



MENTAL COGNITION & OBSERVABLE ABILITY IN ELECTED OFFICIALS

The necessity of testing the cognitive ability
of elected officials

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MOC Policy Paper & Legislative Draft

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Zarria Simmons is not a policy-writer, nor a legislative drafter. Zarria Simmons is a student studying policy, and occasionally writes MOC policy papers, and legislative drafts on issues in society she feels should be addressed. Any MOC policy papers and legislative drafts written by Zarria Simmons relate only her own ideas regarding solutions to current issues, and are not affiliated with any government entity, or think-tank. These MOC policy papers and legislative drafts serve only as a proof of her knowledge and ability to engage with concepts in policy making, and social study.

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Introduction

This paper is a proposal to adopt the policy recommendation herein. The issue of cognitive decline among elected officials became evident to the public around 2020, during the Biden administration. The slow observable decline of U.S. President Joe Biden has piqued the concern of constituents, as well as other elected officials. First accusations of Bidens cognitive decline began after Biden showed signs of memory loss, and impaired speech during his public addresses over the year 2021 and 2022. His seeming to forget where he is on stage, and inability to form complete sentences when speaking with the public has elicited reactions from the public questioning his cognitive condition. Biden, and other elected officials like him have shown difficulty communicating effectively when addressing other members of public office, and the public.

Senator John Fetterman displayed signs of cognitive decline during a May 2023 Senate Banking Committee discussing the collapse of Valley Bank¹. Sen. Fetterman had difficulty forming his thoughts and recalling details of the reported incident with the bank. This banking collapse came as a whirlwind crash of a multi-million-dollar American bank, something the public should be very concerned about. Sen. Fetterman's inability to effectively probe the witnesses in question, on such a pressing matter, urged many constituents and fellow elected officials to question his cognitive dexterity. Democratic constituents are largely concerned with the issue of the cognitive decline of their elected officials. With only 47% of democratic constituents wanting to see Biden re-elected for U.S President 2024². The other 53% are concerned with Bidens ability to lead efficiently due to his apparent cognitive decline. Some partisan members wave off the issue as being unimportant, unfounded, and a petty pursuit of the republican party. While others like former White House Advisor to the Trump administration Stephen Miller say "Biden is not cognitively present" (2022) The issue remains that elected officials who experience cognitive decline must be transitioned out of office at the onset of mild cognitive impairment.

Statement of The Problem

Joe Biden's presidential election brought with it hope for change across the country. Anticipation for reform on the critical social justice front, economy, welfare, and education, was high. However, no one anticipated the rapid cognitive decline of Biden during his presidential term. Biden has, since 2022, shown signs of mental cognitive decay. His public addresses are at times incoherent, at other times he seems to ramble off into oblivion. He also shows signs of confusion during his onstage appearances. Often seeming to forget where on stage he is, and where he needs to go next. At 80 years old, the topic of cognitive ability will arise. As Biden is a sitting president his mental ability at his age should be called into question.

This is not only an issue that pertains to just Biden, but every elected official. Proof of cognitive ability must be made a pre-requisite for every elected government official, at the state and national level.

United states Senators Dianne Feinstein, and John Fetterman, are other examples of the growing issue of cognitive ability among elected officials. The cognitive decline of high-ranking government officials calls into question the need to set a precedent. Presupposing that an elected official experiences a cognitive decline severe enough to impair their ability to practice situational awareness, who and what is to stop an official from accidentally divulging sensitive or classified information. In the case of United States President Biden, a very high-ranking government official who has access to sensitive information. His cognitive decline may pose a threat to national security. In the even that he was to leak sensitive information during a public address as a result of his declining mental cognition, this would present a massive threat to our national security.

Rather than waiting for an undesirable situation such as this to present itself, congress should convene immediately to set a precedent that would mitigate a situation like this from ever occurring. The problem of cognitive decline of elected officials poses a potential threat to national and state security and must be addressed pre-emptively.

Current Policies

As it currently stands there are no policies or precedents being set to address the issue of cognitive decline among elected officials. There are physical exams required of U.S. presidents. However, whether or not the exam comprises a cognitive exam component and how rigorous it is remains unknown. I propose two reasons for why we must adopt the proposed policy herein.

The first reason being, as I stated above, the potential risk to national and state security posed by an elected official experiencing a cognitive decline. There are clearly no efforts being made by government officials to address the issue of cognitive decline in our elected officials. The potential threat of an elected official with access to sensitive information losing their cognitive ability poses a tremendous threat to national and state security. It is pertinent we set precedents now to deal with this issue, before it becomes a real life problem. In the event that a high-ranking elected official becomes cognitively impaired, and blurts out confidential intel during an interview, or public address, it would be too late to do anything about it at that point. This is why we need policy now to prevent this situation from ever occurring. Constituents and government officials are aware of this issue. However, our officials feel no need to address it. This level of willful imprudence from our government regarding this issue is concerning.

