

# “Current Events” with Frank Damon

Summer 2020

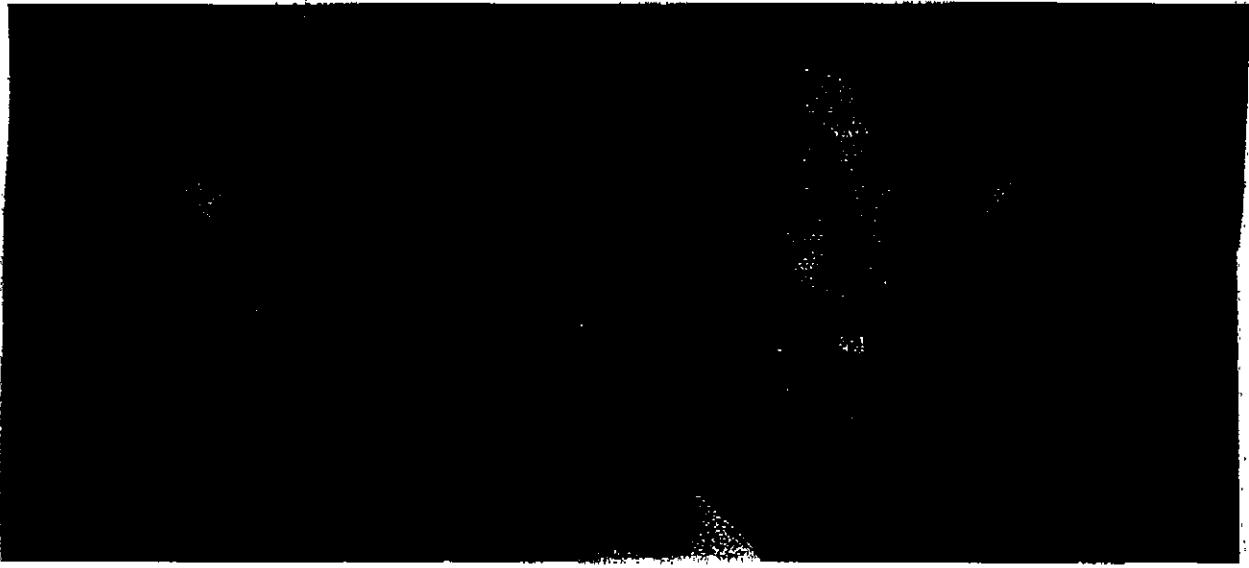


Doelger Senior Center has been most fortunate to have Frank Damon leading both our Current Events and History discussion groups for the last 5 years. During this current time of physical distancing due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Frank is sharing his current events discussion topics online. He will begin offering discussion groups using ZOOM in the very near future. Stay tuned for updates!

Frank received his BA degree from the University of San Francisco (USF) with a dual major in Political Science and American History. He also earned his MA in Political Science and teaching credentials at USF. Over the course of his career, Frank taught in the San Mateo Union High School District and at Marin Catholic High School, Terra Nova High School, Golden Gate University, College of San Mateo, Skyline College and Canada College.

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Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in these articles and discussion topics are those of the authors and group participants and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any agency of the City of Daly City.



### ON POLICY ISSUES, ALIGNED WITH BIDEN, LEFT OF CENTER

When Joseph R. Biden Jr. selected Senator Kamala Harris of California to be his running mate, he opted for a partner who shares his center left positions—someone with whom he more than likely will find agreement on many matters of policy. During the Democratic primary, both Mr. Biden and Ms. Harris were viewed as moderates. Though Ms. Harris had, at times, struggled to clearly outline her stance on fundamental issues such as whether she would endorse a “Medicare for all” style of health insurance.

“I’m not trying to restructure society,” she said. “I’m just trying to take care of the issues that wake people up in the middle of the night.”

As a Democratic presidential candidate, Ms. Harris set forth her vision for criminal justice reform and how to “stand up for Black America.” She called for ending mass incarceration, cash bail and the death penalty. She also advocates the creation of a national police systems review board and making Black colleges and university debt-free for students.

On the issue of health care, Ms. Harris co-sponsored Senator Bernie Sanders’s Medicare for all legislation. Early in her campaign, asked about private health insurance, she said, “Let’s eliminate all of that.” Mr. Biden wants to build on the Affordable Care Act as opposed to eliminating private insurance. Ms. Harris later put forth her own health care plan, which placed her somewhere between Mr. Biden and Mr. Sanders. Her plan advocated Medicare for all Americans, but kept a role for health insurance companies by allowing people to choose private plans modeled on Medicare Advantage.

