

The Devil Is in the Seat Cushion

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A few weeks ago, I suggested setting up a betting pool for the upcoming presidential debates. How many would there be?

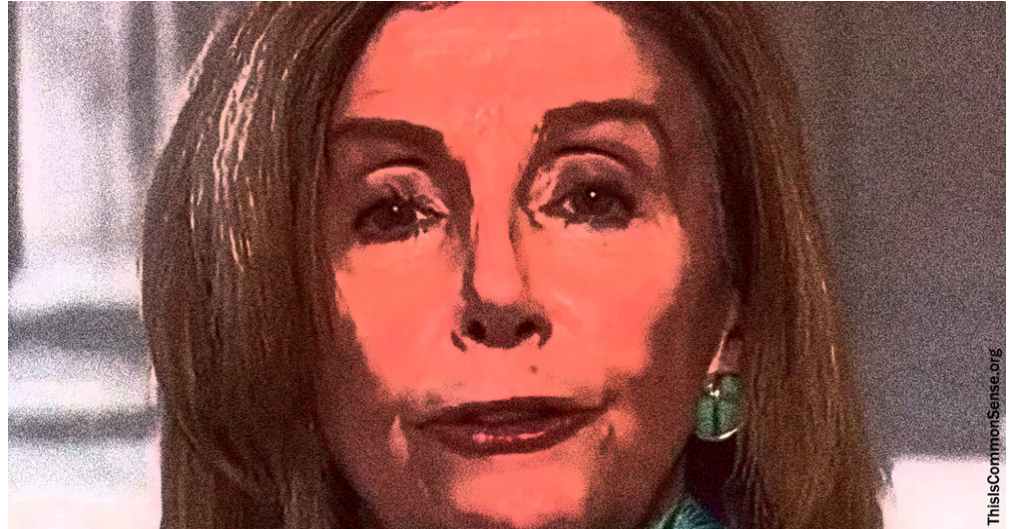
Jeff Jacoby of the *Boston Globe* predicted that there would be three — “no more, no less” — but *prescribed* zero: “America’s quadrennial presidential debates have become an absurdity,” he wrote.

“They long ago devolved into shallow ‘gotcha’ contests, prime-time entertainments designed to elicit memorable soundbites — tart put-downs rehearsed in advance or the unforced error of an unexpected gaffe,” which is about right, though President Donald J. Trump excels at the *spontaneous* put-down.

Advisability to the side, Jacoby surmised what we all have surmised: that Democrats

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shouldn’t be pushing debates. That is, if they want their candidate, Joe Biden, to win the election. He is too off his game. Biden should take a hint from the name given to his



generation: Silent.

Enter Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of the House and very rarely silent herself — and indeed older than Biden but as sharp as the proverbial tack the Devil is said to need to sit upon. She says that Biden should not debate President Trump.

“Don’t tell anybody I told you this,” she jests. “Especially don’t tell Joe Biden. But I don’t think there should be any debates.”

The president, she argues, has not “comported himself in a way . . . with truth, evidence, data, and facts. I wouldn’t, I wouldn’t *legitimize* a conversation with him, nor a debate in terms of the presidency of the United States.”

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Good politics — *realpolitik* — but also *horrific* politics — setting up a transparent-but-serviceable CYA excuse.

But it is definitely 2020 politics.

This is Common Sense. I’m Paul Jacob.