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POLITICS **BLOG**

The Mitch McConnell/Alison Lundergan Grimes Kentucky Horse Race Update

After slipping in the polls and getting outspent by McConnell forces two to one, Grimes surprised everyone last week by surging in the latest Bluegrass Poll.

By Leslie Savan

OCTOBER 10, 2014

Things were beginning to look up again for Alison Lundergan Grimes, the Kentucky Democrat who has a fighting chance of knocking Mitch McConnell out of his over-warmed seat as Senate minority leader. After slipping in the polls and getting outspent by McConnell forces two to one, Grimes surprised everyone last week by surging in the latest Bluegrass Poll, topping Mitch by two points, leaving her within three points of McConnell in the latest RCP poll average.

Then, at an endorsement meeting with the Louisville *Courier-Journal* yesterday, this happened (see first 40 seconds):

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Like so many Dems running in red states, Grimes's campaign revolves around the chant "I'm not Barack Obama." Which makes it all the more strange that she didn't have a stock answer for a question she had to know was coming. "Grimes is fairly new on the national scene, but she's not new enough not to know how to answer this fairly simply," Phil Bump writes in *The Washington Post*. "'Yes, I voted for him,' you say, 'but I've been disappointed by a lot of the things he's done, particularly on COAL and JOBS and GUNS' or whatever." Chuck Todd, the new host of *Meet the Press*, is not new enough not to know better than to go overboard by saying, as he did on *Morning Joe*, "I think she disqualified herself" (a blowhard statement the rightwing blogs are lovin').

Still, Grimes's refusal to answer a direct question kind of shreds the image she's assiduously been building as a strong Kentucky woman who looks tougher handling a gun than Mitch. That—and proving her distance from Obama—was the whole point of her ad "Shooting

Shed." "It's what you said," says Democratic Representative John Yarmuth of Louisville that's responsible for her rise in the polls.



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Her refusal to answer if she voted for Obama comes right after Mitch's own bad performance earlier this week: he sounded angry and petulant on the most popular radio show in Kentucky.

No, we progressives don't like that Grimes won't say who she votes for, that she won't mention Obamacare—even though its Kentucky incarnation as KYnect is extremely successful—or that she's trying to sound like she's dirty coal's best friend.

But the risks of her losing—the GOP winning the Senate and McConnell running it—are worth sucking it up for. If you want to look deeper into Kentucky politics, you should check out “Five Days in Kentucky,” Al Jazeera America's half-hour special tonight at 8:30 ET, the culmination of shorter reports that have been running all week.

And if you want to dig still deeper into the Kentucky coal debate, you have to see Chris Hayes's “Coal Country,” also a five-parter running every day this week, on his 8 PM show on MSNBC; it began with a focus on Kentucky, travels to other states, and lands on the future beyond coal.



LESLIE SAWAN

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for *The Nation* about media and politics.

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[ELECTIONS](#) [PRISON REFORM](#) [BARACK OBAMA](#)

From Prisoners to the President

A collection of 2008 letters to President-elect Obama shows that even though many incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people cannot vote they do have a stake in our country.

By [Marlon Peterson](#)

APRIL 8, 2016

In December 2008, as I was starting the final year of a 12-year sentence in a New York state prison, the African American Organization, led by prisoners in Otisville Correctional Facility, put together its annual Kwanzaa celebration. During the seven days of Kwanzaa men from the prison would gather in a classroom and observe each day's principle. Every night for about three hours, we would listen to prepared speeches from our peers that explored the principle of the night. That year, on the second night, I was given the opportunity to deliver remarks about *kujichagulia*, Swahili for self-determination.

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Not long before the night of my speech, I came across a pull-out in the January 2009 issue of *Essence* that prompted readers to fill out a form letter to the newly elected President Obama and send it to the White House. I decided to make photocopies of the handout and ask the men who were in attendance the night of my speech to fill out the handout.

The *Essence* letter asked reader to fill in the blanks for the following statements:

1. I was inspired by_____.
2. In the days to come, I wish for you and your family_____.
3. During your presidency, I hope you will pay attention to_____.
4. I pledge to do my part by helping my community to_____.
5. Our prayer for you, as we embark on this journey together, is_____.

People in prison are so much more than prisoners. They are more than campaigns for advocates and activists to fight for. The women, men, transgender people, and children that occupy America's prisons have insights to offer. As you read the words of these men, I ask you to digest them with careful thought. Did he fulfill their (our) hopes and dreams? Is there anything you would consider prophetic in their letters? Anything particularly insightful? Or maybe there are statements that will make you rethink your evaluation of his presidency.

