

Is 70 the new 50 for presidential candidates? | Stu Bykofsky

Despite millennials' greater numbers, the gray heads are in the lead

[Stu Bykofsky](#)



VARIOUS

A sizzling 76, former Vice President/U.S. Sen./Serial Hugger Joe Biden is expected to announce within days that he will make his third run for the White House.

His age will be an issue for some people. But why?

He's a year younger than 77-year-old Bernie Sanders, who seems to get a

pass because we are used to him as a presidential contender. President Donald Trump is 72, and the titular leader of the Democratic Party, Nancy Pelosi, is 79.

Isn't it weird that even though millennials (ages 23 to 38) have [surpassed Baby Boomers](#) (55-73) as America's largest [cohort](#), or age group, the leaders of the presidential sweepstakes are well beyond what's thought of as retirement age, which is itself a shaky concept?

The [Gray Panthers](#) were founded in 1970 by Philadelphian [Maggie Kuhn](#) when she was forced to retire because she hit the magic age of 65. She lost a job she loved but launched a movement.

A tireless quote machine, Maggie said there were six myths about old age: "That it's a disease, a disaster. That we are mindless. That we are sexless. That we are useless. That we are powerless. That we are all alike."

Maggie died in 1995 at 89, and since there is no Philadelphia chapter, I asked Jack Kupferman, 64, a lawyer who leads New York City's Gray Panthers, what Maggie might say about a candidate's being too old.

"That's nonsense, that's just nonsense," Jack imagines her saying. "The basic thing is understanding and experience. And the ability to get things done is essential." Ideas are good or bad, not young or old.

Predictably (because they are my age peers), I say the gray-haired guys (not to mention the orange-haired one) still are buzzy. They are a finished product.

"Aging is an extraordinary process where you become the person you always should have been," said my peer David Bowie, who died at 69.

The process also rewards you, he did not say, with an annoying number of

aches and pains.

For half my life, the Big Thinkers have described America as a culture that worships the young, new, and unwrinkled. I found that cool when they were talking about me, less so now that I've aged out.

Does the appeal of septuagenarian candidates mean America has swapped youth culture for ancestor worship?

I doubt it. Sanders, Biden, and Trump benefit from name recognition.

When I engage with online critics, the point of attack is my senior status more than my race, religion, gender or political views. Almost without exception, this comes from the Left. The same people who hyperventilate over racism, homophobia, misogyny, Islamophobia, transphobia, and xenophobia are comfortable whipping out the club of ageism.

Does it bother me? Not really. Age brings a sort of serenity. They often think I don't get it, whatever "it" is to them. I do know that I have been 25, and can remember what that feels like, but they are clueless about how and what you feel at 50.

My peeps grew up on rock and roll, we poured into college, we created prosperity while we fought the Cold War. Many of us were drafted to defend Europe or Vietnam. We understand service.

While our minds may be fuzzy on some details, we have the maturity to understand how and why things work. There aren't many surprises.

But there are some — like health, which can go south quickly, even for those with apparent vigor.

That's why I'm certain that should either Biden or Sanders be the Democratic nominee, the vice presidential candidate will be *at least* one generation younger.

And it won't be a straight white male.