



Amitabho Chattopadhyay <[REDACTED]>

Presidential candidates

9 messages

Amitabho Chattopadhyay <[REDACTED]>
To: chomsky@mit.edu

Mon, Feb 17, 2020 at 4:41 PM

Hello, Professor Chomsky,

Considering that the neo-liberal candidates on the Democratic ballot are effectively identical to Trump in a material sense, particularly Bloomberg, how is it preferable for one of them to win over Trump? It seems like a single-minded condemnation of Trump, to the point of endorsing any Democrat who runs against him, is counterproductive and will result in nothing more than (1) the same anti-worker policies started by the countless prior administrations and now continued by Trump, but quieter, and (2) a dimming of the class consciousness that has arisen since Trump took office.

Thanks,
Amitabho Chattopadhyay

Noam Chomsky <chomsky@mit.edu>
To: Amitabho Chattopadhyay <[REDACTED]>

Mon, Feb 17, 2020 at 4:56 PM

First, you are overlooking what is far and away the most important issue: global warming. They differ radically. Four more years of Trump and we may well be passing irreversible tipping points. That alone is enough to make it obligatory to vote against Trump.

Second, Trump's anti-worker policies are much worse than those of the Democrats, which are bad enough, and have been undermining class consciousness by the standard Republican technique of diverting attention to guns, religion, xenophobia, white supremacy, etc. But all of this, though awful enough, is secondary to his dedication to destroying the prospects for organized life earth in order to pour more dollars into overstuffed pockets.

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Amitabho Chattopadhyay <[REDACTED]>
To: Noam Chomsky <chomsky@mit.edu>

Mon, Feb 17, 2020 at 5:54 PM

To the extent that Bloomberg opposes global warming, it seems to me that this desire grows out of his own investments in companies which provide 'green' energy. It seems almost like his stance is designed to allow him to funnel federal money into his own coffers, possibly resulting in the funding of anything he has invested in, no matter how ineffective, to the exclusion of all else. At least having Trump as the president keeps public attention on the issue, rather than letting people ignore it because 'it's fine, a Democrat is in office'. Obviously, the other billionaire-funded candidates suffer from a more attenuated version of this, but nothing quite so extreme as the personal financial stake Bloomberg will have.

The billionaire and billionaire-purchased candidates' self-interest aside, this approach -- treating the symptom, global warming, rather than the cause -- frankly seems to be the political equivalent of rubbing a soothing salve on the rashes caused by the cancer of capital. Although the next four years might come with its share of irreversible climate change milestones, the mere fear of that possibility would not seem to warrant surrendering to the certainty of billionaire pseudo-philanthropists who intend to quietly promulgate the right-wing policies the Republicans wish they could push through right now.

To me, it seems like voting in one of these people will not actually fix climate change, but at best result in the typical misdirection. For example, how these people have tried to 'fix' crime by cracking down on poor inner-city youth rather than prosecuting wage theft, 'fix' healthcare by penalizing poor people for not paying private companies for healthcare rather than giving people healthcare, 'fix' the homeless problem by paying contractors millions to come up with subpar solutions rather than providing them with housing, etc.

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Noam Chomsky <chomsky@mit.edu>
To: Amitabho Chattopadhyay <[REDACTED]>

Mon, Feb 17, 2020 at 7:35 PM

I don't give a damn what his motives are. He's quite obviously very remote from the Trump wrecking ball, which may well doom us. Unfortunately, many people seem not to comprehend the enormity of Trump's policies. Bloomberg or any other candidate would provide time to those who are working to head off catastrophe, and a defeat for the Republicans would also cut off the massive propaganda they are producing daily that is deluding many Americans, who listen to them, about the severity of the crisis.

That is the only possible way to head off catastrophe. It's not just an oversight that you don't suggest another path. There isn't one.

And I should say that exactly the same with regard to social and economic policies. I'm sure I'd oppose Bloomberg's, but it's hard to imagine that they would be anything like Trump's vicious assault against working people, the poor, the vulnerable – meaning most of the population.

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Amitabho Chattopadhyay <[REDACTED]>
To: Noam Chomsky <chomsky@mit.edu>

Mon, Feb 17, 2020 at 8:13 PM

I appreciate that I have not provided another path. Indeed, if we take for granted that climate change is so pressing that we must delay its effects by any means necessary for the next four years is required for human survival, I can't help but agree with your conclusion.

However, I do question the factual premises of this view. From what I know about the matter, shouldn't we have about another decade or so to reverse the effects of climate change? Pushing a right-wing Democrat candidate into power will ultimately result in the same stagnation which led us into this climate catastrophe and to Donald Trump in the first place, and a few more years of Trump wouldn't necessarily doom us in the same way a multi-decennial perpetuation of that system will.

Not to mention, I find it hard to believe that people will turn out in sufficient levels for someone like Bloomberg to overcome the massive popular support that Trump has; no matter your intellectual grounds for supporting the prospective Democratic nominee regardless of who they are, many working people would simply not be inspired to vote for them in the same way they would be inspired to vote for Trump. On a practical level, at least, it would seem like the best strategy for the primaries would be to claim 'Bernie or bust', even if we don't intend to follow through (whether for the climate, or for other reasons).

I also find it difficult to suppose that voting the Republicans out would cut their propaganda, as well. The news outlets on whom the people who would believe their propaganda depend would not be cut out simply because the Democrats are in office.

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Noam Chomsky <chomsky@mit.edu>
To: Amitabho Chattopadhyay <[REDACTED]>

Mon, Feb 17, 2020 at 8:36 PM

The “decade” is a serious misinterpretation of the IPCC report. What they stated is that we must act urgently immediately. Any year's delay increases the threat severely. The message is explained by one of the lead authors, in the main US scientific journal concerned with these issues:

*Let's get this on the table right away, without mincing words. With regard to the climate crisis, yes, it's time to panic....
“We are in deep trouble.”*

It's amazing to me, and ominous, that even highly literate and concerned people don't appreciate the enormity of the problem, or how Trump – alone in the world – is sharply escalating the race to disaster. Any Democrat would be radically different and would provide both measures that help and time to confront the crisis.

The president has a "bully pulpit," and greatly amplifies the rot that pours out of the rightwing media. Getting rid of him would surely deflate the denialism that may destroy us. But there's no need to speculate about that. Looking at the policies suffices to provide decisive reasons to vote for any Democrat.

The rest of your letter has to do with an entirely different matter. The best strategy for dealing with the enormous threat of a Trump victory.

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Amitabho Chattopadhyay <[REDACTED]>
To: Noam Chomsky <chomsky@mit.edu>

Mon, Feb 17, 2020 at 9:17 PM

I see. It is definitely difficult for me to put aside the revulsion that I have against the other candidates and decide rationally that any Democratic candidate will be better for the climate than the current one, but you definitely appeal to my rational side.

May I share this exchange with others? I feel like this adds a lot of helpful context to the remark you made earlier today about voting for Bloomberg if he won the nomination.

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Noam Chomsky <chomsky@mit.edu>
To: Amitabho Chattopadhyay <[REDACTED]>

Mon, Feb 17, 2020 at 9:22 PM

I'm generally reluctant to have letters shared. Tends to elicit a flood of comment sometimes verging to diatribe. And time is finite. But if you feel that there's some hope for rational discourse, OK.

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Amitabho Chattopadhyay <[REDACTED]>
To: Noam Chomsky <chomsky@mit.edu>

Mon, Feb 17, 2020 at 9:24 PM

Thank you. If it helps, I definitely think very differently of what you said now than what I did before.

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