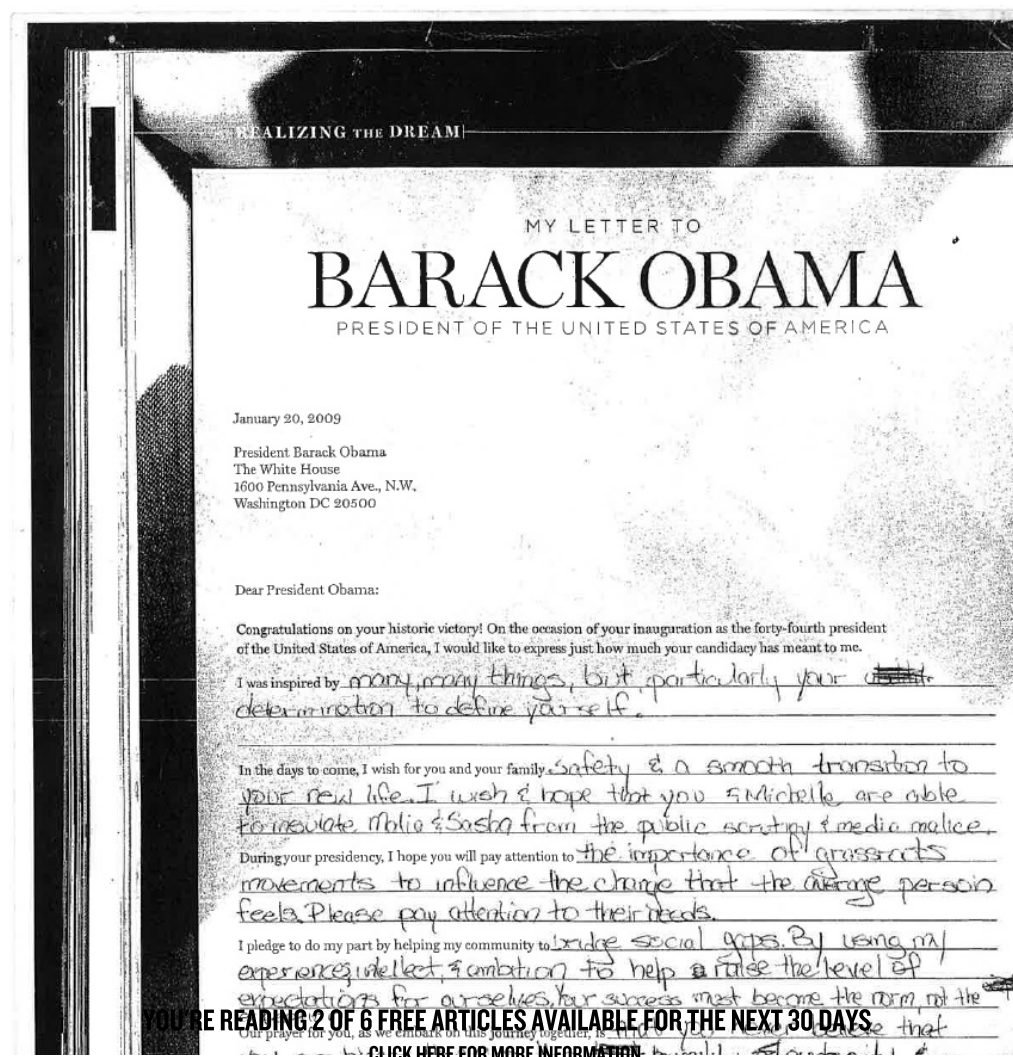
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What if there was a presidential debate held inside a prison facility? Moreover, how would candidates Hillary Clinton, Bernie Sanders, Donald Trump, Ted Cruz, and John Kasich answer the prisoners' questions? If we're real about criminal-justice reform, and political revolutions, then here's a chance to be authentic. The letters attached are evidence that even though many incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people cannot vote they do have a stake in who becomes president.

Letters from Prisoners at Otisville Correctional Facility to President Obama



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0 COMMENTS

MARLON PETERSON

Marlon Peterson is a national social- and criminal-justice advocate, writer, community organizer, and educator. He is the founder of The Precedential Group.

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ELECTION 2016 BERNIE SANDERS HILLARY CLINTON

Both Clinton and Sanders Are Qualified—but Only Sanders Calls for Political Revolution

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That's why The Nation still thinks primary voters should turn out for Sanders.

