Dear Joe Biden,

I write to offer some thoughts concerning your decision to continue your run for a second term. These thoughts come in two forms: (1), A description of what it is like to live from 81 to 86, something that I have done, and you have not. And (2), a way to leverage your power as presumptive nominee to guarantee the best possible solution for all of us.

1. ***A Guide The Early Eighties***

I was born in ’38, you, in ’43, back in the good old days when two numbers and an apostrophe were sufficient to identify a year. We both were raised during World War II. We have other things in common, a life-long disability, yours a stammer, mine a devastating hip infection as an infant. We both had heart attacks, yours at an early age, mine much later. I say all this to claim some standing with you as a spokesman for the early eighties. I certainly have not suffered the awful human losses that you have endured in your long life.

The problem of the early eighties is not what a younger person thinks it is going to be. When I was younger, I worried about the dramatic event that killed me or left me totally incapacitated, the stroke or the heart attack. Mind you, these sorts of endings are possible, and the more stress a body is under, the more likely they are to happen. And mind you, also, such sudden deaths are devastating to the people you love.

 But rational fear of these outcomes is not the hardest part of living through the early eighties. The most terrifying feature is the vice-like squeeze between the time available to do ordinary things and the time it takes to do them. Please consider a simple example. Once upon a time, I could spring from behind a desk like a scalded cat, stride quickly across a room, and plop myself down in a couch, while not losing a beat in the conversation. Now, such a move requires preparation. Arthritis in my hips, knees and back makes me stiff after a prolonged period of sitting. Am I going to lift with my legs, or with my hands on the surface of the desk. Once up, before I take my first step, I must be sure of my balance and footing. Is that a fold in rug between me and my destination? My path must be adjusted to take account of it. When I get to the couch, I must plan my sitting. I need to sit at the end, so to have the arm of the couch to let myself down gently lest I collapse on to the cushions like a pile of old bones. And if I was talking when I decided to make this voyage, I must pause. Those to whom I am talking feel obligated to stay silent till I am reseated, lest they endanger my progress. All of this is disconcerting enough. I can only imagine the discomfort I might feel if my spectators were generals, congresspersons, senators, or cabinet members.

The expansion of the time it takes to do such small acts is multiplied a hundred times a day. Since fatigue sets in a few seconds earlier every afternoon, this time is deleted from a day that is itself shrinking inexorably. Sure, adjustments can be made, sure there can be naps, sure, staff can step up, others can fill in, but each of these people is also on their own vice-like time schedule. As this vise tightens, there is bound to be a moment when someone’s life shatters between its jaws. And with all the devoted people working around you, you can never be sure that the life that shatters is your own.

1. ***Make them put up or shut up.***

Despite these dark realities, I grant that you have many good and generous reasons to challenge the odds and hang onto the nomination you have amply earned and won. Ezra Klein’s dream of a orgy of democracy at the convention is bonkers. Unleashing the competitive instincts of a bunch of career politicians (and their organizations) at this time would almost certainly lead to Trump’s second term.

But there is a way out of this dilemma. I suggest that you go before the nation with the following proposal.

***My fellow Americans,***

***It has come to my attention that many of you are concerned about a President’s ability to carry on with the job into his eighties. You should know that most of the work of being president is in hiring the people who make up the administration. That work is done. The people around me are extraordinarily skilled and well-informed, and once such a team is assembled, the role of the president is to keep them moving forward steadily in a coordinated direction. One does not have to be able to dance a jig to get that job done. One can do it from a chair.***

***As things stand, of course, the country has no way to avoid being governed by an octogenarian. The choice now is between an elderly man with a loving and hopeful heart and the alternative, a selfish and mendacious schemer who admires dictators and seeks vengeance all who oppose him. Now that the Supreme Court has removed constraints against presidential criminality, this choice becomes ever more stark,***

***As it stands, that choice seems obvious to me. Still, many of you would prefer another option. I see that. But I think you all would agree that if I were simply to withdraw at this late date, without any guarantee of order and continuity, chaos might follow.***

***So, here is my proposal. Let the candidates who would succeed me, [all extraordinarily people in their own right], agree upon an alternative. If they can, I will release my delegates and endorse that alternative. If, however, they cannot, then I will continue to pursue a second term.***

***Whomever you choose, you should be reassured that my team, highly qualified, steady, and firm in their allegiance to the institutions of democracy, will be at the service of any candidat.***

***Good night, and sleep well, all of you.***

***And when you wake up tomorrow, please think about this proposal, and make your wishes known to your leaders.***

In closing, thank you for all you have done to stave off this assault on democracy.

Yours faithfully,

A fellow octogenarian.