

# A Centrist Democratic Candidate is Needed in 2020 to Beat Trump and Change the Rhetoric

by Elliot Benjamin, Ph.D., Ph.D. January, 2020

**AUTHOR'S NOTE:** *This article is a modified and extended version of my previous two articles that can be found at [bit.ly/integrative\\_dem](http://bit.ly/integrative_dem) and [bit.ly/impeach\\_finally](http://bit.ly/impeach_finally) (cf.<sup>7</sup>). References and notes for this article are available from [lavoz@esperanzacenter.org](mailto:lavoz@esperanzacenter.org) (see also the above websites).*

In September, 2019 I facilitated a discussion in London sponsored by the British Association of Humanistic Psychology that was stimulated by my talk entitled Creative Maladjustment, Progressive Politics, and Humanistic Psychology<sup>1</sup>. The discussion was engaging, stimulating, lively, and was filled with much passion and sensitive listening, as many of us shared our respective alarming concerns about the present drastic political situations in the United States and Great Britain. The discussion topics ranged through merging progressive political action into humanistic psychology, the dehumanization of excessive social media manipulation, hate crimes stimulated by the rhetoric of U.S. president Donald Trump and U.K. prime minister Boris Johnson, the normalization of prejudice, discrimination, and violence, the escalation of violent extremist reactionary movements, the destruction of democracy, and a number of other topics. But what struck me the most as I think about all that I experienced that evening, was a repeated passionate plea from Brian Thorne, who is an international humanistic psychology leader and authority on the work of Carl Rogers<sup>2</sup>. Brian Thorne eloquently, passionately, and persistently conveyed that what was needed was a “change in the rhetoric”; i.e., a change in rhetoric from hatred and violence to compassion and love<sup>2</sup>.

When Brian eloquently conveyed his argument for a change in the rhetoric, I immediately thought about the U.S. democratic presidential candidacy of Marianne Williamson<sup>3</sup>, and I portrayed my thoughts to the group. Marianne Williamson has been well known in American “new age” circles as a spiritual guru for over 40 years<sup>4</sup>, and her reaching the presidential debate stage for the first two democratic primary debates was quite impactful to me. True to her character and her political writings<sup>3</sup>, Marianne spoke up in the debates, whenever she was given any speaking time, for the “spiritual” needs of America, as she talked about the “dark psychic force” that is permeating us (Corasaniti, 2019) and the

need for Americans to “reach into our hearts to reclaim our love for democracy and the passion for the possible”<sup>3</sup>.

However, at the present time in the U.S. we are smack in the middle of whether we are going to be able to successfully navigate Brian Thorne’s plea for a “change in the rhetoric.” President Trump has been impeached in the House<sup>5</sup>, though I think

it is highly unlikely that he will be removed from office in the Senate (Drew, 2019; Dartagnan, 2019a). But for me the worst nightmare is the thought that through Trump’s wealth and political influence, his social media manipulation inclusive of support from Facebook<sup>6</sup>, the very possible renewed election interference from Russia and other countries (Falconer, 2019), and numerous additional disturbing scenarios, inclusive of the horribly dangerous scenario of a possible war with Iran stemming from Trump’s January 2, 2020 unilateral decision to

assassinate Iran’s top general (Slavin, 2020), it is quite possible that we could have Trump for 4 more years.

In this regard I have serious concerns about the prospect of defeating Trump in 2020 by a Democratic presidential candidate who is “too progressive,” in particular by Elizabeth Warren or Bernie Sanders<sup>7</sup>. In spite of the fact that my own personal leanings certainly favor the political platform of Warren or Sanders, I am very afraid that the system of the U.S. electoral college with its priority of reaching a sufficient number of middle-of-the-roads in the battleground states could easily backfire in terms of defeating Trump if the Democratic candidate is too progressive<sup>7</sup>. Along these lines, a number of Republicans, spearheaded by attorney general William Barr, have made continuous efforts to try to invalidate the whole impeachment process and take the rhetorical emphasis away from impeachment and move it toward criminally investigating the “origins of the Mueller report” (Dartagnan, 2019b; Glasser, 2019; Sherman & Palmer, 2019; Sumner, 2019). And it appears from a Gallop poll released on the morning of the impeachment vote that showed an increase in Trump’s favorability ratings and a decrease in support of impeachment (Cillizza, 2019), that these Republicans may have been at least partially successful.