As to Ms. Harris’s relationship with Wall Street and Silicon Valley, it highlights her reputation as a centrist. As attorney general, she used her power to wrest more money from major mortgage lenders, announcing that California homeowners would receive \$12

billion in mortgage relief. Yet critics on the left criticized her for not doing enough to clamp down on miscreant lenders or to regulate the technology industry.

On another issue—autonomous vehicles—Ms. Harris threatened UBER with legal action in 2016 if the company didn't remove driverless cars from the California roads.

She is committed to putting into place a number of gun control measures like mandatory background checks and tougher regulation of gun manufacturers. She has also promised to work at closing a loophole that allows some domestic abusers to buy guns under certain conditions.

She has proposed closing the gender wage gap by requiring larger companies to certify that men and women are paid equally.

On climate, Ms. Harris has worked with Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York on proposing legislation that would establish an Office of Climate and Environmental Justice Accountability to rate environmental laws based on their impact on low-income communities.

She has also introduced legislation aimed at providing a tax credit of up to \$6,000 for middle-class and working-class families.

## HARRIS JOINS BIDEN TICKET, ACHIEVING A FIRST

Kamala Harris at a glance: She is the daughter of an Indian mother and Jamaican father. She has been a senator from California since 2017. At 55, she will be the first Black woman and the first person of Indian descent to be nominated for vice president by a major party. She is only the fourth woman in U. S. history to be chosen for a presidential ticket. Having been picked as his political partner, Joseph R. Biden Jr., if he wins, may well have elevated her to the position of de facto leader of the Democratic Party in four or eight years.

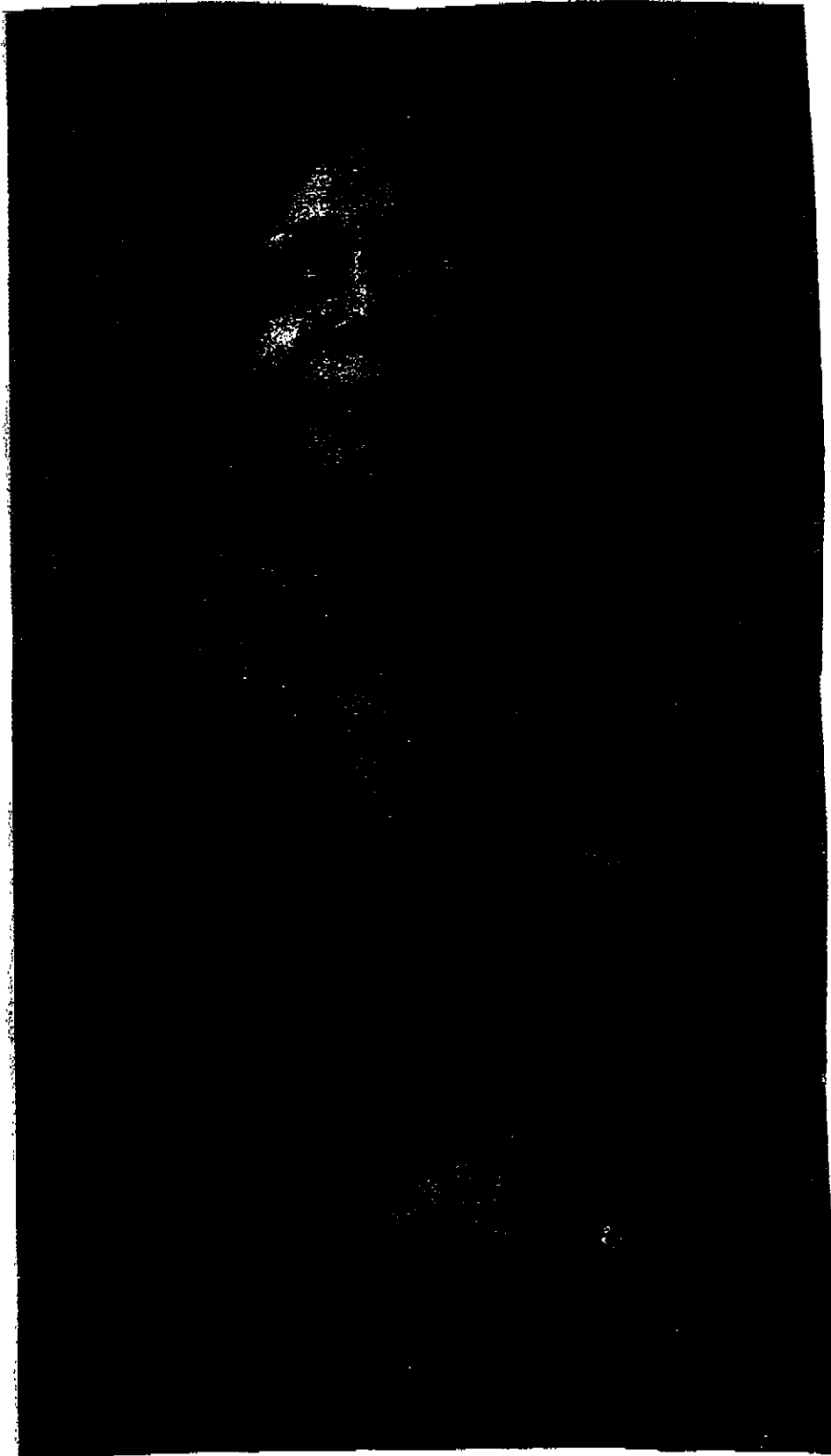
A former candidate for the U.S. presidency, she served as district attorney in San Francisco and state attorney general. Among her signature issues is her proposal to cut middle-class taxes, her recent advocating of policing reform, pushing a Senate bill to make lynching a federal crime, and playing a high-profile role in the confirmation hearings of Justice Brett M. Kavanaugh.

