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OUR VIEW

Bloomberg can make anyone a farmer

Democratic presidential hopeful Michael Bloomberg is finding out that things you said in the years prior to the campaign can come back to haunt you.

In the past weeks, the electorate has been treated to the recorded wit and wisdom of Bloomberg on a variety of topics ranging from health care, the ability of black and Hispanic men to comport themselves in the workplace, and the nature of crime in poor neighborhoods.

Bloomberg is a self-made billionaire, probably the richest and one of the most accomplished people ever to make a run for the presidency. He is a man of great achievement. But like many such men, he fancies himself an expert in many fields.

He apparently doesn't think much of some fields.

In 2016, he made a speech at Oxford University's business school. He was making a point about the sophistication needed to succeed in the modern, technology-based economy. Compare that to agriculture.

"The agrarian society lasted 3,000 years and we could teach processes. I



AP Photo/David J. Phillip, File

Democratic presidential candidate and former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg speaks during his campaign launch of "Mike for Black America" at the Buffalo Soldiers National Museum earlier this month in Houston.

could teach anybody, even people in this room, no offense intended, to be a farmer," Bloomberg told the audience at the Distinguished Speakers Series at the University of Oxford Saïd Business School. "It's a process. You dig a hole, you put a seed in, you put dirt on top, add water, up comes the corn."

And what of those who work

the factories?

"You put the piece of metal on the lathe, you turn the crank in the direction of the arrow and you can have a job."

Compare farming and factory work to jobs in the tech-based economy that require workers to "think and analyze."

In Bloomberg's world, these trades are just matters of process where success can be accomplished by rote. Dig a hole, plant a seed, add some water and you get a crop. Easy peasy.

If only it were so.

In fairness to the candidate, it is possible, four years on, that these comments have been taken out of context. Speech writers often employ over-simplification to move the narrative along, so perhaps this was a bit of hyperbole to make a point.

Nonetheless, we can't help but contrast the text of Bloomberg's remarks to a speech given in 1956 by then-President Dwight Eisenhower at Bradley University in Peoria, Illinois.

The topic of that speech was the negative impact of command-and-control farm programs conceived and executed by "synthetic farmers behind Washington desks." To hear Eisenhower tell it, without any practical experience those guys thought they could tell anyone how to farm, too.

"Farming looks mighty easy when your plow is a pencil and you're a thousand miles from the corn field," he acknowledged.

It sure does.

OTHER VIEWS

Here's how Bernie can beat Trump — possibly

Bernie Sanders' sweeping win in the Nevada Democratic caucus will surely prompt the Russians to pop Champagne. They've been reportedly boosting Bernie behind the scenes, having calculated that a 78-year-old socialist with a tricky ticker in his chest is the foe most likely to lose to their stooge. They're surely marveling at their good fortune, at how easy it has been to conquer America without firing a shot.

Even though I'm on record believing that Bernie would crash in November, and even though his lefty pipe dream of all-government health care (forcing 160 million Americans to lose their private coverage) would likely erase the suburb-driven blue wave that swept House Democrats into power, and even though skepticism about Bernie is so endemic that 65% of Americans now believe Trump will win a second term (new CBS News poll), I'll try to be a good sport.

Among the Democratic candidates, only Bernie has demonstrated that he can stoke voters under age 30. They've grown up alienated from both party establishments, with millions burdened by college debt, mindful of the ever-widening gap between the rich and everyone else. Of all the age cohorts, theirs is by far the most supportive of democratic socialism. To win in November, Democrats need young people en masse, and Bernie alone would pull them into their coalition.

Bernie, more than any of his rivals, is connecting with young Latinos. Hispanic Americans have long been called a "sleeping giant," because their ballot participation — relative to their population — has been markedly lower than other minorities. Bernie, with his potential strength among the youngest adults in that community, could awaken the giant. That could have a big impact on one potentially crucial state on election night: Arizona.

Bernie's economic populism can potentially attract a lot of the white working-class voters in key Rustbelt states. Remember how Hillary Clinton narrowly lost Michigan to Donald Trump? Well, eight months earlier, white working-class voters helped Bernie beat Hillary in the Michigan Democratic primary. If Bernie wins the 2020 nomination — which now looks more likely than not — he can pitch again to those vot-

ers (especially women), contrasting his economic agenda with Trump's track record, which features a tax cut law that made the rich richer.

Democrats and left-leaning independents, desperate to halt the slide toward authoritarianism, will vote blue no matter who. By late autumn, all partisans will bury their qualms and unite for the common cause of saving democracy. One Democrat's tweet summed it up: "I'll vote for Bernie if he's the candidate. I will also still think he and most of his supporters are assholes."

Bernie could pick a running mate that broadens the ticket's appeal. Nobody seems to be talking about this factor. Given his age, his determination to hide his heart attack medical records (renewing on his promise to release them), and his need to at least calm the Democratic establishment, his veep choice would be of paramount importance. A smart choice would be someone who helps put in play the swing states (Pennsylvania, Michigan, Wisconsin) that put Trump over the top in 2016 — or add states that weren't in play last time (Arizona, North Carolina, Georgia, Florida).

Do you buy these arguments? Trump certainly doesn't.

If he feared Bernie as an opponent, he'd be trashing him. Instead, Trump's been rooting for Bernie at every turn. If and when Bernie wins the nomination, the GOP slime machine will kick into gear. Rest assured, if the Republicans and their allies could successfully trash John Kerry's war medals, imagine what they'll do with the 1980s videos that show Bernie praising the Soviet system — and marveling at the subway station chandeliers.

And even if Bernie does inspire massive turnout among habitual nonvoters, 2016 third-party voters, and young minorities, who's to say that his presence won't inspire massive turnout among dormant Trump voters? As progressive analyst Ruy Teixeira warns, "It is truly magical thinking to believe that, in a highly polarized situation, only your side gets to increase turnout."

But I should stop. I promised to be nice.

Dick Polman is a veteran national political columnist based in Philadelphia and a Writer in Residence at the University of Pennsylvania.



DICK
POLMAN
COMMENT



YOUR VIEWS

Sounds like DMV hoping for a miracle with 'Real ID'

I have been reading about California's problems in updating driver licenses to the "Real ID," which will be required in October of this year to meet TSA's requirements. At least they have been attempting to process their millions of requests.

Here in Oregon, we took to opposing the process back in 2009. That's OK, but come this October if you don't have a passport or Real ID, you won't be able to board a plane — period. In October of 2019 the Oregon DMV's recommendation was "get a passport." In their press conference they

stated "they cannot legally begin to provide Real ID cards until July of this year."

If my math is right, if there are a million residents who want to get that ID (that's about 25% of the total population). DMV will have to process those million requests in four months. I find it interesting that in that press release they don't really mention what the "legal" issue was.

Sounds like they were just hoping that some miracle would just make the whole thing disappear. There are going to be a lot of very unhappy people come October 2020.

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