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Informed Voting: Understanding the 2020 Presidential Nominees

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This essay won First Place in the 2020 General Election Informed Citizen Writing Contest co-sponsored by the Office of Undergraduate Research and UNF Writing Center

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The 2020 November election has been publicized as one of the most influential and crucial elections for years to come. Because of this, it is of the utmost importance that voters are well versed in the policies each candidate supports and has vowed to uphold and in the policies which hold the most importance to them. In the 2016 election, only “61.4 percent of the citizen voting-age population reported voting” (File). However, increasing voter turnout will only have a positive effect if voters are also properly informed. To be an informed voter, one must have knowledge about the issues, positions, and ideals of all the candidates. Voters must be able to submit their ballot without outside influence. Biased information can stem from sources such as the media, friends, and family. Most individuals tend to be unaware of the difference between simply voting and making an educated and personal decision between candidates. Statistics support that “increased voter turnout in elections is only beneficial whenever voters are informed” and it is imperative that voters are both informed and equally incentivized to vote (Tyson).

The Republican nominee, incumbent President Donald Trump, has held office since his inauguration on January 20, 2017. During his presidency, he met with North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un at the Trump-Kim Summit in Singapore (Park). This meeting resulted in the complete denuclearization of North Korea in return for security guarantees (Park). Trump has become one of the most controversial presidents by defending actions of the white nationalist movement, which “no president has done in generations,” as well as withdrawing from The Paris Agreement (Thrush). Incumbent Vice President Mike Pence strongly supported President Donald Trump throughout his first term. He spoke at the Republican National Convention on August 26, 2020 about how President Trump is a “doer” and “has

kept his word to the American people” (Pence). Trump’s campaign promises include a desire to expand non-renewable energy, apply an income tax cut, repeal the Affordable Care Act, and protect the Second Amendment.

Former Vice President and Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden plans to “build back better” than ever. Vice President Biden is running as a Democrat but promises to “govern as an American president. No red states, no blue states, just the United States” (“Live: Biden . . . NBC News” 00:13:21-00:13:22). Democratic vice-presidential nominee Kamala Harris is a junior United States senator of California and a vocal civil rights defender. Previously, she led the “fight for equal pay for women” and “has a strong record of fighting to protect women’s rights” (Dworkin). Harris has been critiqued throughout her entire career for her African American heritage and being a female politician. However, she has held fast against criticism by Republicans and built a career off that dislike. Even though she is now the vice-presidential nominee, it is safe to say that she is “not afraid to challenge Joe Biden,” which will help America get the president they deserve (McCaskill). Biden and Harris have both expressed their full support for immediate coronavirus relief following the inauguration. Additionally, they plan on re-joining the Paris Climate Agreement, raising taxes on those making more than \$400,000 a year, expanding the Affordable Care Act, repairing foreign relations, and addressing systemic racism within the country.

One of the most pressing concerns to be addressed is how the next president will handle a response to the COVID-19 pandemic. At the time this article was written, “more than 8,190,900 people in the United States have been infected with the coronavirus” and “at least 219,500” people have died (Almukhtar et al.). To combat the coronavirus, Biden promises to “put scientists in charge of all decisions on safety” guidelines in America immediately upon inauguration (“Joe Biden Campaign Website”). He supports the expansion of testing throughout the country, wants to eliminate individual costs for coronavirus treatments, and increase pay and protective equipment for essential workers. Contradictory to Trump, he wishes to fully open the country only after coronavirus cases have been reduced.

President Trump is skeptical of climate change, calling it a hoax. Rather than following scientists’ recommendations, he wishes to expand the use of non-renewable energy instead of renewable energy. By the end of 2020, the United States will formally withdraw from the Paris Climate Accord under his direction. Mr. Trump

has “viewed the nature and extent of federal regulation with contempt” which led to his decision to issue executive orders addressing the topic (Aldy). Throughout his presidency, he has reversed numerous Obama-era climate regulations and loosened the federal government’s hand on climate policy. Alternatively, Biden has profusely expressed his desire to rejoin the Paris Climate Accord if elected and achieve a “100% clean energy economy and net-zero emissions no later than 2050” (“Joe Biden Campaign Website”). He has proposed banning oil and gas drilling on public areas, as well as a \$2 trillion investment into green energy.