The second reason for this policy is to test the cognitive function of elected officials so to confirm their ability to perform their duty. The duties of elected officials call for officials to use critical thinking, effective speech and writing, as well as prudent decision making. The American people cannot afford to be governed by officials who lack the capacity to perform their basic duties.

Alternative Solutions

As this issue has been over-looked by government officials, the number of proposed solutions to this problem are few, in fact null. The proposition of there needing to be concern surrounding this issue has been brushed off, and deemed unimportant and trivial. I propose one solution.

Recommendations

To solve the issue of cognitive decline among government officials, I propose that government officials be subject to rigorous psychological, and cognitive testing, ongoing from the first sign of cognitive decline or instability.

Cognitive ability tests “assess abilities involved in thinking (e.g., reasoning, perception, memory, verbal and mathematical ability, and problem solving)”³. The purpose of this test is to confirm what level of cognitive decline an elected official is experiencing. There are four stages of cognitive severity⁴. They are NCI, no cognitive impairment, SCI, subjective cognitive impairment, MCI, mild cognitive impairment and dementia. At the SCI stage, in which it becomes noticeable that one is undergoing cognitive decline, the continuous testing of an official’s cognitive ability should begin, and continue throughout their term.

The test used must be a necessary addition to exams already implemented to test the fitness of elected officials. For example, the annual physical exam given to U.S. presidents. This physical exam simply tests physical fitness. A cognitive component must be added and will test verbal, memory, written, critical thinking, and arithmetic ability. Otherwise known as the 5-Cog test⁵. If no such physical exam exists for an elected official, a cognitive exam must be implemented regardless. This standard 5-Cog test is unlike the MOCA cognitive test⁶ in that it has not particular age limit. As cognitive decline can happen to any person of any age, including those in their 30s⁷. The 5-Cog test can be used to quickly screen for early signs of MCI. If detected than the MOCA cognitive test is implemented. The results of the cognitive test are to be recorded by the office of the surgeon general and Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health. With special provision that upon request said results may be made public.

Should an elected official at any time fail this cognitive test, and their cognitive ability deemed a severity stage of MCI, or dementia in which they are completely impaired and no longer able to perform their duties. The proper course of action should

be to immediately begin a transition of the official out of office, and implant an interim official. Who will hold the office until next election season.

The proposed policy herein fulfills a need currently being ignored by our elected officials. Those government officials who realize and acknowledge the need to question an elected official's cognitive function include government personnel like Ex-White House doctor Ronny Jackson, and members of congress such as Mike Johnson, Elise Stefanik, and Doug Lamborn⁸. Official letters have been penned in both [2021](#)⁹, and [2022](#)¹⁰, calling for elected officials like Biden to undergo cognitive testing. Echoing the sentiments of elected officials who agree that this is not a partisan issue. This is an issue that should concern all American citizens.

The most critical opposition posed to rebut this need for policy regarding the aforementioned issue may include party members of partisan groups. A candidate being barred from or removed from office due to a decline in cognitive ability would pose a problem to partisan groups who wish to enter or remain in office. Democratic leaders evade calls to address the cognitive decline of officials like president Biden, and Senators Dianne Feinstein, and John Fetterman. Having a partisan elected official subjected to this policy may pose a threat to party control of any particular government office. To counteract such opposition, the policy must remain nonpartisan, and equally subject all elected officials to cognitive testing, regardless of political affiliation.

Should this policy be adopted as a joint resolution it will add to ArtII.S4¹¹. Where a civil officer may be impeached on certain grounds, now including an inability to perform duties as assigned by their office as a result of cognitive decline. The term "civil officer" is to include all elected officials. This policy will also add to Amdt14.S3¹². Where elected officials must prove cognitive ability and continue to do so throughout their term in office. If it is found that they are incapable of performing their duties as a result of cognitive decline they are both impeached under ArtII.S4, and disqualified from serving in office again under Amdt14.S3. The enactment of such policy, post adoption, should begin immediately, and be applied to every elected official at the national and state level.

The results of this policy would then be seen following the reporting of cognitive test results to OSG, and OASH.

Conclusion

In recent years, since 2020, it has become evident that cognitive decline among elected officials is a reality, and thus a cause for concern. President Biden, and other government officials have made it abundantly clear that there must be precedents set, and legislation made on the matter of cognitive ability and mental action among our officials. The issue is not petty, nor trivial, but a matter of national security. Elected officials at every level from national to state are the barriers between our public safety, and those who may seek to do us harm. They are trusted members of society, who we elect to make decisions on our behalf. As such the proper function of their cognitive abilities is absolutely necessary. Without it, they are incapable of performing their basic duty as elected officials, and pose a burden to their staff, as well as a threat to public safety. Among the myriad duties of an elected official is included the duty to apply due discretion. To know when and what information to divulge, and what not to. To make sound decision, and apply a careful use of one's given power. Can the American people afford a cataclysmic event wherein an elected official experiencing an MCI level cognitive decline blurts out launch codes during a public address. I think not. The necessity of this policy should be self-evident. Its consideration among lawmakers should be deliberate and detailed, and its implementation expeditious.

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