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Former Vice President Joe Biden speaks Jan. 21 in Washington at the National Action Network Martin Luther King Jr. Day Breakfast. (Wikimedia Commons/AFGE)



by Pat Perriello

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Competence. Experience. Authenticity. Highly qualified. Well-regarded in the African-American community. Well-liked by American workers — think Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin. Pushed President Barack Obama to evolve more quickly in promoting marriage between gay and lesbian members of the community. Knowledgeable on foreign affairs. Moderately progressive.

What's not to like?

The Democratic field has a very progressive cast to it right now. That's good. I think Democrats are pretty much all progressive. Joe Biden is certainly a progressive. The question, though, is what is meant by progressive.

I hear too many Democratic pundits on television [espousing the far-left edges](#) of the progressive agenda. Medicare for all. A wealth tax on billionaires. Abolish Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Etc. I'm a pretty liberal guy. In fact, I don't necessarily disagree with any of these points. I just believe you have to crawl before you can walk.

It is necessary to shore up the Affordable Health Care Law before you can talk about Medicare for all. The worst parts of the unfortunate tax law passed by the Trump administration need to be corrected before we can talk about confiscating money from billionaires. Why would we even consider abolishing ICE right now? Of course, there are terrible abuses that need to be corrected, but the notion that we don't need security to protect our border is a nonstarter in our country.

It was my understanding that the No. 1 priority for Democrats this election cycle was [beating Donald Trump](#). I don't think many on the left are considering that reality when they fantasize over turning our country into another European socialist government. It sounds very Trumpian to me to forget where 40 percent of the country is ideologically and to impose our will on them because we know better.

We are being told that the country is [moving to the left](#) and is ready to embrace Medicare for all, and a high tax on billionaires. Maybe so, but these are things that need to be approached on a gradual and responsible basis, not recklessly announced as campaign promises. Even in the effort to increase the minimum wage,

most states have used a gradual approach by [increasing the minimum wage to \\$15](#) over a period of years.

Unfortunately, the growing Democratic field of candidates is locking itself into a litmus test that is producing an unseemly conformity. There is not only room for a moderate lane but a need for one. Former Vice President Biden is fully capable of making that case and appealing to portions of the electorate needed to win, without alienating the more progressive wing of the party.

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An arrogant and aggressive push for an over-the-top progressive agenda is not a way to win an election. I believe it also shows a lack of understanding of Democratic voters. They want fairness, they want progress, they want to overturn as much of the damage the Trump presidency has done as possible. They want a comprehensive immigration policy that treats all people as worthy of dignity and respect while still protecting legitimate borders. They want the promise of the Affordable Care Act restored and made better and more affordable — perhaps with a public option. They want sensible gun safety laws to protect our children.

Some of the pie-in-the-sky agenda items being proposed can get in the way of the practical agenda that is needed to return our country to a sane domestic and foreign policy that all of America can unite behind. The agenda being enunciated by current Democratic presidential candidates can turn away independents and Republicans who will absolutely be needed in 2020 to put Trumpism behind us.

We need to change the trajectory of our country. The progressive agenda being highlighted by Democratic candidates for president seems hell-bent on jumping over giant steps necessary to the process, in order to get to where they want. That could be a disastrous choice.

Run, Joe Biden, run.

[Pat Perriello, a retired educator from the Baltimore City Public Schools, served as the coordinator of Guidance and Counseling Services and an associate professor at Johns Hopkins University.]