By the Editors

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APRIL 8, 2016



New York is an electoral microclimate that is in many senses distinct from the rest of the United States, yet the storms that develop in New York sweep across the American political landscape. We know; *The Nation* was founded in New York, and we have been covering this city and its outsized influence on this country for 150 years. Because so much economic, social, and media power is concentrated in New York, it shapes not just a local debate but a coast-to-coast dialogue. Perhaps it is true that what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas. But what happens in New York goes national.

So as the 2016 Democratic presidential race crashes into New York City in advance of the April 19 New York state primary, it is no surprise that everything is blowing up. The charges and countercharges are flying, the tabloid headlines are rolling off the presses, and the pundits say that “Wisconsin nice” has been replaced by “New York nasty.” We don’t quite buy that. What’s happening is that a race that has been reasonably genteel—especially when compared to the brutal battle Republicans are experiencing in this Trumped-up campaign season—has intensified because so much is at stake. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton retains her front-runner status, with a clear lead in the race for delegates. But Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders is winning the momentum race, having secured overwhelming majorities on six of the last seven contests—including a Wisconsin primary fight where both candidates ran hard and Sanders carried 71 of 72 counties and won 57 percent of the statewide vote.

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The morning after the Wisconsin primary, all attention shifted to New York and it seemed as if the volume was suddenly turned up 11. Unfortunately, the New York fight started with less focus on



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issues and ideas and more focus on foibles and mischaracterizations. Let us break through the New York noise and state a few things up front: Bernie Sanders has a lot of good ideas for breaking up big banks, he cares a lot about victims of gun violence, and he knows that subway tokens are a thing of the past. Hillary Clinton knows how to use a MetroCard, she understands that mass incarceration must be addressed, and she is qualified to serve as president of the United States.

It is on that last question of qualifications that the Democratic contest has turned particularly edgy. On April 6, Clinton was asked on the MSNBC show *Morning Joe* if she believed Sanders is “qualified and ready” to be president. Clinton said responses by Sanders to questions from the New York *Daily News* editorial board “raised a lot of really serious questions.” The headline writers at *The Washington Post* wrote: “Clinton questions whether Sanders is qualified to be president.” Sanders responded by noting the questioning of his qualifications and said of Clinton: “I don’t believe that she is qualified if she is, through her Super PAC, taking tens of millions of dollars in special interest funds. I don’t think that you are qualified if you get \$15 million from Wall Street through your Super PAC. I don’t think you are qualified if you have voted for the disastrous war in Iraq. I don’t think you are qualified if you’ve supported virtually every disastrous trade agreement, which has cost us millions of decent-paying jobs.”

Now everyone has gone to their corners, as accusations and demands for apologies fly back and forth, and pundits talk up the notion that, by the time the New York primary rolls around, the Democratic race really could be as nasty as the Republican race.

That won’t happen, in part because Clinton and Sanders have more
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respect for one another than the Republican candidates do, in part because an argument about qualifications and records is dramatically different from an argument about wives and hand sizes.

Nation editors examined the qualifications of both Clinton and Sanders before making an endorsement in the race. We concluded that, on the most basic measures, both candidates are exceptionally well qualified: Clinton is a former senator and secretary of state with vast experience working on an array of critical issues: from children's rights to women's rights to healthcare reform, and the direction of American foreign policy. Sanders is a former mayor, congressman, and US senator who helped to form the Congressional Progressive Caucus, became a master of the legislative process (using amendments to shape policy even in Republican-controlled congresses), and forged a remarkable bipartisan coalition to develop and pass the most comprehensive piece of veterans legislation to be enacted in decades.

We could accept either of these candidates as president, but we endorsed Sanders with enthusiasm because we believe that he has additional qualifications rooted in judgement and vision. He did vote against authorizing the war in Iraq, and against the Patriot Act, and against trade deals that have done enormous damage to the prospects of American workers and American communities. He has steadily opposed the death penalty and argued for criminal-justice reform, and he recognizes and challenges the economic underpinnings of structural racism. He objects to regime change as a foreign-policy priority and instead argues for a focus on diplomacy and development. And he has recognized, along with Elizabeth

Warren, that our rigged economy extends from a rigged political process in which special-interest groups and billionaires have far more influence than citizens. On many of these issues, Clinton has



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developed credible positions, but she keeps arguing for lowered expectations and more limited goals. That's not what is needed. When Sanders speaks of the need for a political revolution, he evidences an understanding of just how serious the moment is and just how bold we must be in fighting for the future. To our view, that recognition is a qualification. Indeed, it is the qualification that makes us confident that Bernie Sanders is the candidate who is best prepared to be the Democratic nominee and the president of the United States. ●

18 COMMENTS

THE EDITORS

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