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Make the Informed Decision: Biden or Trump for 2020

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This essay won Third 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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It's election time again. The signs are out and the political ads are in full swing. The time has come for the United States and its citizens to participate in a democratic election, electing a politician and political party that they want at the forefront of our government. It is our responsibility to choose the party that we as a country believe will hold the ideals that will best combat the issues that plague our society.

At least, that is how it is supposed to go in a democracy. In today's polarized landscape of social media-based propaganda and radicals relaying false information to the public, it is almost impossible for one to sift through it all to determine fact from fiction. While tedious, doing so is not only a citizen's responsibility but critical for our society to properly move forward in the future. Each year, the citizens of our country are told that "voting is the most important thing you can do," but it is imperative that each vote is made by an informed voter. Informed voting is "be[ing] knowledgeable about the issues and positions of candidates" and "[being] able to make decisions without influence from outside factors" ("Guide to Informed Voting"). Simply, it is the ability for one to think for themselves.

One needs to cut through all the fancy phrasing and catchy slogans and get to the meat of the issues: what each politician and party stands for. Only then will the citizen's vote really count for something and it will stand for what they believe in. Our nation prides itself on individuality and free will, yet our leaders and media try to persuade its people without allowing them to think and disguising their intentions and flaws to get a vote. Becoming an informed voter means that the citizen is taking back control and choosing the person who will speak on behalf of our beliefs, by not just voting, but voting with a purpose and with our future as a nation in mind.

With definition and reasoning out of the way, this year's major candidates now will be discussed. Democrats have selected former Vice President Joseph Biden and

running mate Senator Kamala Harris to take on Republican incumbent President Donald J. Trump and Vice President Michael Pence in the 2020 presidential election. When looking at his campaign website, it is clear that Biden and his campaign team have put a lot of thought into making plans for societal issues in America. Readers can see, based on the prominence of the topic on his website (“Build America Back Better”), as well as in many speeches, that the Biden campaign wants to first and foremost curb the health and healthcare crisis in America.

Arguably the most discussed goal for the Biden administration is to take on the current pandemic nationwide in a more regulated way than did the Trump administration. Switching back to a broader “big-government” stance rather than the approach he claims his opponent has, Joe Biden and his campaign team promise to “take responsibility, rather than leave states, cities, tribes, and territories to fend for themselves, and focus on producing more of these critical supplies in the United States” while also “ensur[ing that] all Americans have access to regular, reliable, and free testing” and promising “clear, consistent, evidence-based national guidance for how communities should navigate the pandemic” (“Build America Back Better”). Biden makes it clear that he has no tolerance for a lenient attitude on the matter. While addressing the nation during the first Presidential Debate, Biden declared, “He [Trump] says... we’re learning to live with it. People are learning to die with it” (Biden). In saying this, he staked out his position on the pandemic while referencing the deadly consequences.

More broadly, Biden supports the Affordable Care Act and plans to build it back up, making sure both health care costs are reduced for all Americans while making healthcare more accessible (“Build America Back Better”). Following healthcare on the administration’s list of prominent plans is the general idea of bringing the nation back together, both through values and policies. Biden constantly expresses that he sees a nation divided, and that he sees the task of bringing us all to an equal, agreeable middle as critical for the country to prosper. His website lists plans to “improve racial economic equity,” “empower and protect women,” and to help “people with disabilities” (“Build America Back Better”).

While continuing his party’s plea for social and economic equality, Biden also puts forth the idea that we must work together as a nation and become more unified to accomplish anything of value. Vice President Biden made a bipartisan plea when he said, “I’m running as a proud Democrat, but I’ll govern as an American” (“I’m

Running”). While the health of the nation and its social stability is at the forefront of Biden’s platform, the platform also includes increased awareness and action regarding climate change, economic and work reform (bringing the wealth to the people rather than the corporation), and a push for funding to be put back into the education system (“Build America Back Better”). In summary, Joe Biden and his administration are pushing policies typical of the Democratic Party complete with bigger government, an emphasis on social reform, and inching closer and closer to universal healthcare. However, Biden is making a push to put aside differences and attempt to unite the country in the face of such a polarizing atmosphere, establishing his stance as that of a moderate Democrat.

