


# Substantial Disruption



## Goldwater's Lesson for Liberals

By Mike Tully

On July 16, 1964, Barry Goldwater stood to accept the Republican presidential nomination. "I would remind you that extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice!" he told the throng. "And let me remind you also that moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue!" Many of his supporters cringed, fearing electoral pushback. The line was remarkably effective – for Lyndon Johnson. The incumbent President trounced the Arizona senator in November and many believed the "virtue" and "vice" declaration had a lot to do with it.

Exactly fifty-five years later, *New York Times* Columnist Tom Friedman cringed as he [reacted to](#) the Democratic Party's presidential debate in June. "I'm struck at how many people have come up to me recently and said, 'Trump's going to get re-elected, isn't he?'" Friedman wrote. "And in each case, when I drilled down to ask why, I bumped into the Democratic presidential debates in June. I think a lot of Americans were shocked by some of the things they heard there. I was."

By "some," he meant "three." These are the things that went bump in Friedman's night:

1. "I was shocked that so many candidates in the party whose nominee I was planning to support want to get rid of the private health insurance covering some 250 million Americans and have 'Medicare for all' instead."
2. "I was shocked that so many were ready to decriminalize illegal entry into our country."
3. "I was shocked at all those hands raised in support of providing comprehensive health coverage to undocumented immigrants."

Friedman didn't mention it but another issue belongs on the list: The Green New Deal. There's more extremism than moderation in all four policies and Friedman and his readers fear a Goldwater-like self-inflicted wound. Fortunately, there is still time to reform the political dialogue and defuse the bomb. Here's my take on the Four Horsemen of electoral darkness:

1. **SINGLE-PAYER HEALTH CARE.** Lost in the hysteria over "taking private health care away" is the fact that every candidate supports universal health care. That's positive. What isn't is lack of candor, especially from Elizabeth Warren. I like Warren, but she disappointed me by evading Chris Matthews' question whether her plan would raise taxes. Rather than directly answer, she kept repeating that health care will "cost less." What she was saying – carefully concealed between the lines – is that taxes will go up, but health care expenses will go down even more. A single-payer system would have a smaller marketing burden, less in executive salaries and, most importantly, no shareholder dividends. Logically, it could reduce overall health care cost, but logic has nothing to do with it. Americans hate taxes and don't trust the government. Voters' disdain for taxes and government eclipse math and logic. Advocates for a single-payer system can argue that their plans

will save money and free employers from the health care burden, likely resulting in raises. But it's unlikely they'll convince a majority of voters by the election, which means settling for something like the Affordable Care Act with a public option. Don't be rigid. Extremism in pursuit of single-payer is no virtue.

2. **DE-CRIMINALIZING ILLEGAL ENTRY.** Julian Castro wants to eliminate [Section 1325 of Title 8 of the U.S. Code](#), which can punish illegal entrants criminally or civilly. Until the Trump administration the general practice was to treat simple entries as civil offenses. As Castro notes, the criminal provisions allowed the inhumane separation of parents and children. His position makes logical sense, but, as with health care, logic is outweighed by emotion. Think of this way: if you enter onto your neighbor's property without permission, you are trespassing, a criminal offense. If it's a crime to enter without permission into a neighboring yard, why not a neighboring country? Blanket elimination of the criminal provisions is bad policy and gives Trump ammunition. A better approach is to retain the criminal provisions, but remove the one that is identical to the civil portion, so that ostensibly civil infractions are not criminalized unnecessarily. That means removing section (1) of 1325(a), while retaining sections (2) and (3). Extremism in pursuit of eliminating the entire statute is no virtue.
3. **HEALTH CARE FOR UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS.** The candidates should clarify that illegal entrants are not entitled to all the benefits of the federal health care system. They should, however, point out that it's not only humane to provide health care, but sensible. Remind them that, instead of asking "why should I pay for their healthcare?" they should ask, "why should I be exposed to contagious illnesses?" If an illegal entrant has the flu, they should be entitled to treatment, even at taxpayer's expense. It's as sensible as covering your mouth when you cough. There is a sweet spot between allowing undocumented immigrants the full benefits of a health care program and making sure they are not left unattended when they fall ill. Extremism in pursuit of generosity toward undocumented immigrants is no virtue.
4. **THE GREEN NEW DEAL.** The Green New Deal addresses global climate change, an existential threat that demands an urgent response. Unfortunately, the Green New Deal, an aspirational statement codified as [House Resolution 109](#), is more a Christmas Tree than a targeted plan. Much of it makes sense, such as retrofitting buildings, reducing use of carbon-based fuels, and research and development. It appropriately addresses displacement of those who lose their jobs when fossil-fuel industries become fossils themselves. Unfortunately, the resolution includes supporting indigenous communities, requiring "high-quality union jobs," "family-sustaining wages," "protecting the right of all workers to organize," and preserving public lands. These are worthy issues, but distract from the goal of saving the planet. You can't repopulate a forest with cut Christmas trees. Extremism in the pursuit of everything you want is no virtue.

Most voters in 1964 didn't like Lyndon Johnson, but Goldwater frightened people, partly because of his "vice" and "virtue" statement. Donald Trump is scarier than Barry Goldwater. Focusing on that instead of unrealistic promises is no vice.