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Elected Democrats are Conformist Enablers of Biden for 2024

Recent news reports have been filled with results of one poll after another after another showing that President Biden continues to weaken as a candidate for re-election. With an overall approval rating now 21 points underwater, polling shows he has lost support among key demographics that made his 2020 victory possible – especially the young and people of color. Alarm bells among pro-Biden pundits have finally begun to break the political sound barrier.

But on Capitol Hill, all's quiet on the Democratic front.

A gap has grown vast between current assessments from media, largely based on voter opinion data, and current public claims from congressional Democrats who keep their nose to the talking-points grindstone. An effect is that party leaders and backbenchers alike are losing credibility with the party's base.

The gap is so lopsided that a poll this month found 67 percent of “Democrats and Democratic-leaning independent voters” said they don't want Biden to run again. Meanwhile, no more than 1 percent of Democrats in Congress are willing to say so in public. By any measure, a disconnect between 67 and 1 percent is, uh, substantial.

For Democratic lawmakers to be so untethered from the people who elected them tells you a lot about the compliant relationship that usually prevails among elected Democrats toward President Biden. And it signifies an unhealthy relationship between Democrats in office and the party's activist base.

While supposedly representing a progressive grassroots base to the political establishment, some members of Congress end up routinely representing the political establishment to the progressive grassroots base.

The dire need for progressive advances in government policies is undermined when elected Democrats reflexively echo the Biden 2024 campaign line and pretend that he's a sufficiently strong candidate to defeat the neofascist Republican Party next year. When deferring to congressional Democrats who in turn defer to the man in the Oval Office, progressive activists and organizations end up functioning more like supplicants than constituents in a representative democracy.

Top Democrats and their allies have publicly touted the canard that cast Joe Biden as a hero of last year's midterms. The intoxication from that messaging was in sharp contrast to the sober clarity from a re-elected House Democrat who spoke to the New York Times "on the condition of anonymity to avoid antagonizing the White House." The newspaper reported that the congressman said "Biden's numbers were 'a huge drag' on Democratic candidates, who won in spite of the president not thanks to him."

Polling in the 10 months since then indicates that Biden would likely be an even huger drag on Democratic candidates a year from now. But hope springs eternal, and so does fear of angering the White House. With the start of presidential primaries just a few months away, the crux of the matter is that Democrats in Congress are opting for self-focused, risk-averse conformity rather than visionary leadership.

Now — while even pro-Biden media like CNN and MSNBC are, at last, sounding more realistic about Biden's severe electoral deficits — prominent Democrats are either keeping quiet about the grim odds of a 2024 political train wreck or are spouting feel-good nonsense worthy of the myopic Mr. Magoo. The more that Democrats in the House and Senate declare how great Biden will be as the party's standard-bearer next year, the more it seems they've been swallowed up by a Capitol Hill bubble.

Yet mainstream media outlets are now underscoring the wide distance between the Democratic players on the Hill and the Democratic voters who've put them there. NBC News brought it all into focus, summing up: "When party elites look at President Joe Biden, they see the second coming of Franklin D. Roosevelt. When voters view the president, many see an old man."

More importantly, many hear timeworn ideas and promises that ring hollow. Working-class voters can see and hear a president who has refused to really fight for their economic interests, while corporate greed has been raising prices. It's an invitation to eye-rolling from core Democratic constituencies when Biden and his advocates proclaim how he's going to go all-out to fight for their interests in the second term after he hasn't done so in the first.

To Democratic officeholders, worried about retaining the presidency and their own seats, such matters might seem relatively unimportant. But bleak electoral consequences are foreseeable. Biden has declined to use the bully pulpit to battle for progressive measures that are poll-tested and popular with the electorate.

Democrats in Congress have ample reasons to be apprehensive about next year. But their silences and spin increasingly make them look more like PR specialists than leaders. The more they prop up Joe Biden to run for re-election, the better Donald Trump likes the odds he'll return to the White House.

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