

Eyeing the White House: The Democratic Field

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Region: [USA](#)

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*Not so much hunting season as declaratory season in US politics. The US presidential candidates from the Democratic side are making promises spiced with forced excitement in anticipation of the 2020 elections. This early morning of the public holiday of Martin Luther King, Jr., US voters were given a spray of enthusiastic promises by yet another potential candidate for the White House: **Senator Kamala Harris**.*

The Democratic field is wide, expansive and not necessarily satisfactory in coping with the Trump phenomenon. The orange hell beast still has them in a tangle, the anti-thesis yet manifestation of so much that is US political behaviour. **Former Vice President Joseph R. Biden, Jr.** and **Senator Bernie Sanders** bear the heavy baggage of wearing and timing. Sanders' failure, one also assisted with the customarily ruthless guile of the Clinton machine in 2016, will handicap him. Biden seems primed for the sunset ride rather than the imperial throne.

Senator Elizabeth Warren, who fell for the gibes and challenges of President Donald Trump on the issue of Native American heritage, pushed her way into contention with an [announcement](#) on the eve of the new year that the White House was in her distant sights. Even Warren's own hometown publication, *The Boston Globe*, felt that she might not make the cut and should best [forget](#) it. The reason? Divisiveness.

Groups such as the Progressive Change Campaign and Justice Democrats [disagree](#), insisting that Warren embraces "multiracial populism" in an effort to tackle "Trump's divide-and-conquer agenda". Such formulae, however, do little to deal with the actual divisions that translate into votes, whatever the clotted rhetoric suggests. What the Trump era has shown with such brutal force is that division does win depending on where the votes fall. The demagogic factor is no longer a matter of fringe politics.

In terms of her messages, Warren does sound like Sanders lite, with distinctions: focus on the mad cat banking sector; focus on the predatory nature of the US political system and its links with finance, but not remove the problem the private sector poses to politics and the general US citizen.

For one thing, she [wishes](#) her Accountable Capitalism Act to propel worker representation on corporate boards while encouraging corporations to be kinder in terms of how they benefit their stakeholders - not just the investor but the worker. (Sanders, by way of contrast, wishes to be rid of the sheer influence of Wall Street, unconvinced about its salvaging properties or the ability of it to be tamed.) Superficially, both sound similar.

"The problem we've got right now in Washington," Warren made clear in her announcement, "is that it works great for those who've got money to buy

influence, and I'm fighting against that."

On the issue of campaign funding, Warren is also staking her claim to purity.

"I don't think we ought to be running campaigns that are funded by billionaires, whether it goes through super PACs or their own money that they're spending."

Rep. Tulsi Gabbard is another figure who has added her feelers to the presidential race. In many ways she remains one of the more interesting prospects, being suitably oleaginous to the political establishment to worry it. In 2017, for instance, she did the unthinkable for the morally righteous core of politics in Freedom's Land: she met Syrian **President Bashar al-Assad**.

Rather sensibly, and hardly revolutionary, she [suggested](#) that it was

"very important for any leader in this country to be willing to meet with others, whether they be friends or adversaries or political adversaries if we are serious about the pursuit of peace and securing our country."

Given the absence of moral cant from such attitudes, she is bound to struggle with the chest-beating moral mongers.

As for the latest sprightly addition, Senator Harris cannot be accused of having an allergy against opportunism. She did not, for one, feel the need for any exploratory committees. The release of her [video](#) on Monday morning, to be catalogued along with commemorations of King, is typically decorative, the flimflam of political ornamentation.

"Justice. Decency. Equality. Freedom. Democracy. These aren't just words. They're the values we as Americans cherish. And they're all on the line now."

Harris has the whiff of the political animal about her, enough so to garner interest in circles regarding her record as San Francisco district attorney and attorney general for the state of California. The very fact that she was a prosecutor has niggled contributors to column space. Briahna Gray [poses](#) the question on whether a prosecutor can "become a president in an age when black lives matter". The view there is that prosecutors side, by definition, with the system, and replicate its faults.

As Gray [reminds](#) us, Harris criminalized truancy and went softly on the misconduct of her prosecutors. She took issue with a finding by a federal judge that the death penalty was unconstitutional. All of these points might just as well be used to *favour* her candidacy: the one who could be tough at points on crime (though not the causes of crime), and modestly enlightened on others.

Finding the progressive ship in US politics is a near impossible task. The forces of reaction find company with those of conservatism, and in a state steered by two right wings, the progressive aspiration is firstly stifled, then asphyxiated.

Harris, for that reason, must do as other contenders will: pretend to be something she is not,

and dissimulate accordingly. She will certainly run as a progressive, but her record in the law will stalk her. It would be best, however, to forget the tag, label or designation of progressive in the broader field now coming to bear. What will matter is whether the populist sting in the electorate remains strong in 2020.

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