While healthcare has always been an important topic in presidential elections, it is especially important considering the COVID-19 pandemic. The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, also known as Obamacare or the ACA, reduces “the overall costs of healthcare” and “[decreases] the number of uninsured Americans” (Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act). The Trump Administration has repeatedly made clear that they plan to completely overturn Obamacare and support a lawsuit “currently before the Supreme Court” addressing this (Levitt). Under these plans, the federal government could “eliminate the current federal commitment to match states’ actual expenditures,” but the poor would see the biggest cuts (Himmelstein and Woolhandler). President Trump’s September 24th speech introducing ‘America First Healthcare’ promises “cutting edge treatment, state-of-the-art medicine, groundbreaking cures, and true health security” for the American people (“Trump Delivers . . .” 00:01:13-00:02:19). Claiming the plan offers affordable options and reduced prescription drug costs, President Donald Trump says this is the best option following the inevitable overturn of the Affordable Care Act. Biden, on the other hand, suggests building upon the already established Affordable Care Act. This would be “available to anyone” and, in states that had not yet expanded Medicare, “automatically cover people with low incomes” (Levitt). Biden’s plan allows the public to choose a new health care option, offered by the government, if an insurance company is not “doing right by you” (“Joe Biden Campaign Website”). Biden also intends to rejoin the World Health Organization if elected.

Perhaps the most important issue up for debate in this election is the matter of racial inequality. The Black Lives Matter movement has made great strides in their call for racial justice across the nation and has evolved to include many other marginalized groups in their fight. This includes, but is not limited to, Latinos, Muslims, LGBTQ+, and women. As a part of Biden’s pledge to build back the

country, he promises “a major mobilization of effort and resources to. . . advance racial equity across the American economy” (“Joe Biden Campaign Website”). The coronavirus pandemic response has shown America’s vast racial disparities in the health and health care of Black, brown, and immigrant Americans. Stemming from this, the economic crisis hit these communities harder than white communities with Black business activity dropping 41% (Fairlie). African American business owners as a whole “were hit the hardest by COVID-19” (Fairlie). To compare, white business owners felt a loss of 11% in business as opposed to the 25% business loss for immigrants in May 2020 alone (Fairlie). The obvious racial disparity between immigrants, Blacks, and whites highlights a need for racial equality as a key issue for the candidates.

In terms of racial injustice, the Black Lives Matter movement also calls for justice in the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and countless other Black men, women, and children (“Joe Biden Campaign Website”). Incumbent President Donald Trump has repeatedly “invoked the idea of colorblindness” as his defense for refusing proposals striving to achieve racial equality (Cirillo). The use of such a term stems from the Confederacy, was coined in the South, and helped legitimize their fight against the integration of races (Cirillo). During the 2020 Presidential Debate, incumbent President Donald Trump was quoted saying, “stand back and stand by” in response to a question about condemning white supremacy (First 2020 Presidential Debate between Donald Trump and Joe Biden, 00:42:18-00:42:28). Not only has Trump’s administration ignored the problem of systemic racism, but it has also refused to believe the problem exists in America. As a result, Trump’s presidency has created a “golden age” for groups with hostility towards the civil rights of marginalized groups, particularly the Proud Boys (Cobb).

Each candidate has expressed their strong opinions on a variety of issues, some gravely important and others highly publicized, which highlight the necessity of informed voters in this election. As Washington boards up and prepares for an onslaught of supporters from either side, it is of the utmost importance to understand that we are not simply voting for these next four years, but for the future of America as we know it. Peggy Noonan, former presidential speech writer for President Ronald Reagan and columnist for *The Wall Street Journal*, stated “Our political leaders will know our priorities only if we tell them, again and again, and if those priorities begin to show up in the polls.”

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