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The Biff Tannen presidency

Heather Wilhelm

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Wednesday, Oct. 21, 2015, has officially come and gone, but it was no slouch when it came to breaking news. Vice President Joe Biden, in a major development of the day, announced he would not run for president, breaking various hearts across the nation and dashing hopes that a viable candidate who seemed slightly normal and fairly pleasant would enter the Democratic race.

One person whose heart remained thoroughly intact at the news, of course, was Hillary Rodham Clinton, who did a quick inner jig, promptly praised Biden as “a good friend and a great man,” and then went on with her daily routine of stealthy plotting, yoga for public relations purposes, and consistent obfuscation.

In addition to Biden’s exit from the messy presidential stage, Wednesday was also a legendary date in film history: October 21, 2015 marked the day that beloved 1980’s cinema icons Marty McFly and Doc Brown surfed the space-time continuum and landed 30 years ahead in “Back to the Future Part II.” The movie predicted many things, including a 2015 Chicago Cubs World Series win, magically expanding freeze-dried pizzas, double-edged neckties, and a half-face Google Glass precursor that Marty’s hapless son wears during a chaotic family dinner.

In an interview with the Daily Beast, the movie’s writer, Bob Gale, added his own excitement to Wednesday when he lobbed a bit of a political bomb: In “Back to the Future Part II,” Biff Tannen—the movie’s oafish, tireless, and very loud villain—was loosely based on current GOP poll leader and presidential candidate Donald Trump.

“We thought about it when we made the movie! Are you kidding?” he said. “You watch *Part II* again and there’s a scene where Marty confronts Biff in his office and there’s a huge portrait of Biff on the wall behind Biff, and there’s one moment where Biff kind of stands up and he takes exactly the same pose as the portrait? Yeah.”

Ouch. In “Back to the Future Part II,” Biff, once a humble 1950’s-style bully—“butthead” is his favorite word, and his most cherished hobby involves knocking relentlessly on people’s heads while shouting “Hello! Hello! Anybody home?”—has transformed himself into a mega-wealthy, mega-tasteless casino owner. Thanks to a sports almanac from the future, some convenient time travel, and a penchant for betting, Biff amasses endless piles of money, running a terrifying,

nightmarish alternate 1985. In Biff's world, random fires smolder on street corners, gangs and vandalism run rampant, and evil, more often than not, wins the day.

Is the comparison over the top? Absolutely. Yet, in the movie, there's power-hungry, sordid Biff, bragging about how he buys off the police; in reality, one might remember Mr. Trump proudly describing his own ability to buy off cash-poor politicians in the first Republican debate. In the movie, there's Biff bending whatever's left of the law to exploit hapless victims; in reality, there's our friend Donald Trump, a man with a proud past of targeting elderly Atlantic City widows using the government's power of eminent domain.

"A decade and a half ago," as Robert VerBruggen noted in *National Review*, it was still "fresh on everyone's mind that Donald Trump is one of the leading users of this form of state-sanctioned thievery." Today, Trump is better known for his Biff-like verbal bombast than anything else. Unfortunately, his fans tend to ignore the fact that his riffs are filled with prescriptions that would require equally bombastic uses of government power.

But is Donald Trump the only Biff in the room? Or is there another, quieter, subtler Biff, one who gets the joke a little more, and who likes to remind us that she's just a kindly grandmother trying to help us all?

It's telling that on Wednesday, when Joe Biden left the speculative presidential stage, he did so with a blatant dig at the current Democratic front-runner. "I believe that we have to end the divisive partisan politics that is ripping this country apart, and I think we can," he said. "It's mean-spirited, it's petty, and it's gone on for much too long. I don't believe, like some do, that it's naive to talk to Republicans. I don't think we should look at Republicans as our enemies. They are our opposition. They're not our enemies."

In last week's Democratic debate, of course, Hillary Rodham Clinton told the nation that Republicans—roughly half the nation, give or take—were enemies that she was proud to have, lumping them in with "the NRA, the health insurance companies, the drug companies, the Iranians." Yowza, Biff. That's kind of harsh. Now that I think about it, you also love government power. What are you going to do when you're the boss?

"Back to the Future Part II" may have been a lot of things, but it was also a great reminder of the perils of unchecked power. "Think of your least favorite presidential candidate," the Cato Institute's Michael Cannon recently pointed out on Twitter. "Now imagine s/he wins. Doesn't limiting government power seem like a good idea?" It sure does—especially when you think of the Biffs in our midst.