Harris and Biden had a friendly relationship before they competed in the 2020 primaries. But Harris also attacked Biden more harshly than any other Democrat in the 2020 race, rebuking him in the first televised debate for having worked with segregationist senators to oppose school busing policies in the 1970s. "There was a little girl in California," she said, "who was a part of the second class to integrate her public schools, and she was bused to school every day. And that little girl was me."

Harris is among the best-known Black women in American politics, with appeal to both moderates and liberals. However, during her unsteady presidential campaign last year, she struggled with questions about her law-enforcement record. The way she handled cases involving police shootings of civilians while she was California's attorney general drew criticism from activists on the left, who argued she was not aggressive enough in supporting the overhaul of rogue police departments and that she sided too often with police unions.

When Joseph R. Biden Jr. announced Ms. Harris as his vice-presidential nominee, he told supporters he considered her the person best equipped to "take the fight" to President Trump. Early in her career, she had learned that there was little if any reward for the meek among Black women in her chosen lines of work.

"She had to be savvy to find a way," said Senator Cory Booker of New Jersey. "There was no path laid out for her. She had to find her way through the kind of set of obstacles that most people in the positions that she's held have not had to ever deal with."



## SCRAP THE PRESIDENTIAL DEBATES

According to Elizabeth Drew, a political journalist who for years covered Washington for the New Yorker, managers of the 2020 presidential debates are being forced to shuffle logistics and locations to deal with the threat of the coronavirus. But she proposes another, and for her, a better idea. Scrap them altogether. And not for health reasons.

The debates, in her view, never made sense as a test for presidential leadership. In fact, they reward the opposite of what we want in a president: intelligence, thoughtfulness, knowledge, empathy and likeability. And don't forget dignity.

Possibly the most substantive debate was the one between John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon. Nixon was thought to have won on substance on the radio, while Kennedy—cooler and more appealing—won on television. Since these weren't true debates, many questions by panels of journalists were geared less to stimulate debate than to challenge one of the candidates.

Over the years, in subsequent debates, points went to snappy comebacks and one-liners. Whatever substance existed was largely ignored. In the 1980 debate between Ronald Reagan and Jimmy Carter, Carter made a serious point about Reagan's position on Medicare. Reagan replied, "There you go again." It brought down the house. End of discussion. In the Reagan/Mondale debate, Reagan, at 73 the oldest nominee for president, quipped: "I will not make age an issue of this campaign. I am not going to exploit, for political purposes, my opponent's youth and inexperience." Come November, Mondale was trounced by Reagan.

So, what's the point of the carefully rehearsed one-liner? When is the president called upon to put down a member of Congress or a foreign leader? Question: In your experience, have we ever had a president who does not adhere to the civility expected of a U.S. president? Should presidents be allowed, even encouraged, to say whatever they think or feel?

In place of debates, it would seem the better way forward is to "pay attention to" the long campaigns whereby candidate put forth their best ideas on a variety of issues of concern to their fellow Americans. If so, it is not difficult to judge how a candidate will conduct himself in office. We can start by following the Trump/Biden debates, if they actually take place in the midst of the most serious pandemic since early in the twentieth century.

