

Editorials are the institutional voice of The Free Press and independent of the newsroom reporting staff

## OUR VIEW: DEBATE

# Female candidates face unfair standard

While Wednesday's vice presidential debate was a welcome relief from the verbal carnage that was the presidential debate, it remains troubling how Democratic vice presidential candidate Kamala Harris had to defer and demur because she is a Black woman.

We should be sick of this.

### Why it matters:

American cultural standards continue to normalize discrimination against women.

The moderator, USA Today Washington Bureau chief Susan Page, continually allowed Vice President Mike Pence to go over his time limit and unfairly often cut off Harris when Harris tried to do the same, even responding to criticism of her record.

Debate analysts noted that Harris likely felt the need to defer and not express her frustration for fear of looking like an angry Black woman to an

audience that still has systemic racism and prejudice in their consciousness.

As a result, the debate was unfair to Harris.

Still, under the circumstances, she did remarkably well, making her points assertively — but not overly so — and directly. She answered more questions directly than Pence, who answered almost none directly. Again, the Black woman had to show respect to the moderator while the white man didn't.

It's a double standard we should consider in the context of the debate. If it was a draw, Harris should get extra consideration for the racial barrier she faced.

While analysts pointed out Harris was probably purposely not "creating a moment" because the Biden-Harris ticket is up in the polls by double digits, it's unfortunate candidates for the highest office have to adhere to such limits in the year 2020.

Women, and Black women especially, are held to a higher standard in American politics than white men. None of us should be proud of that.

## OTHER VIEW

# Trump hasn't learned by doing

Los Angeles Times

"Don't let it dominate your life"? Seriously? This is the lesson the president of the United States learned after the first few days of his infection with COVID-19?

The disease has not merely dominated many Americans' lives, it has ended 210,000 of them — and counting. It has infected more than 7 million people in the United States, leaving many survivors with continuing and, for all we know, lifelong impairment. In just the last week, President Trump, his wife, his campaign manager, his press secretary, several of his top aides and advisors, three U.S. senators and a still unknown number of supporters contracted the disease after flouting the most basic standards of prevention and protection during this worldwide pandemic: Keep at least six feet away from others. Wear a face mask. Don't take heedless risks.

Medical protocol calls for all of them to be isolated, with symptoms carefully monitored, for at least 10 days. Their carelessness endangered themselves, their families and, because of the positions they hold, the entire nation.

And yet those were Trump's words Monday after a long weekend at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, where he received a level of care unmatched on the planet. "Don't be afraid of Covid. Don't let it

dominate your life. We have developed, under the Trump Administration, some really great drugs & knowledge. I feel better than I did 20 years ago!" the president tweeted.

A few days earlier, on arriving at Walter Reed, he had left a sliver of hope that maybe, just maybe, his unfortunate experience had given him some insight into the virulent and potentially deadly disease that he has managed so poorly. "It's been a very interesting journey," he said in a statement videotaped at the hospital. "I learned a lot about COVID. I learned it by really going to school. This is the real school, this isn't the let's-read-a-book school. And I get it and I understand it and it's a very interesting thing and I'm gonna be letting you know about it."

For a few moments, it was possible to think that this man of so little feeling for others had finally been clued in. That's the Hollywood script, the Dickens story updated for modern times, and in this case the liberal fantasy: After years spent mistreating others, the antihero gets a taste of his own medicine, is transformed by the redemptive power of suffering, learns charity and compassion, and becomes a blessing to others.

But as his tweet Monday showed, that's not the insight Trump has taken away from his coronavirus infection.



YOU WANT THE GOP TO PAUSE NEGOTIATIONS ON A COVID PACKAGE UNTIL AFTER THE ELECTION?

# Olson brings people together

This letter is in support of Jon Olson for Minnesota Senate District 20. Early in life, his family taught him to live a life of integrity, hard work and service — and that is just what he has done.

This retired Navy commander served for 21 years across the globe with others from all walks of life. Now he is ready to put all the leadership skills he has gained to work for us here in Minnesota.

Olson will work as our advocate for equal access to affordable patient focused health care, reliable broadband service for rural areas, small businesses as well as working families, and equal educational opportunities for our children. These are but a few issues in his platform. His online platform has many details on all of the issues.

Olson believes in working hard to bring people together to solve problems so everyone benefits and to work with integrity rather than with partisan games.

Carol Burns  
Cleveland

## Elect Feehan and return decency to D.C.

When I consider Rep. Jim Hagedorn's career in Washington, I am reminded that the acorn does not fall far from the tree.

After a lackluster time in Congress serving corporate and foreign interests, especially the dictatorship in Nicaragua, his father, Tom Hagedorn, was defeated. He was soundly beaten by a young moderate Democrat, Tim Penny, who served us honorably.

Now we have Jim Hagedorn, a mini-Trump, parroting his boss's views on the COVID-19 pandemic and possibly exposing others so he could ride on Air Force One with his hero.

His opponent, Dan Feehan, will stand up to lobbyists, not join them. He served two tours in the military in Iraq after enlisting after 9/11 and has been a teacher and public servant.

Let's return decency to D.C. and vote for Feehan for Congress.

Marcia Stapleton  
Lake Washington

## Feehan has strong leadership skills

There is a clear choice for Minnesota's 1st Congressional District and that is Dan Feehan. He represents his constituents and does not accept corporate PAC money. His intelligence and experience in education, military, health care, and public policy are what we need.

