



The School for Ethics and Global Leadership

Speechwriting Case Study

ETHICS AND LEADERSHIP

n.b. This is a hypothetical exercise. Some facts, events, and characters are real. Others are not.

It is late February, 2020. Over the next ten days, the all-important Nevada caucus and South Carolina primary will fundamentally alter the Democratic Presidential nomination landscape. The race to this point has been a roller coaster ride. Frontrunners have come and gone, insurgent candidates have garnered unexpected support, and the Party is more fractured than perhaps ever before. Though several challengers have left the race in recent weeks, the nomination is truly “up for grabs.”

This is in part because the first two states that voted were overwhelmingly white: voters of color have not yet had their say.

Strong showings in Nevada, which has one of the largest Latino/a populations in the country, and South Carolina, which has one of the largest African American populations in the country, will send a powerful message to Democrats around the country. These contests will also have an outsized influence on “Super Tuesday” (the single largest voting day in the race) contests just days later. Weak showings could end a campaign.

Race is at the forefront of Democratic voters’ minds. Most Democrats consider President Trump to be a racist, but many on the left wing of the party have also called out several leading Democrats for questionable positions on race. At the same time, moderate Democrats worry that the party is lurching too far to the left, and are wary of supporting candidates whose policies might boost Trump’s 2020 chances.

THE CANDIDATES

Joe Biden: Long the clear frontrunner in most polls, Biden stumbled mightily in Iowa and New Hampshire, and his campaign is teetering. At the same time, his support among African Americans remains extremely high (significantly higher, in fact, than his support among white voters), in part because of his eight-year tenure as Barack Obama’s Vice President. Until recently, polls consistently gave him the best chance in the general election against President Trump, largely because of his reputation as a moderate. However, younger black voters are less attached to Biden than older generations, and some of his responses to media and debate questions on race have raised eyebrows. Biden needs a strong showing in Nevada and to win South Carolina if he is to have any chance to prove his point that he is the most electable Democrat and is worthy of the party’s nomination.

Mike Bloomberg: The former New York City mayor has shot up in the polls after an unprecedented national spending spree. Rivals have accused the multibillionaire of buying votes; supporters say he is now the only candidate with the resources and pugnaciousness to defeat Trump. Bloomberg is also fighting longstanding allegations of sexist behavior and racist politics. His support of “stop-and-frisk” policing while mayor has prompted some of his competitors (including the President) to call him a racist. Bloomberg defends his record, saying he no longer supports his policing policies as mayor and pointing to his successes as a champion of gun control. Supporters also credit his financial support with helping turn the House “blue” in 2018. Lastly, allies say, while Bloomberg is spending hundreds of millions of dollars on his presidential campaign, the money is not coming from bundlers, billionaires, lobbyists, and corporations who want favors. It is coming from his own deep pockets.

Pete Buttigieg: A darling of wealthier white voters, Buttigieg finished 1-2 with Sanders in Iowa and New Hampshire, and currently leads in the delegate count. He has far less support in South Carolina and Nevada, however, and a poor showing there could prove to voters that he is little more than a flash in the pan. Buttigieg’s campaign nearly derailed after a [racial controversy in South Bend, Indiana](#), where he has served as mayor since 2012: among other issues, a white police sergeant shot and killed an unarmed African American man last summer. The man allegedly had a knife, but the police officer failed to turn on his body camera. At the height of the controversy, Buttigieg famously declared in a Presidential debate, “I didn’t get it done.” Buttigieg has handled

other potential issues with more success, even brushing off right-wing aspersions about his sexual preference. But he continues to struggle with communities of color. Can he change that in these next two contests?

Amy Klobuchar: The Minnesota Senator's steady, composed tone and policy agenda has slowly endeared her to voters. Her stunning third place finish in New Hampshire has given her campaign vigor and momentum. She has earned the great majority of newspaper endorsements, too. On the other hand, she has yet to prove that she can build a winning coalition that looks different from her (mostly-white) constituency in Minnesota. And some voters worry that her conciliatory rhetoric will be no match for Donald Trump. In her favor, many see her as the antithesis of Trump – she is a “grown-up in the room.” Her speech on New Hampshire primary night wowed pundits and voters alike and spoke to her potential as a candidate and possible nominee. How can she translate her message to constituencies in Nevada and South Carolina who barely know her?

Bernie Sanders: Sanders, the Democratic runner-up in the 2016 primaries, is well-known among primary voters for his outspoken, progressive stands, and he is currently leading in national polls. He is particularly strong with millennial voters, who remember his strident stands on criminal justice reform and other liberal priorities in 2016. Still, some observers view the Sanders campaign as an [“old boys club” that is far less sensitive to women and people of color](#) than Sanders' policies might suggest. Meanwhile, his recent claim that the U.S. was “founded on racist principles” is sure to rile moderates. Having never been the front-runner until recently, he is now the target of more pointed attacks from fellow Democrats, who accuse him of everything from not being a Democrat (he calls himself a Democratic Socialist) to enabling rabid, vitriolic supporters known as “Bernie Bros” to troll, demean, and attack anyone who disagrees with him. Can he maintain his front-runner status long enough to win the nomination in a fractured field?

Elizabeth Warren: The liberal Senator's steep rise last summer and fall has been followed by an equally steep fall ever since. Like Biden, she needs a strong showing in Nevada and South Carolina to remain a viable candidate. Though Biden has much deeper roots in communities of color, Warren has spent significant time courting African American and Latino/a communities, has strong support from voters of color in her home state of Massachusetts, and has an encyclopedic grasp of issues affecting communities of color. Unfortunately for Warren, Bernie Sanders is increasingly seen as the standard bearer for left wing Democrats. Of note: her campaign launch got off to a [slow start](#) in part due to her past claims of American Indian ancestry--claims that a DNA test showed were weak and that President Trump has repeatedly ridiculed. In her favor, she has one of the broadest and deepest campaign organizations, but she is running out of money to keep her campaign afloat. Can her organization work well enough to bring her back into the top three?

THE SCENARIO

Voters are expecting each candidate to deliver an important speech on Friday. A candidate who delivers a great speech can breathe new life into a campaign and even propel it to new heights. But a speech that misses the mark could seal doom and lead to a fast exit from the race. In fact, exit polls showed that most New Hampshire voters made up their minds just days before the primary. What is the message that each candidate must convey? How will each persuade voters that her or his campaign best represents a specific constituency's interests and has the most change of beating Trump? And in what setting does each candidate have the best chance of reaching critical voters as they go to the polls? Will it be a friendly audience? A skeptical one? A large crowd? A small group? Will it be in Nevada, or South Carolina, or elsewhere? One thing is clear: the TV cameras will be rolling and voters will be watching.

YOUR CHALLENGE:

1. Decide *what to say* in response to this situation.
2. Decide *where* to deliver a 2-3 minute speech announcing and defending that decision
3. *Author and deliver* that speech