

Grasping Reality with Both Hands

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Bob Kuttner Behaving Badly—Noted

I have learned an awful lot from and have a great deal of respect for Robert Kuttner. America owes him a great deal—much more than it knows. But. This—rarely for him—is stupid.

First of all, it is written as if Biden has it in the bag, and Trump will be a bad dream as of January 21, 2021. Lots and lots of people in the fall of 2016 thought that HRC had it in the bag, and so started to nibble away to undermine her in order to position themselves more advantageously for 2017. Here is Kuttner doing the same thing for 2021. It's a bad, immoral thing to do. Stop it. Biden does not have it in the bag.

Second, everybody whom Biden appoints will be to the left of the governing coalition in the Senate, which is the veto point here. Thus whether Biden's appointees make Robert Kuttner happy in meetings and when he contemplates their influence does not matter. What does matter is whether Biden's appointees execute so that things get up to the Senate, and whether they are able via popular mobilization and clever framing and legislative tactics to move the governing coalition to the left. I understand that Kuttner does not like Jennifer Hillman and Miriam Sapiro. I understand that Kuttner does not like Steve Ricchetti and Anita Dunn. I understand that Robert Kuttner does not like Sergio Aguirre and Nitin Chadda and Michele Flournoy and Tony Blinken. In a different day, with a different Senate, I could be persuaded that some of all of them would be bad choices for a Biden administration. But not today. That Kuttner does not like them is at best orthogonal to whether Biden should pick them:

Robert Kuttner: *The Trouble With Biden’s Big Tent* <https://prospect.org/politics/the-trouble-with-biden-big-tent/>: ‘It papers over some irreconcilable differences of policy and principle. Sooner or later, Biden will have to choose which side he’s on...

...There is also the case of Biden’s very progressive policy proposals and his not so progressive senior campaign team. As I’ve previously written regarding his highly detailed releases on industrial policy, infrastructure and jobs, they are terrific.... Meanwhile, however, his closest-in advisers are mostly centrist Democratic operatives closely associated with all that was wrong with the Obama and Clinton years. Steve Ricchetti, a top campaign aide and former Biden chief of staff, is a Wall Street guy and a lobbyist. Anita Dunn, the campaign’s chief strategist, is also a longtime corporate lobbyist.

As Jonathan Guyer reported in an investigative piece for the Prospect, recently lifted without credit by The New York Times (shame!), Biden’s foreign-policy team is both orthodox and riddled with conflicts of interest. In one true progressive in Biden’s inner circle is his longtime Senate chief of staff, Ted Kaufman.... But it’s not clear how much influence Kaufman has today in Biden’s inner, inner circle...

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