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Jill Biden is actually a voice of reason following last week's debate debacle

3-minute read

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It was Dr. Jill Biden who first revealed to the public the horrifying 6-day “debate camp” that immediately preceded last week’s pivotal showdown between President Joe Biden and former President Trump. A grueling prep, lack of sleep, and a stress-related respiratory infection culminated in Biden’s poor performance as seen by 51.3 million viewers.

For most Americans, obviously curious about how their president conducts himself in domestic and foreign meetings, seeing an octogenarian — albeit healthy and productive — stumble over words, have trouble finishing sentences, and sometimes combining two subjects in one sentence without a natural segue left them shaken, shocked, and rudderless. For those who embrace the Democratic platform of ideals, policies, and values, the angst of Biden possibly losing to the Republican challenger was overwhelming.

Amidst a [torrent of demands that Biden leave the race](#) lest he cause a major Democratic defeat not only in the presidential but in the subsequent gubernatorial and congressional elections throughout the country, Jill Biden remained steadfast. Putting on her hat, as a doctor of education — with an admirable track record of boosting literacy rates by helping students overcome reading impediments and having taught teachers how to improve reading and composition skills of their students — she identified the cause of her husband’s faltering in answering questions posed by CNN’s Jake Tapper and Dana Bash.

Jill Biden was right: 'Debate camp' at Camp David was too much



President Joe Biden and First Lady Jill Biden walk from Marine One to board Air Force One at Francis S. Gabreski Airport in Westhampton Beach, New York on June 29, 2024. MANDEL NGAN, AFP Via Getty Images

Jill Biden pointed out that being sequestered at Camp David for nearly a week leading up to the debate, surrounded by staff members intent on cramming the mind of the president with facts, figures and minutia, was not a way to properly prepare for a debate. In fact, it proved to do just the opposite. A good night’s sleep would have been wiser, especially considering the unusually grueling international travel schedule and the two-continent wars that undoubtedly require the president to take calls in the middle of the night.

In as much as this round-the-clock “debate camp” — consisting of endless sessions of fact cramming, memorization, and tactical advice on how to handle barbs from the other side — must be reconsidered, this is not a matter of simply shifting the blame. On the contrary, it is a stark view of the reality of the internal wars we impose on ourselves as we try to navigate in this world and fulfill our ambition of effecting positive change.

Jill Biden is a runner, an athlete who understands the importance of reaching one’s goal. And as a creative thinker in the education field, she started a program to educate female students about breast health and the importance of early detection and treatment of breast cancer. She has also stood at her husband’s side as he pioneered in the Senate the Violence Against Women’s Act, or VAWA, which has enabled countless battered women to flee to safe havens to avoid further domestic abuse. And more recently, she has stood at his side when, as president, he signed key provisions in the reauthorization of VAWA that direct courts to seriously weigh evidence of domestic violence and child abuse before making a custody decision.

Ratings and metrics aren't always healthy measures

Our fear is that we’ve devolved into an era of clicks, likes and tags — so much so that we can no longer evaluate performance, integrity and commitment. And what that means is that instead of judging a person by their record, history, experience and so forth, we impulsively assign ratings — whether it’s to the take-out place that delivers our food, to the dentist who just performed root canal, or to the president who partook in a heated debate devoid of a good night’s sleep.

We are reminded of how relying on ratings can be misleading in other contexts as well, and with similarly deleterious consequences. For example, as researchers who have studied the family court, we’ve seen just how quickly judges “rate” mothers who come before them pleading to retain custody of their children. We’ve seen women falter terribly under cross-examination: they stutter, they show confusion and they often cry. Yet, their record of having cared admirably for their children is often obliterated by their performance in court. In fact, many judges will justify a custody award based on the mother’s performance in court rather than her performance as a parent. Not surprisingly, we’ve seen tragic mistakes made in such custody decisions, sometimes leading to the death of the child by the abusive parent.

In the last analysis, we must recognize that “ratings” can be specious and can lead to poor decisions. Jill Biden has pointed out the conditions of “debate camp” that must be addressed, lest we descend into a world of specious ratings that undermine a strong and impressive presidential record. And the consequences of doing so can be grave.

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