On the other side of the ticket is President Donald Trump, running for re-election aside his Vice President, Mike Pence, representing the Republican Party. While the President’s campaign website does little to explain policies, Trump’s reuse of his campaign slogan, “Make America Great Again” implies that he is continuing the promises he made in the 2016 election (“Donald J. Trump for President”). Just as they did during that election cycle, Trump and his administration put much of their effort into emphasizing the need to secure and improve the United States’ economy. Before the pandemic, this meant new American jobs and tax cuts, but at the height of the pandemic Trump and his administration promised to carry out much more than that (Taxvox). Now, Trump and his administration are making it one of their most pertinent missions to reopen America, and most importantly, America’s businesses (“Donald J. Trump for President”). In a press conference, President Trump stated, “under my administration’s strategy to vanquish the virus and restart our economy, small businesses across the nation... safely reopen” (“Remarks by President Trump”). Trump prides himself on running the nation “like a business,” so it is not surprising to see that his plans lie around not only protecting the economy, but also improving it (“Trump Running”).

Not far behind Trump’s emphasis on economic policy are his plans for immigration reform. Since 2016, Trump and his administration have promised to “construct... a border wall... ensuring the swift removal of unlawful entrants...ending chain migration, eliminating the Visa Lottery, and moving the country to a merit-based entry system” (“Immigration”). The Trump administration is still fighting to accomplish these promises. While the President does support legal immigration, his desire for the process to undergo reform correlates with his economic endeavors, as

the administration claims that illegal immigration and a poor economy go hand in hand. Trump noted that “we have a moral duty to create an immigration system that protects the lives and jobs of our citizens” (“President Donald J. Trump Is”).

While immigration and the economy are the President’s most pressing concerns, he has plans for many of the other aspects of American society, which include but are not limited to foreign policy in regards to trade deals, national security, the advancement of the military, and ending the Affordable Care Act (“Donald J. Trump for President”). Over the years, Donald Trump has stood out as a one-of-a-kind President for several reasons; however, his policies are quite “run-of-the-mill” when it comes to the Republican standard. President Trump plans on continuing his policies and his stance as a right-wing Republican while building off his slogan and keeping the country and its values in his favor.

Promises and fancy jargon are one thing, but what sources and information are their claims based upon? Both Donald Trump and Joe Biden have experience to back their claims, as Trump has made his mark as President for the last four years and Biden has been a politician for multiple decades (“Joe Biden”). Trump’s campaign claims many accomplishments in almost every policy area. Regarding the economy, his campaign page notes: “under President Trump’s leadership, Congress passed historic tax cuts and relief for hard-working Americans,” and, further, that “since his election, the Trump administration’s pro-growth policies have generated 6 million new jobs, the unemployment rate has fallen to its lowest point in 50 years, and wages have grown at more than 3% for 10 months in a row,” statistics that the President promises to keep on the “up and up” (“Donald J. Trump for President”).

On immigration, Trump has been less successful, but he has stoked many fights with Congress in order to “fully fund a wall along the Southern border, to close legal loopholes that enable illegal immigration, to end chain migration, and to eliminate the Visa Lottery Program” (“Donald J. Trump for President”). Trump has also been able to “withdraw the United States from the Trans-Pacific Partnership” and “increase defense spending,” both major promises he had made to the American people during his campaign (“Donald J. Trump for President”).

Vice President Biden has been in politics for 47 years, as both a U.S. Senator and the Vice President under President Barack Obama, but, unlike Trump, he has never held the position of President of the United States (“List of Joe”). Over his career, Biden has accomplished several feats, such as “overs[eeing] implementation

of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act,” and he “helped pass Obamacare (Affordable Care Act)” and “sponsored the original Violence Against Women Act,” an act which led to a decline in spousal abuse (“List of Joe”). Biden has also “secured the passage of arms limitation agreements in 1979 between the United States and the Soviet Union” (“List of Joe”).

Both candidates have prior experience in politics and both can hold their own when defending points and values they believe in. President Trump has claimed to care deeply about the U.S. economy and he has kept that commitment, which makes sense considering his immense prior knowledge in the field. With Biden’s experience in brokering peace negotiations and fighting for social justice throughout his career, he continuously delivers a message of coming together and fighting for peace.

After examining all this information and thinking as its citizens about what it all means for our country, do we know who to vote for? Well, yes and no. Technically, there is no wrong or right answer, Biden or Trump, Democrat or Republican, as political opinions are based on a multitude of variables. The information above should give us, the now-informed voters, the knowledge needed to make a decision aligning with our values. The choice is for the individual voter to make, but no matter what choice is made at the polls, citizens should be informed while voting.

To be a part of a republic and have access to political information (which we hope is factual) are things that many of us take for granted. We have the choice as Americans to be a part of forming the nation we want to live in and the rules we want to live by. It is crucial to our society that we involve ourselves, both by being informed and by voting. Otherwise, we are not living in the society the majority of us want, but rather one wanted by a select few, making it as if we were never granted the right to vote at all.

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