Jim Hagedorn has shown that he does not represent the citizens of our district. He has consistently voted against our interests, favoring the big

banks and drug companies that he is beholden to, which has caused our drug prices to soar in the past two years.

Hagedorn is part of the problems we currently see in Washington, where big money controls his party. Even Hagedorn's campaign has been riddled with scandals and questionable financing that we taxpayers are stuck paying for.

I was very moved by Feehan's speech at the candlelight vigil held in St. Peter last month for Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. He eloquently stated what all of us attending were feeling at the time, and it was very comforting.

Feehan has the experience. He worked in the Obama administration as an acting assistant secretary of defense in the Pentagon. Prior to that service, he served our country as an active duty soldier, completing two combat tours of duty in Iraq.

We will not be able to recover from the economic problems we are facing until we elect strong leaders who represent us, not Wall Street and big corporations. I urge citizens of the 1st District to elect Feehan, who will bring courage, experience and leadership that is so desperately needed right now.

Cynthia Shirk  
Mankato

# Keeping the focus on Trump — and Biden

WASHINGTON — No matter how hard, in his quiet and earnest way, Vice President Pence tried to turn Wednesday's vice-presidential debate into an assault on Joe Biden, Sen. Kamala Harris and reality itself forced the discussion back again and again to the failures of the Trump administration.

If Pence's goal was to disrupt the trajectory of an election that has been moving the Democrats' way, he plainly failed. And Harris succeeded by declining to make herself a center of attention. She acted instead as advocate for Biden and a sharp, detailed but tonally restrained critic of the current occupant of the White House.

From the very first question, Harris was on the attack, calling the Trump administration's handling of the coronavirus pandemic "the greatest failure of any presidential administration in the history of our country."

"They still don't have a plan," she said. "Joe Biden does."

Pence hit back by claiming that Biden's plan for the virus was similar to Trump's and accused the vice president of "plagiarism." He thus snuck into the debate — jarringly — an issue from Biden's youth that plagued the Democratic nominee in his first quest for the presidency more than three decades ago.

But Pence's defensiveness only underscored how the damage inflicted on the country by COVID-19 has allowed Biden to build his large lead in the polls. And Harris, calmly and forcefully, came back to the pandemic and health care whenever she could.

"There is a weird obsession President Trump has had with getting rid of any accomplishments achieved by President Obama and Vice President Biden," she said, referring to Trump's dismantling of parts of Obama's efforts to protect against pandemics. "We are now looking at 210,000 Americans who have lost their lives."

It was hardly a major achievement that the vice-presidential debate delivered more tranquility and civility than last week's encounter between Trump and Biden. But the candidates did underscore how wild and chaotic Trump's performance had been. Paradoxically, Pence's reserved demeanor may have done more to harm than help the candidate whose cause he was promoting, by reminding viewers Trump's extreme lack of discipline.

Pence's interruptions of Harris suggested he forgot that Trump had made disruption a mortal sin. Harris called him on it repeatedly. She made "I will not be lectured" one of her refrains. It no doubt resonated with many women watching.

Pence likewise talked over moderator Susan Page, who nonetheless succeeded in imposing a certain order on the evening.

Vice-presidential debates are rarely consequential, but Wednesday's was at least as important as the 2008 encounter in which doubts about then-Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin's capacity to be president made her confrontation with Biden especially important.

This time, the ages of the nominees — Trump is 74, and Biden will turn 78 on Nov. 20 — increase the actuarial possibility that Pence or Harris could succeed to the presidency, a consideration brought home especially in Pence's case by Trump's COVID-19 infection.

Whatever else happened on Wednesday, both vice-presidential nominees reassured members of their own parties, and perhaps beyond, that they are fluent in policy and capable of holding their own in a test of wits.

But it was Harris, the less familiar figure to many voters, who made the most of the evening. She was skilled at using Pence's attacks to provide listeners with new information helpful to her ticket.

Thus, when Pence accused Democrats of being anti-Catholic for their

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handling of Trump's nomination of Amy Coney Barrett to the Supreme Court, Harris pointed out that both she and Biden were "people of faith." She said that she was "insulted" by Pence's attacks and noted that Biden would, in fact, be only the second Catholic president.

And when Pence attacked Biden's economic plans, Harris used his criticisms to place herself and Biden in the great tradition of lunch-bucket Democrats — and managed to convey more detail about Biden's plans than Biden himself had in his own debate. She spoke of how Biden would make it easier for young people to attend college, for all Americans to get health care — and stressed that Biden would not raise taxes on anyone earning less than \$400,000 a year.

Although Pence presented himself as a traditional if somewhat syrupy midwestern, conservative Republican, it was a sign of how the ideological pendulum is moving away from the right that he chose to downplay conservative positions.

On climate change, for example, he said "we'll follow the science," an approach conservatives have rejected for years. He insisted that Republicans would protect the health insurance of those with pre-existing conditions, the very protections he and Trump would scrap by repealing Obamacare.

For Harris, there was comfort in coming back again and again to hailing the man who put her on the ticket. "Joe Biden has a history of lifting people up," she said at the close of the debate, "and fighting for their dignity." She had a job to do. She did it.

E.J. Dionne is on Twitter: @EJDionne.

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