The picture is certainly very complicated and difficult to



know what is true. For example, there was a December 10, 2019 article entitled *Donald Trump Beats Every Democrat Frontrunner in Three Key Battleground States Amid Impeachment: Poll* (Walker, 2019). However, the poll conducted in this article was done by a Republican public affairs firm, and a number of things about the methodology is not known, such as the survey questions, response rates, etc. (Walker, 2019). But then again, a gallop poll conducted a few hours before the 12/18/19 House impeachment vote appears to reinforce the alarming thrust of this article (Cillizza, 2019). On the other hand, a Christian Evangelical magazine, *Christianity Today*, published an article calling for the removal of Trump from office

(Galli, 2019). But then a number of follow-up articles in *The New York Times* conveyed that this magazine represented quite a small portion of evangelicals, although Trump is taking it quite seriously with a harsh condemnation of the Christian magazine that published the article and his initiation of an Evangelicals for Trump coalition (Dias, 2019; Dias & Peters, 2019; Posner, 2019). However, *Christianity Today* got a big subscription boost that was three times the number of subscribers they lost as a response to their article (Pennyfarthing, 2019). So is the tide starting to turn against Trump? I certainly hope so, but this leads me back to my contention that a Democratic centrist candidate is needed to beat Trump in 2020 and change the rhetoric.

What concerns me the most is related to the realities of the U.S. electoral college, which boils down to the disturbing scenario that to win the 2020 presidential election it is necessary to reach enough voters in a handful of battleground states<sup>7</sup>. I don't think the strong pro-Trump supporter base is going to change their adoration of Trump no matter what violations Trump has committed, but I think there are a number of voters in these battleground states who perhaps are "mild" Trump supporters or bona fide middle-of-the-roaders, and it is these people that I think the Democrats absolutely need to persuade to vote Democratic in 2020, or at least stay home and not vote for Trump<sup>8</sup>. In spite of my own personal inclinations toward Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren, I believe that either of these candidates will alienate the above voters in the battleground states that are desperately needed to beat Trump<sup>8</sup>. I see the picture even more bleak if we have a gay Democratic candidate, as Pete Buttigieg has recently been on a surge (Nilson, 2019), and I certainly don't think that billionaire centrist Democratic candidate Mike Bloomberg is going to reach these voters<sup>9</sup>. I think that Demo-



*I am very afraid that the system of the U.S. electoral college with its priority of reaching a sufficient number of middle-of-the-roaders in the battleground states could easily backfire in terms of defeating Trump if the Democratic candidate is too progressive<sup>7</sup>. Credit: Bernie Sanders, Miller Center; Elizabeth Warren, Buttigieg, Stoyer, Gage Skidmore*

cratic centrist candidate Amy Klobuchar has some qualities that could appeal to these middle-of-the-roaders, but I also think, unfortunate as it is, that these voters need a "safe white male candidate" if there is any hope of wooing them away from the "cult of Trumpism" (Benjamin, 2018). But perhaps a Democratic ticket of Biden/Klobuchar would be the strongest case against Trump.

As I conveyed in my earlier essay<sup>7</sup>, this leads me once again to promote Joe Biden as the best (perhaps only) possibility to get rid of Trump. Yes, Biden gets mixed up and gets himself into trouble by too frequently saying things unintentionally that are disturbing to large segments of the voting population<sup>10</sup>. But I don't think that Biden lacks the mental faculties to be an effective president of the U.S., and I

was relieved to see him give a strong gaffe-free December, 2019 debate performance (Podhoretz, 2019). There are certainly things that I find disappointing in Biden, not the least of which is his support of Israel in regard to the issues of the mistreatment of Palestinians (Staff, 2019). But my priority is to beat Trump in 2020, and I believe that if the candidate is not Biden then Trump will be able to effectively keep enough of his base and middle-of-the-roaders in the battleground states to pull off another 4 years. For it would be "crazy Bernie" the communist and "Pocahontas" (Trump's condescending nickname for Elizabeth Warren) taking away your health care insurance choices, destroying the American dream of success, letting immigrants come into the country to take your jobs and kill your children, etc. Trump knows very well that Biden would be a severe challenge for him, and this is why I believe he has done all in his power to get rid of Biden, which is how impeachment finally came out of the woodwork and succeeded.

In conclusion, I will say that I am trying my best to not sink into calamity thinking, such as move to Canada, etc., but rather to maintain a positive state of mind that the "change in the rhetoric" toward human empathy and compassion that Brian Thorne eloquently called for during my London presentation will prevail, along with the defeat of Donald Trump in 2020.

*BIO:* Elliot Benjamin is a philosopher, mathematician, musician, counselor, writer, with Ph.Ds in mathematics and psychology and the author of over 150 published articles.

*EDITOR'S NOTE:* We encourage readers to send in their opinion articles on the 2020 Presidential race. However, *La Voz de Esperanza* does not endorse candidates for any office.