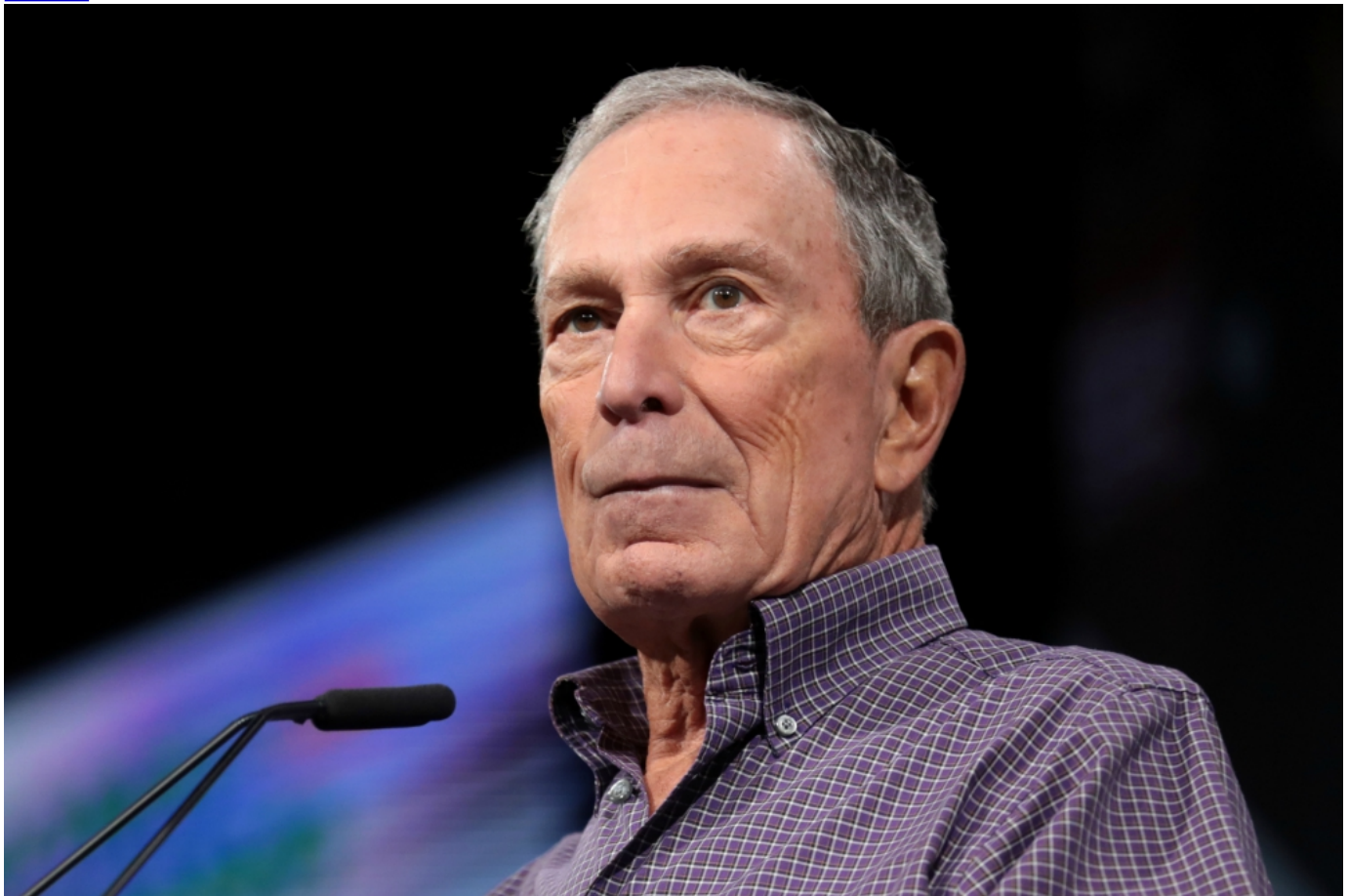


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Former Mayor Michael Bloomberg speaks at the Presidential Gun Sense Forum in August 2019 at the Iowa Events Center in Des Moines. (Wikimedia Commons/Gage Skidmore)



by Michael Sean Winters

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This week, I discovered an additional reason why I am grateful not to be on Instagram. Former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg [dumped yet more millions](#) on a meme-creating campaign that he launched on the platform. I am glad I can't see them. Bad enough that we have to watch his pretty lousy ads around the clock on all channels.



