

Keep an Eye on Mayor Pete

Elections, especially presidential elections, are about a lot more than policy positions, more than simply what the candidate thinks about taxes and immigration and climate.

When Americans are picking a president they take all sorts of intangibles into account. They factor in how the candidate comes across to them, his personality, how he or she looks. A nice smile helps. A friendly voice can't hurt. Some candidates have the "magic," some don't. Kennedy did, Nixon, not so much.

Which brings us to Pete Buttigieg, the mayor of South Bend, Indiana, who until he had a starring role on a CNN town hall last month just about nobody outside Indiana had ever heard of – and even if they knew the name, they couldn't pronounce it. (Try Boot-edge-edge, which in Maltese means "Lord of the poultry.") Now, along with everyone else on the Democratic side, he's running for president – and he's gone from zero to 60 in no time flat; as you read this he's in the top tier of presidential wannabes.

Mayor Pete is just about everything a progressive voter would want: young – 37 years old, attractive, gay, married, and despite his moderate tone, reliably left of center.

His Democratic opponents should be concerned. And so should Republicans. Yes, he may be a long shot to win his party's nomination, but so are almost all of the ten thousand other Democrats who want to beat Donald Trump.

In a New York Times op-ed that ran under the headline, "Why You Love Mayor Pete," David Brooks writes that, "It's important to remember that when Democrats vote next year, they'll not only be choosing a policy alternative to Donald Trump, they'll also be making a statement about what kind of country they want America to be."

Meaning, Pete comes off as a nice guy. The president is another story. Pete is smooth. Donald is a flamethrower.

Whether you're a fan of the president or not, no matter who you blame for the name-calling and bitterness, it's been a turbulent two years (and counting). Not a day goes by without some kind of turmoil with this president. Blame it on "fake news" if you want, but there's no escaping the chaos. Americans may detest the media, polls tend to confirm that, but I suspect a lot of voters are also growing weary of the melodramatic reality show of the Trump presidency.

That's why Mayor Pete is a young man to be taken seriously. He's a progressive like Bernie Sanders but doesn't come off as an angry revolutionary the way Bernie does. Unlike Joe Biden, he's not seen as yesterday's man, a guy who sniffs too many female heads and rubs too many of their shoulders – not because he's a sexual predator, but because he's just old-fashioned, which is a sin of major proportions as far as the rising generation that Pete Buttigieg represents is concerned.

Biden and Sanders are leading in the polls at the moment, but name recognition has a lot to do with that. As for the others, none of them, except maybe another young guy with a clean cut look, Beto O'Rourke, has drawn any real attention. And despite his Ivy League education, Columbia, he sounds as deep as a book by Dr. Seuss. And after he lost the Senate race to Ted Cruz last year he ate New Mexico dirt with *mystical qualities* so that he could *regenerate* himself. He reportedly brought some home for the family to eat, too. No fooling.

Mayor Pete went to Harvard, was a Rhodes scholar, joined the Navy. He's a practicing Episcopalian, a Midwesterner, a Washington outsider who has criticized the elite in his party for looking down on voters who live between Manhattan and Malibu.

But when it comes to policy, he's as left wing as all the

other Democrats that want to unseat Donald Trump. He says he's open to expanding the Supreme Court, he's suggested that we abolish the Electoral College and the Senate filibuster, and he's for adding Puerto Rico and Washington, D.C. as states.

In other words, he's in favor of wiping out the institutions that make it harder for Democrats to get their way when they can't do it by winning elections. And he wants to add two Blue states to the union to grease the wheels.

With so many candidates in the field, even the mayor of a small city in Indiana can win enough Democratic primaries to become the candidate to take on Donald Trump. And if the election is about the president's character instead of the economy, if it's about Mr. Trump's stormy and divisive presidency instead of the Democrat's leftist policies, Mayor Pete could actually become the first millennial we've ever elected president.

Yes, it's a long shot, as I say. And you know that Biden, Bernie and the rest will go after him if he catches on. Making sure the parking meters work on Main Street, they'll say, is nice, but not a qualification to be president of the United States.

But if he can portray himself as a military veteran with traditional American values (his marriage notwithstanding), if he can portray himself as an antidote to the culture war, his progressive politics may not sound as scary as they would coming out of Bernie's mouth or one of the other left-wingers who want to be president.

November 2020 is a long way off. Shooting stars fizzle out. But I'd keep an eye on Mayor Pete. His Democrats opponents are. And Donald Trump may want to do the same.