

# The Delray Democrat

## This Is What a President Looks Like<sup>1</sup>

*Michael K. Cantwell*

If you've attended a protest march anytime during the past few decades, you're familiar with this powerful Call and Response:

***Show me what democracy looks like***

***This is what democracy looks like!***

It's a bittersweet sensation. You feel as if in some temple of democracy but can't hide from the fact that we do not live in a democracy. If we did:

- government would be addressing instead of ignoring the existential threat of climate change;
- Amazon and Netflix and other multinationals would pay taxes instead of getting a rebate, and plutocrats would be taxed at a higher, not lower, rate than middle-class Americans;
- the minimum wage would be \$15, we'd have sensible gun legislation, and labor unions would be protected;
- Americans would have the option of buying into Medicare and students the option of buying into tuition-free college; and
- the electoral college would be a relic, and the vote of someone in Wyoming would no longer count 3.7 times as much as the vote of someone in California or 3.8 times as much as someone in Florida.

*All the above are supported by a majority (and often a substantial majority) of Americans. The good news is that we are finally on the cusp of realizing some of them. And that's why, as I listened to President Biden address Congress last week, I found myself silently chanting:*

***Show me what a president looks like***

***This is what a president looks like!***

I don't mean just by contrast with Donald Trump – a jackass would appear presidential next to that jabbering, hate-spewing, despicable, sorry excuse for a human being, much less a leader. I mean that “JRB” has the potential to surpass *every* president since FDR as the model of a president.

In his first speech to Congress, he evinced a calm, a compassion, and a competence that felt like a breath of fresh air after the chaos, cruelty, and incompetence that has characterized the last four years.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Delray Democrat*, May 2021, p. 1.

Most significantly, and despite the immediate problems of a deadly pandemic and a depressed economy, President Biden made clear that he has not lost sight of the greatest threat facing humanity, nor will he back down from addressing it.

On his first day in office he signed the instrument that will bring the United States back into the Paris Agreement, and in his speech to Congress he offered a preview of how he plans to finesse Republican opposition to the legislation needed to combat the existential threat of climate change:

*For too long we've failed to use the most important word when it comes to meeting the climate crisis: Jobs. Jobs. Jobs. For me, when I think climate change, I think jobs. The American Jobs Plan will put engineers and construction workers to work building more energy efficient buildings and homes. Electrical workers, I.B.E.W. members, installing 500,000 charging stations along our highways so we can own the electric car market. Farmers, farmers planting cover crops so they can reduce the carbon dioxide in the air and get paid for doing it.*

### **The First 100 Days**

FDR coined the concept of a president's "first 100 days," much to the chagrin of his successors, none of whom were able to match the high standard he set.

Of course, no president since FDR (not even Obama) faced the crisis that awaited FDR in 1932. That said, Biden is the ONLY president to be inaugurated just two weeks after his predecessor incited an armed insurrection to overturn the election.

In addition to an economy that shed 10 million jobs over Donald Trump's last year in office, Biden faces a deadly pandemic that has killed more than half a million Americans. He also faces two significant problems not faced by any of his predecessors since Abraham Lincoln:

- a bitterly divided country, in which one side (numbering tens of millions) displays a depth of ignorance, a level of hatred, and an arsenal never before seen in America; and
- an opposition party that feeds and depends on that ignorance and that, under the spell of Donald Trump, has devolved into a crypto-fascist entity.

Biden's calm, effective leadership and demonstrable results in addressing the pandemic and restoring the economy can help make headway with healing the above divide. Or if that doesn't work, and assuming that we have his back and work like our lives depend on it, he can join FDR in bucking the trend that says first-term presidents lose seats in the next midterms.

So far, JRB's record speaks for itself. He has under-promised and over-delivered. He promised to vaccinate 100 million Americans in his first 100 days, and 220 million were vaccinated. At the time he spoke, half of Americans had received at least one shot and 70% of seniors were fully protected.

The American Rescue Plan, signed on March 11, is the biggest job creation and anti-poverty program since the New Deal. It has provided immediate assistance to those most in need and is projected to cut child poverty in half. It has already led to a surge in employment.

Not a single Republican in Congress voted for it, yet another example of how Republicans will always put party before people and country. By contrast, virtually every Democrat in Congress voted in favor of President's Trump's \$2.2 trillion CARES Act even knowing it would help Trump.

Of course, voting against the American Rescue Plan Act didn't stop Republicans from taking credit for some of its provisions, which included:

- Payments of \$1400 to every taxpayer and each of his or her dependents.
- Expanded health coverage and reduced premiums under the Affordable Care Act for nine million Americans.
- Establishment of a special sign-up period for the Affordable Care Act, adding 800,000 previously uninsured to the ranks of the insured.
- Expanded and extended unemployment benefits.
- An expanded Child Tax Credit, which will cut childhood poverty in half.

President Biden's rollout of his American Jobs Plan and America Families Plan was equally masterful. He presented the former as the largest jobs plan since World War II, addressing not only our infrastructure needs but bringing high-speed internet to rural America, modernizing our vulnerable power grid, and, most critically, responding to the most pressing issue of our time (and this cannot be repeated often enough) . . . the existential threat of climate change.

The American Families Plan extends some of the time-limited benefits provided under the American Rescue Act, including the tax credit to families that is projected to cut child poverty in half and the reduced premiums for healthcare under the ACA.

In addition, the AFP provides:

- An additional four years of free education for all Americans, beginning with two years of pre-school and two years of community college.
- Access to high-quality affordable child care.
- Up to 12 weeks of paid medical leave.

Republicans are already sputtering "how can we afford it," a question they never asked before passing their \$2 trillion deficit-busting gift to plutocrats and multinationals.

Of course, they're asking the wrong question. When it comes to climate change, the right question is: "[How Can We Afford Not to Do It?](#)" Moreover, unlike Republican "trickle-down" fairy tales, JRB's bubble-up American Jobs Plan *will* create jobs.