A screengrab from one of former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg's campaign advertisements

I am equally disgusted to see other mayors flocking to flack for their former colleague. D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser [appeared on CNN](#) where she defended Bloomberg's comments about stop-and-frisk. She had a hard time explaining why it is OK for Bloomberg to suggest that all neighborhoods where black folk live are filled with potential criminals but not okay for President Donald Trump to suggest that most Latino immigrants are criminals.

I watched former Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter [defend Bloomberg on MSNBC](#) and also learned that, at the height of the financial crisis in 2008, Bloomberg did not blame the bankers, but appeared to blame the poor neighborhoods that had [previously been redlined](#), as if the racist policy of refusing to extend credit in certain neighborhoods was a good thing.

Mind you, I am sure that I have said some things in the past that I regret, employed a bad choice of words that conveyed something that I did not believe, or simply said

something stupid. But I am not running for president.

Regular readers will know that I am no fan of former Mayor [Pete Buttigieg](#). But at least in his bid for the Democratic nomination, he made himself available to any and all press outlets for interviews to get his name out there, participated in every debate, visited small towns in Iowa and New Hampshire. His fundraising techniques — wine caves! — undercut his reform agenda and he would not be rolling in dough if he were not openly gay, but at least he has run a campaign. At least he did not jump in at the last minute thinking he could effectively buy the nomination.

Make no mistake, buying the nomination is exactly what Bloomberg is trying to do. The Democratic Party was founded to combat the moneyed interest, not to kowtow to it. It doesn't matter whether you know all the words to the musical "Hamilton" or not, Bloomberg is a modern-day Federalist, not a modern-day Democrat.

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Bloomberg criticized the one genuinely new idea this campaign has produced, Sen. Elizabeth Warren's proposed [wealth tax](#). Sen. Bernie Sanders later came out with his own version of the tax. Now, Bloomberg has even unveiled his own version but, surprise, surprise, his would leave approximately \$3.5 billion more in his deep pockets than the [proposals from his opponents](#).

This is the year that everyone has become a pundit, speculating about who is best positioned to [defeat Trump in November](#). And the best rationale for Bloomberg's candidacy I have heard came from a friend who suggested that many voters who really like the state of the economy will be hesitant to jump ship for someone they think might wreck the economy. Bloomberg, my friend thought, would reassure people that the economy would be just fine post-Trump.

Here is the problem with that line of analysis. It is never enough to win. You then have to have a rationale for governing. The problem with Buttigieg, Amy Klobuchar, Joe Biden and now Bloomberg is that their policies sound an awful lot like those of Hillary Clinton. Does anyone think these moderates would have pushed to send some Wall Street bankers to jail for their role in the 2008 economic crash?

I remain convinced that if President Barack Obama had urged the Treasury and Justice Departments to prosecute some of those whose thefts were in the billions,

Trump would not now be our president. All the while, Bloomberg's police were frisking kids who might have shoplifted a candy bar.

Here is another problem with that line of analysis. Some Republicans voiced the same concern about nominating the "extremist" Ronald Reagan in 1980. I remember Democrats breathing a sigh of relief when Reagan secured the nomination. How did that turn out? And, lest we forget, every Democrat I know said that in 2016, there was no way Clinton was going to lose so long as the GOP nominated Trump.

Of the two, the Reagan-in-1980 analogy is more on point: Reagan, like Sanders, had lost narrowly four years prior to the more moderate candidate for the nomination, Gerald Ford, who went on to narrowly lose the general election to Jimmy Carter, just as Clinton narrowly lost to Trump. The lesson? Sometimes, the way to unite the party is from the base, not the center.

Which leads us to the final reason Bloomberg's candidacy should be frowned upon: Does anyone think that Team Sanders would be enthusiastic about a Bloomberg nomination? Of all the moderates, he is the one who is least able to unite the party, someone whose very approach to the election embodies so much of what Sanders' and Warren's supporters find objectionable about the role of money in politics. Bad enough that Biden and Buttigieg have bundlers and closed-door fundraisers, but self-funded billionaires?

It is important that Bloomberg not welch on his promise to spend hundreds of millions of dollars defeating Trump, even if he is not the nominee. So, the other candidates need to be polite to him. That leaves it to us in the pundit class to make sure the primary voters recognize that a Bloomberg candidacy is a road to ruin.

[Michael Sean Winters covers the nexus of religion and politics for NCR.]

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