Opinion
Guest Voices
Pope Francis and U.S. President Joe Biden meet privately on the margins of the Group of Seve

Pope Francis and U.S. President Joe Biden meet privately on the margins of the Group of Seven summit in Borgo Egnazia, in Italy's southern Puglia region, on June 14. (CNS/Vatican Media)



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Americans idolize youth. We want something new, fresh and beautiful. Wrinkles are not badges of wisdom and maturity. They are ugly and need to be stopped with Botox.

Today, we have an elderly pope in Rome, an elderly president and an elderly Republican candidate for president.

Because the 87-year-old pope has difficulty walking, the media were constantly talking about the possibility of Pope Francis resigning. People forget that a president in a wheelchair got us through the Great Depression and World War II. The ability to walk is not essential for popes or presidents.

In any case, the media stopped talking about the pope resigning after he performed so well in an extensive interview on "60 Minutes" and CBS News. He was attentive, his answers were clear and his pastoral personality shone through. He hit the ball out of the park. Although some people did not like some of his answers, no one could judge him incapable of performing his duties.



Pope Francis sits down exclusively with "CBS Evening News" anchor Norah O'Donnell at the Vatican April 24, 2024, for an interview ahead of the Vatican's inaugural World Children's Day. The CBS interview marked the first time a pope has given an in-depth, one-on-one interview to a U.S. broadcast network, according to CBS. A roughly 13-minute portion of the interview aired May 19 on "60 Minutes," CBS' long-running newsmagazine, with the balance of the session to be broadcast in a one-hour prime-time special May 20. (OSV News/Adam Verdugo, courtesy, 60 minutes, CBS NEWS)

Sadly, 81-year-old Joe Biden's performance in the debate with his 78-year-old opponent was not as encouraging, to say the least. Rather than reassure the public, as the pope's appearance on CBS did, the debate reinforced concerns about the president's age, and caused handwringing among Democrats about whether it would be a permanent setback or something he can overcome in time.

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Biden's opponent was combative and on message, even though almost every word out of his mouth was a lie. The president's performance made us sad; Donald Trump's performance was scary.

Also scary are the people with whom the former president will surround himself if he returns to the White House. The presidency is not a single person; it is also all the people the president brings to the executive branch to run the government. Many of the experienced people who surrounded Trump in his first term have denounced him and endorsed Biden. The second Trump presidency will be filled with incompetent sycophants.

Beyond the personalities of the candidates, there are systemic issues that got us where we are today.

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First, the Republican Party for decades was run by corporate interests who used popular grievances about race and religion to win elections so they could push through lower taxes and fewer regulations. Republican demagoguery opened the way for a demagogue to take over the party from the corporate elites and party professionals who ran the party in the past. Pragmatism gave way to the politics of grievance, which said that getting even was more important than getting anything done.

The Democrats, on the other hand, retooled party politics by replacing their own party bosses with primary elections as the method of arriving at a nominee after the disaster of the 1968 Chicago convention. But in the absence of party elders, money and media now determine who gets nominated.

As primaries took hold in both parties, too, the most radical voters, unchecked by party professionals, gained sway. Rather than moving toward the middle to win elections, the candidates now move to the extremes to appeal to those who hold the most ideological positions.

In the past, Republican Party bosses could have stopped Trump. Remember, Barry Goldwater told Richard Nixon that he had to go to end the Watergate scandal. Democratic Party professionals could have told Biden to quit after four years. Remember, Lyndon Johnson stepped aside for his more progressive veep, Hubert Humphrey.

Today, no elected Republican who faces a primary has the courage to speak out against Trump. Nor is it likely Democratic professionals could get Biden to step aside and then coalesce around a new candidate without a political bloodbath. Every candidate puts self over party.

Today's politics makes one yearn for the days of Chicago's Mayor Richard J. Daley. Party bosses brought us the likes of Harry Truman and John F. Kennedy. True, there was graft and corruption, but at least the garbage was collected. And a multitude of political professionals is better than one-man rule.

Money and media celebrities are running the country without any check. It is time to reverse this trend by giving some power back to political professionals.

This story appears in the **Election 2024** feature series. View the full series.