Twitter Thread by Noah Smith ■



Noah Smith ■
@Noahpinion



1/Today's Substack post is about Biden's chances of becoming a truly transformational president -- someone who will move U.S. economic policy onto a leftward track, as Reagan once moved it onto a rightward

2/Political scientist Stephen Skowronek has a theory that says we're due for a "reconstructive" President who will define a new paradigm for the next few decades.

https://t.co/p1usloRmsD

3/Like most people, I thought Biden would be an incrementalist centrist who would get little done other than restoring competence and morality to the executive branch (and that alone would have been plenty of reason to vote for him!).

4/When I read Skowronek's theory, I read it as a prediction of a Bernie or Warren presidency.

I did not imagine that Biden could be a transformational president.

BUT, it's looking like he just might be one!

5/Check out @mehdirhasan's rundown of Biden's rapid blitz.

https://t.co/o6nqPL97S8

6/Or check out @drvolts' rundown of Biden's climate actions!

https://t.co/FrFhE1RLSp

7/Biden has done more executive actions in the first 3 weeks of his presidency than Obama and Trump combined at the equivalent mark. Here's a list.

https://t.co/UkqOTmu49E

8/His legislative agenda is breathtakingly bold. It's -- dare I say it? -- Rooseveltian.

On the legislative front, Biden's proposals are remarkably bold. His $1.9 trillion COVID relief bill includes two huge poverty-reduction initiatives — a tax credit of up to $3600 per child that would transform the U.S. welfare state, and a $15 federal minimum wage that would undo decades of minimum wage stagnation. But that's only the beginning of what Biden is putting forward. Next comes a huge investment bill, expected to be worth $2 trillion. That will include infrastructure upgrades and green energy investments like electric vehicle charging stations. Biden is also planning an immigration overhaul that includes an amnesty and path to citizenship for all undocumented immigrants. There are other big bills in the works as well.

9/Now, Biden might be stymied on the legislative front. Mitch McConnell might filibuster much of his agenda to death (though I'm remaining cautiously optimistic this will not happen).

10/But remember, this sort of happened to Ronald Reagan too!

But there may end up being some important parallels between the way Biden and Reagan change the country. Reagan managed to get his big tax cuts through a Democratic House of Representatives, but ultimately failed to cut government spending (and had to reverse some of the tax cuts when deficits exploded). He was famous as a deregulator, but actually much more of the significant deregulation happened under Carter and Clinton. Inflation was defeated by Volcker, who was a Carter appointee. If Biden is stymied by Mitch McConnell and the filibuster, legislative impotence could end up being his fate as well.

11/Reagan's true transformational influence came from:

1. Executive actions and appointments that weakened unions and regulation, etc.

2. An enduring ideological shift, which led eventually to Clinton's welfare reform and deregulations.

> Yet Reagan was transformative for two big reasons. First, he changed the nature of the federal bureaucracy through his executive orders and his appointments — his order for OIRA to intervene in regulatory efforts was responsible for blocking lots of regulation for decades, and his NLRB is widely credited with having broken the power of unions in America (along with his firing of thousands of striking air traffic controllers). Second, Reagan set the tone for policy for decades to come — Clinton's welfare reform, deficit hawkery, and financial deregulation, for example, came from a desire to defang Republicans' perceive advantage on economic issues. By winning landslide elections with a conservative economic message, Reagan moved the political center to the right in an enduring fashion.

12/In the same way, Biden might usher in a new age where economic progressivism -- in the form of government sending people cash -- is the norm, and leaders of BOTH parties compete to see who can do it better.

Maybe this is the first glimmer:

https://t.co/eOQEeeroo4

13/Maybe individual leaders' temperaments and preconceptions are less important than the necessities of the times in which they lead.

Maybe it's not Biden. Maybe it's COVID making America finally realize that Reaganism is inadequate to the challenges we face.

> In Reagan's case, that crisis was the stagflation of the 1970s. In Biden's, it was COVID. The small-government approach Reagan inculcated into the minds of generations of American policymakers was hilariously, tragically, disastrously inadequate to the challenge of the pandemic. And so the country's leaders adjusted course, with the bipartisan CARES Act being both the most generous and the most effective government welfare program since Medicare. That in turn whet Americans' appetite for greater government interventions — $15 minimum wage and $2000 checks are both extremely popular.

14/In other words, maybe Skowronek is right -- maybe it's simply TIME for a transformational President. Maybe Biden just happens to be the person that the Hand of Destiny tapped on the shoulder.

(end)

https://t.co/k5xqLQ88Xq

And remember, if you like this kind of content, sign up for my free email list and get it delivered direction to your inbox! :-)

https://t.co/FGppA1M8W6