

Waiting for California and the FBI

Exclusive: Some Democratic leaders are privately scouting around for someone to replace Hillary Clinton if she stumbles again in California and/or the FBI detects a crime in her email scandal, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

For months now, poll after poll have registered the judgment of the American people that they want neither Hillary Clinton nor Donald Trump as the next President, but the two major parties seem unable to steer away from this looming pileup, forcing voters to choose between two widely disdained politicians.

The Republicans are locked in after Trump's hostile takeover of the party's selection process, but the Democrats have one final chance to steer clear, on June 7 when they hold several primaries and caucuses including New Jersey and California. If Bernie Sanders can upset Clinton in California – and/or if Clinton's legal problems over her emails worsen – there remains a long-shot chance that the Democratic convention might nominate someone else.

As far-fetched as this might seem, some senior Democrats, including reportedly White House officials, are giving serious thought to how the party can grab the wheel at the last moment and avoid the collision of two historically unpopular political figures, a smash-up where Trump might be the one walking away, damaged but victorious.

Two Washington insiders – Democratic pollster and political adviser Douglas E. Schoen and famed Watergate investigative reporter Carl Bernstein – have described panicky meetings of top Democrats worried over Clinton's troubled campaign, with Schoen also describing private talks about possible last-minute alternatives.

I've heard similar tales of hushed discussions – with the fill-in options including Vice President Joe Biden, Secretary of State John Kerry or Sen. Sanders – but I still believe these fretful leaders are frozen by indecision and don't have the nerve to pull Hillary Clinton's hands off the steering wheel even to avoid disaster.

But at least I'm not alone hearing these frightened whispers. In a Wall Street Journal [opinion piece](#), Schoen, who served as a political aide to President Bill Clinton in the 1990s, wrote: "There is now more than a theoretical chance that Hillary Clinton may not be the Democratic nominee for president. ...

"The inevitability behind Mrs. Clinton's nomination will be in large measure

eviscerated if she loses the June 7 California primary to Bernie Sanders. That could well happen. ... A Sanders win in California would powerfully underscore Mrs. Clinton's weakness as a candidate in the general election.

"Democratic superdelegates – chosen by the party establishment and overwhelmingly backing Mrs. Clinton, 543-44 – would seriously question whether they should continue to stand behind her candidacy. ...

"Mrs. Clinton also faces growing legal problems. The State Department inspector general's recent report on Mrs. Clinton's use of a private email server while she was secretary of state made it abundantly clear that she broke rules and has been far from forthright in her public statements. The damning findings buttressed concerns within the party that Mrs. Clinton and her aides may not get through the government's investigation without a finding of culpability somewhere.

"With Mrs. Clinton reportedly soon to be interviewed by the FBI, suggesting that the investigation is winding up, a definitive ruling by the attorney general could be issued before the July 25 Democratic convention in Philadelphia. Given the inspector general's report, a clean bill of health from the Justice Department is unlikely.

"Finally, with Mrs. Clinton's negative rating nearly as high as Donald Trump's, and with voters not trusting her by a ratio of 4 to 1, Democrats face an unnerving possibility."

Besides the lack of trust, voters simply don't like her. On Wednesday, the Real Clear Politics poll average of Clinton's favorable vs. unfavorable numbers were 37.6 percent to 55.8 percent, an 18.2-point net unfavorable.

Looking for a Fill-in

Schoen continued: "There are increasing rumblings within the party about how a new candidate could emerge at the convention. John Kerry, the 2004 nominee, is one possibility. But the most likely scenario is that Vice President Joe Biden – who has said that he regrets 'every day' his decision not to run – enters the race.

"Mr. Biden would be cast as the white knight rescuing the party, and the nation, from a possible Trump presidency. To win over Sanders supporters, he would likely choose as his running mate someone like Sen. Elizabeth Warren who is respected by the party's left wing. ...

"All of these remain merely possibilities. But it is easier now than ever to imagine a scenario in which Hillary Clinton – whether by dint of legal or

political circumstances – is not the Democratic presidential nominee.”

In a CNN interview after last week’s scathing State Department Inspector General’s report on Clinton’s use of her home email server, Carl Bernstein said he was hearing similar speculation:

“I was in Washington this week, I spoke to a number of top Democratic officials and they’re terrified, including people at the White House, that her campaign is in freefall because of this distrust factor. Indeed, Trump has a similar problem, but she’s the one whose numbers are going south.

“And the great hope in the White House, as well as the Democratic leadership and people who support her, is that she can just get to this convention, get the nomination – *which they’re no longer 100 percent sure of* – and get President Obama out there to help her, he’s got a lot of credibility... But she needs all the help she can get because right now her campaign is in huge trouble.”

On Tuesday, Clinton received a boost when California Gov. Jerry Brown endorsed her – reflecting the Democratic establishment’s view that it is safer to leave Clinton at the wheel than try to wrestle it away and face the wrath of Clinton’s female supporters who insist that it’s “her turn” after she lost a hard-fought race to Barack Obama in 2008.

Trump also administered another self-inflicted wound with a bitterly defensive press conference about his fund-raising for veteran groups, and he suffered more bruises with the release of court evidence about high-pressure sales tactics used by the now-defunct Trump University.

Trump’s black Tuesday reminded Democrats why they were so hopeful that Trump might first blow up the Republican Party and then blow up his own campaign, letting Clinton win essentially by default. But the fragility of Clinton’s own position was exposed by last week’s IG report, which reinforced public perceptions that she is imperious, entitled and dishonest.

Voter Uprising

Ironically, the two parties reached this collision point from opposite directions. The Republican Party’s establishment wanted almost anyone but Trump but the party’s favored candidates fell victim to the reality TV star’s skill at exploiting their weaknesses – almost as if he were playing a high-stakes reality TV show.

In contrast, the Democratic Party’s leadership tried to arrange a coronation for Hillary Clinton by discouraging other candidates from challenging the powerful Clinton machine, arguing that a virtually uncontested nomination would save

money and limit the exposure of Clinton's political weaknesses.

But the unlikely candidacy of Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, technically an Independent although he caucuses with the Senate Democrats, revealed both a powerful hunger for change within the Democratic Party and Clinton's political vulnerabilities amid a season of voter discontent.

Whereas Republican leaders failed to suppress their voters' uprising – as Trump torched his GOP rivals one after another – the Democratic leadership did all they could to save Clinton, virtually pushing her badly damaged bandwagon toward the finish line while shouting at Sanders to concede.

But it has now dawned on some savvy Democrats that Clinton's campaign vehicle may be damaged beyond repair, especially if more harm is inflicted by the FBI's findings about her sloppy handling of government secrets. The Democrats see themselves stuck with a status-quo, legacy candidate at a moment when the public is disgusted with government dysfunction and demanding change.

Yet, whether the Democrats have the guts to go through the pain of denying Clinton the nomination may depend on what happens in California and inside the FBI.

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)).
