

BLITZ PRIMARY

BRIEFING MEMO: OPTIONS FOR AN OPEN NOMINATING PROCESS FOR THE 2024 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

If President Biden chooses not to run for another term, the Democratic Party will need to quickly and decisively lay out a fair process to select its new nominee. A consensus is fast building that this unprecedented challenge can be turned into an unprecedented opportunity for the Party and the country. **The purpose of this briefing memo is to show how, providing a menu to decision makers of the most compelling – and, critically, *practical* – options for the Party’s first-ever “special primary.”**

First, there is the question of anointing Vice President Harris or inviting her into an open process. While there are convincing opinions on both sides of this, our conclusion after weeks of consideration and study, is that anointment would set her and the Party up to fail.

- Vice President Harris may well be the best alternative, but she will be vastly stronger if she wins the nomination. If she stands next to several other inspiring leaders and dazzles the country – emerging not just among Party elites, but among the general public as someone who generates passion and enthusiasm, not just the “less bad” option – she will be set up for exponentially more success in the General Election and in her first term.
- Party members will be effectively disenfranchised if Harris is simply anointed as the sole alternative to Biden. While President Biden was correct to note recently that 87+ percent of Democrats voted for him in the primary, *none* voted for Kamala Harris to be the Presidential nominee.

More importantly, though, anointing Harris would cause the Party to miss a remarkable opportunity to capture the nation’s imagination between now and the Convention. If handled poorly, the new process will reinforce America’s cynicism and fatigue. In contrast, an inventive, confident and inclusive nominating process would reinvigorate the Party and draw in millions of disengaged voters. America is hungry, even desperate, for a wholesale reset of this election. We can flip the script, create suspense, showcase the Democratic Party’s dynamic energy and deep bench of talent, and suck much of the oxygen out of the Trump campaign.

The question is how. Several creative plans have been advanced in the past two weeks that offer viable paths forward. We have called our vision the **Blitz Primary**; similar plans have been referred to as a mini-primary or open primary. This memo culls the best ideas from each,

providing a brief overview of how such an accelerated process would work from the 10,000-foot level and then how each of its three fundamental phases would work:

- **Phase I:** Selecting Candidates
- **Phase II:** Introducing Candidates to the Public
- **Phase III:** Selecting Our Presidential Nominee

A special primary by any name would not only produce the best nominee. It would also be perhaps the best opportunity in years, if not decades, for the Democratic Party to reclaim its role as the party of the people – and to reinvent itself as the party of the future.

OVERVIEW

Bold approaches to an open nominating process all involve these common elements:

- **ASAP:** In an iconic speech, building on his belief that we must all unite to save the soul of the country, President Biden announces he will stand aside after one of the longest, and one of the most productive, careers in public service – securing his place in history alongside George Washington as one of the rare leaders willing to relinquish power and pass the torch to a new generation of inspiring leadership.
 - He designates a small committee to manage the process of selecting new candidates for consideration (some combination of, e.g., Barack Obama, Nancy Pelosi, Chuck Schumer, Hakeem Jeffries, or other respected Party leaders that can reflect the sentiments of Americans who cherish and wish to preserve our democracy).
 - He makes clear he will use his campaign infrastructure and funds to support the new process and eventual nominee.
- **Phase I:** Within days, using a fair and transparent process, the Party selects a slate of dynamic candidates for a compressed open nominating process, i.e., special primary. All pledge to run positive campaigns and support the eventual nominee.
- **Phase II:** The Party's immense creative talent produces a compelling process leading up to the Convention. Televised forums introduce the candidates to America, while simultaneously expanding the Party's reach and appeal.
- **Phase III:** The Convention draws a massive audience, as Americans wait to see who becomes the new nominee. Millions of once-disengaged voters re-engage, grateful for a fresh alternative to a Biden/Trump rematch.
- **November:** Our unifying nominee wins handily while lifting down-ballot candidates.

After weeks of collecting and synthesizing the best ideas, we have concluded that there are multiple solid, fair and manageable options for each of these phases. The rest of this memo outlines these options and sets out their pros and cons.

PHASE I: CANDIDATE SELECTION

Mutually Exclusive Options to Identify a Manageably Sized Group of Candidates

Option 1: Current Party Convention Delegates submit their top three choices (unweighted). The candidates getting the top six (could be fewer) ‘votes’ are notified and encouraged by process chairs to step up. If someone declines, go further down the list. All strictly confidential. Goal is to generate a list of 4-6 candidates.

Pros: Simple. Respects the role of delegates. Results in a manageable number of candidates. No one comes across as clawing for power.
Cons: Process driven solely by delegates.

Option 2: Interested candidates declare intent to be considered and then quickly campaign to gain support from the DNC’s 448 voting members in a short process. Those obtaining at least 40 endorsements qualify to be on the ballot at the convention. Process designed to include potential candidates from each DNC region – East, South, Midwest and West. Candidates submit applications for certification by the DNC secretary.

Pros: Direct engagement between candidates and DNC.
Cons: Discounts the role of delegates. Risk that some potentially strong candidates do not toss hats into the ring out of fear of displeasing Biden or Harris. More complex.

Option 3: Candidates selected based on polling data based on name recognition, favorability, match-up with Trump.

Pros: Quick.
Cons: Prioritizes those with a running start. May lead to haggling over cut-off points. Disregards voice of delegates, DNC, and Party leadership.

Option 4: Pool of candidates selected by respected Democratic Party leaders (e.g., Biden, Obama, Bill Clinton, Pelosi, Schumer, Jeffries), after a rapid (1-3 day) period of consultation with other top elected Democrats in Congress and at the State level.

Pros: Leaders may bring greater insight and expertise in identifying the strongest candidates than delegates can bring.
Cons: this option puts party leaders on the hot seat. Top-down, without grassroots involvement.

