned and animated the Frankenstein monster of a sexual harassment witch hunt, they now discover it is not so easy to make their creation go away. This "fiend" too, like the original, "can create desolation."

Prominent figures in the Democratic Party, including Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, Nancy Pelosi, Kirsten Gillibrand, Kamala Harris, Amy Klobuchar, Stacey Abrams and others, are presently "standing by" Biden and choosing to accept his claims of innocence. That support could evaporate overnight, or even more rapidly, if confidence in the former vice president deteriorates further.

The hypocrisy of the various #MeToo Democrats, who have applauded

or even helped engineer the destruction of various “powerful men” since October 2017 on the basis of flimsy evidence, or none at all, is breathtaking.

Gillibrand, Democratic Senator from New York, who played a leading role in forcing then-Senator Al Franken (Democrat from Minnesota) to resign over trivial sexual misbehavior in early 2018, continues to back Biden on the grounds that the former vice president has “devoted his life to supporting women and he has vehemently denied this allegation.”

It takes gall for Gillibrand—who, along with Harris, Klobuchar and Abrams, has vice presidential ambitions of her own—and others to take special note of Biden’s strenuous denials. As though declarations of innocence by the accused, vehement or otherwise, have carried the slightest weight during the neo-McCarthyite campaign of the last several years.

One is obliged to point out yet again how cynical and empty the #MeToo campaign and its slogans have proven to be. They were and remain principally means of channeling the indignation and discontent of the affluent petty bourgeois in a rightward direction. When it seemed expedient to destroy careers and lives on the basis of unsubstantiated, unproven and often anonymous charges, the media, the Democrats and their “left” hangers-on went ahead with their dirty work without batting an eye.

“Believe women” was the watchword. It seems pointless to recall how many times that slogan was trotted out by media and political figures in 2017, 2018 and 2019—and with what nearly bottomless sanctimony!

It turns out that battle cry needs a slight adjustment.

During the confirmation hearings of now-Justice Brett Kavanaugh in 2018, Gillibrand, for instance, tweeted, “The fundamental question we must answer right now: Do we value women? Do we believe women? Do we give them the opportunity to tell their story? To be heard? Will we ensure they get the justice they deserve? We must fight to be a country that answers, ‘Yes,’ every time.”

Every time except this time, it seems. With remarkable sophistry, Gillibrand now says, “So when we say believe women, it’s for this explicit intention of making sure there’s space for all women to come forward to speak their truth, to be heard. And in this allegation, that is what Tara Reade has done.” *Hearing* is not the same thing as *believing*.

Stacey Abrams, the former Georgia state legislator and right-wing racist, has also qualified her 2018 comments about ensuring “that survivors who wish to come forward can do so safely, and be believed.” She recently told CNN, “I believe that women deserve to be heard and I believe that they need to be listened to, but I also believe that those allegations have to be investigated by credible sources.”

Gillibrand, Abrams and the others simply hope the public suffers from amnesia. “Believe women” meant just what it said: there was not much need, if any, for additional proof, an allegation of sexual misconduct was proof enough—especially if the “victim” was accusing an influential male figure.

Along those lines, *Washington Post* columnist Monica Hesse bluntly urged in 2018, at the time of the Kavanaugh hearings, “In other words, believe them [women] when they tell stories of assault and harassment. Victims’ lives are rarely made easier by levying accusations against powerful perpetrators, which means that if a woman has come forward, she’s probably doing so at personal cost. So believe her.”

Biden offered the same reasoning at the time. When a woman “comes forward in the glaring lights of focus” to make an allegation of sexual abuse, he said, “you’ve got to start off with the presumption that at least the essence of what she’s talking about is real.”

Actress Alyssa Milano, who popularized the slogan #MeToo in October 2017, is standing by Biden and has also discovered that “Believe women” is not sufficiently nuanced. In a column on *Deadline* (“Living in the Gray as a Woman”), Milano outlines her general world view. Living “in a

culture whose structures fundamentally thrive upon the objectification and oppression of women,” the actress writes, has “forced so many women to make impossible choices between working with the very people who oppress us in order to have a chance at gaining power or not working with them, and staying under their thick, hairy thumbs.”

Nonetheless, because the “world is gray. And as uncomfortable as that makes people, gray is where the real change happens,” Milano is sticking with Biden, apparently “thick, hairy thumbs” and all. Although her endorsement is not exactly categorical: “The allegations against Joe Biden concern me, deeply. He’s a man I know, respect, and admire, and who I can’t picture doing any of the things of which he’s accused. But I’ve thought that before, and been wrong. And sexual assault is always wrong.”

Columnist Jessica Valenti, #MeToo crusader and middle-class moralizer par excellence, won’t give up so easily on “believing women” under any and all circumstances. In an April 30 column for *Medium* (“The Importance of Believing Women—Even When It’s Politically Inconvenient”), Valenti, formerly of the *Nation* and the *Guardian*, contends that if Reade “is smeared as a liar or opportunist by a movement that claims to believe women, what moral standing will we ever have again?”

Without providing the slightest evidence Reade is telling the truth, Valenti goes on to argue that “it is feminists’ responsibility to come to the aid of a woman who accuses a powerful man. We can listen to her story, believe her, and speak out about what Biden has done—not just to Reade, allegedly, but to the many women he has made feel uncomfortable or diminished over the years.” Remarkably, Valenti too, however, concludes that “Doing all of this doesn’t mean we can’t vote for Biden”!

In any event, the accusations against Biden have left his #MeToo supporters twisting and turning.

For the working class, the crisis of the Democratic Party over a sexual misconduct allegation under the present disastrous circumstances should be further proof that this is a big-business party and resolute enemy of their interests and needs. A clean historical break with the Democrats and the turn toward socialism is on the order of the day.



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