

Beltway's big question: Biden's not really running again, is he?

[Ed Morrissey](#) May 19, 2022 10:11 AM ET



AP Photo/Alex Brandon

Will he or won't he? The Hill's Amie Parnes and Hanna Trudo [claim today](#) that the question on everyone's lips in Washington is whether Joe Biden's serious about running for re-election in 2024. It certainly beats asking about Democrats' prospects in the midterms, which likely will be the first real test for that question:

The 79-year-old Democrat and his closest allies say he wants a second White House term and plans to run again. Biden told former President Barack Obama he intends to launch another bid.

But that hasn't silenced the whispered questions about whether he will do so given his age — he will be 81 in November 2024 — and his rocky approval ratings.

The party is also bracing for a difficult midterm election season, and some think negative results could change the president's calculations.

"If he's weakened, the sharks will be circling the tank," said one Democratic strategist who asked to speak candidly on background.

Will be? It's practically Sharknado already, and would be if Democrats had a bench of candidates that made any sense.

Jimmy Carter's presidency is the best analog to Biden's term, but Biden's performance in office is far worse. Carter suffered a mild setback in the 1978 midterms, losing three Senate seats, but that still left Democrats with a 58-41-1 majority. Carter also lost 15 House seats but Democrats still dominated with a 277-seat caucus. Carter's confidence-crisis cascade didn't really manifest itself until his third year in office after the "malaise" speech and the Iran hostage crisis, and he drew a strong primary challenge from Ted Kennedy anyway. Carter beat back Kennedy but lost in a landslide to Ronald Reagan in 1980, 51/41 in the popular vote and 489-49 in the Electoral College.

Kennedy had been groomed for that presidential bid, and had Chappaquiddick never happened, likely would have at least made Democrats competitive in 1980. In contrast, who do Democrats have on the bench? There's Kamala Harris, but as Parnes and Trudo politely hint, Harris is a *disaster*. Her approval ratings are below Biden's, her public appearances turn into word-salad comic routines, and she hasn't got the sense to work with people to improve her performance. "

“Yet her missteps in office and her struggles as a presidential candidate in 2020 have raised questions about her political strength,” they write with almost comic understatement. Swapping Biden for Harris would gain Democrats nothing but derision.

Who else? Parnes and Trudo mention Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders, but they couldn't derail Biden two years ago. They're also the last gasp of the Boomers in an electorate where Boomers are getting vastly outnumbered (an issue that Republicans should consider as well). Pete Buttigieg is at the other end of that spectrum, unaccomplished as well as incompetent at dealing with the supply-chain crises that have plagued the Biden administration. Besides, why run a Biden White House official to replace a deeply unpopular Biden? This situation requires an outsider, not an insider. Voters certainly aren't looking for *continuity* in this inflationary and catastrophically incompetent environment.

Normally, a party in this position would look to its gubernatorial ranks for an outsider rescue. Democrats tried that in 1988, picked the wrong governor, and then got it right in 1992 with the centrist Democratic Leadership Council-endorsed Bill Clinton. The DLC folded in 2011, however, as progressives insisted that they would drive the Emerging Progressive Majority. As a result, they have a series of non-entity leftists in a reduced number of gubernatorial seats and practically no bench of candidates with enough cross-over appeal to win the presidency.

Andy Beshear might fit the bill in Kentucky, but when was the last time anyone heard about Andy Beshear, especially from his own party? He'd have to campaign not just against a sitting president for the nomination, but against the progressive weight of his own party. Biden might be unpopular enough for such a challenge, but unlike Kennedy in 1979, Beshear wouldn't have any support for such a bid, politically or financially, and not just

because of a circling of wagons around the incumbent.

There really isn't any question at all about Biden's 2024 bid. If he's still breathing, he's running, because Democrats really have no other option.