Note: Regardless of the option selected, we recommend that all candidates be required to commit to running 100% positive campaigns until a ticket is selected—and to campaigning like hell for the eventual nominee. The spirit of this process is friendly collaboration among candidates fighting to save democracy.

PHASE II: INTRODUCING THE CANDIDATES TO THE PUBLIC

Not Mutually-Exclusive Options

Option 1: Conventional televised forums moderated by familiar TV news figures. Candidates respond to questions and make their case to voters. Weekly or two times each week, leading up to the Convention.

Pros: Familiar to voters. Signals business-as-usual from the party. Will draw diligent voters assessing candidates.

Cons: Same things. Doesn't innovate. May draw small viewing audiences.

Option 2: Get creative. Televised forums (1-2 times per week until the convention).

Illustrative, non-exhaustive list of potential moderators and topics (note, none have been approached yet):

- ***Oprah Winfrey***: Personal Journeys - and Your Big Dreams for America
- ***Mr. Beast, Zendaya***: America's Future... and Issues Facing Youth
- ***Bernice King, Pr. Rick Warren, T.D. Jake, Rabbi Sharon Brous***: Faith, Character, Service, & Leadership
- ***Lin-Manuel Miranda, Henry Louis Gates, Doris Kearns Goodwin***: Lessons You Will Draw from American History
- ***Leading Economists***: Your Path to Prosperity & Lower Inflation?
- ***Tim McGraw, Common, and Yo-Yo Ma***: American Arts & Culture... and Your Human Side
- ***Condoleezza Rice, Robert Gates, Admiral Bill McRaven, Gen. Stanley McChrystal***: National Security in the 21st Century
- ***Kara Swisher, Reed Hastings***: Technology, Innovation, and the Next American Century
- ***Michelle Obama, Liz Cheney, Adam Kinzinger, Ben Sasse***: Bringing America Together

Pros: Potential to draw significantly larger audiences. A powerful way to broaden our base of motivated voters. Forums personal, engaging, and fascinating. Excerpts go viral on social media. Breaks from the tired path of pundits posing questions on tariff policy, with candidates delivering short, canned responses.

Cons: Requires more creativity and effort; need to quickly reach out to potential moderators and networks (note that this is already being done, informally)

PHASE III: SELECTING OUR NOMINEE

Option 1: An open convention where delegates in Chicago decide on a presidential nominee, taking as many ballots as necessary for a single candidate to achieve a majority.

Pros: Familiar path used in the past. Lots of suspense as the process unfolds. Could lead to an exciting, mediagenic convention.

Cons: Risks include chaos, bickering, ugly backroom deals, etc. Could lead to a horror show; endless balloting; televised party infighting; narrative about a bitterly divided party.

Option 2: The day before the Convention, delegates submit ranked-choice votes among the six candidates in a secure, confidential process. On day one of convention, top three names revealed. On day two, top two revealed. On final day, winner revealed.

(Vice President chosen by nominee, drawing guidance how others performed during the nominating process.)

Pros: Outcome predetermined before delegates convene in Chicago, eliminating onsite sniping and ugly bartering. Ideal for building suspense into the four days of the Convention. Ensures we select the candidate with the broadest appeal. Educates the nation on the merits of RCV. Lends itself to a suspenseful roll-out over the first three days of the Convention as the field is narrowed by RCV's re-ranking process.

Cons: Open to criticism for being too 'reality TV.' Leaks could be disruptive. (Timing can be potentially compressed to address both issues.)

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Phase I (Candidate Selection):** Options 1 and 4 offer the best opportunities to identify the 4-8 strongest candidates in a manner that balances fairness and transparency with speed.
- **Phase 2 (Introducing Candidates to the Public):** Option 2 offers the best opportunity to reach a large viewing audience and engage the disaffected-- in a way that will pay dividends after the convention.
- **Phase 3 (Selecting Our Nominee):** Option 2 offers the best opportunity to build suspense in a positive way while minimizing the risk that convention devolves into chaotic interparty warfare.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Much like American democracy, the Democratic Party is in crisis. If President Biden remains at the top of the ticket, or if Vice President Harris is anointed as his chosen successor, we won't flip the script between now and the election – and we instead risk limping toward near-certain defeat.

We all know that Donald Trump will exploit every vulnerability in his opponent for his own gain. While on first blush, an open primary seems as if it could expose new vulnerabilities by inviting internal competition and debate instead of immediate party unity in the event of President Biden dropping out, that unity would be feigned at its best – and allowing a well-managed competition would only project inner strength and self-confidence. By contrast, a nominee who is viewed as never having earned her own Party's endorsement is inherently weak.

If we have one message in these high-stakes days less than one month out from the Convention, it that **it's still not too late to turn this crisis into a historic opportunity for the Party and the nation**, at least not yet. This memo highlights our analysis today of how to do so, but it does not provide an exhaustive list of options, and we recognize other paths are of course also possible.

Still, all viable options share the potential for the same fundamental effect: **they will push the “reset” button for the general election and generate enormous voter enthusiasm** across generations, regions, race, faith, and even ideology as the country meets the candidates and as the Party projects enough confidence in its core and 'big-tent' nature to invite debate and the exchange of big ideas among its leaders. In so doing, we also draw a stark contrast to the cult of personality that is now the Republican Party's core, on full display at the Trump National Convention.

Consultations with historians, social scientists, legal scholars, political strategists, polling experts, media leaders, and above all voters, make it clear that the American public is desperate for new energy and ideas.

The Democratic Party is in a position to provide exactly that if we can find collective courage to seize the moment and do what we have always done best as a Party in our finest hours—not only what's right, but what's *inspiring*.