

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: John Beilenson, SCP
jbeilenson@aboutscp.com
610-453-5993

When Considering Presidential Candidates, Age Is Just a Number

With more people living longer and healthier lives than ever before, a [new AFAR white paper](#) shows there is no such thing as being “too old to be president.”

July 26, 2019 (New York, NY) – Age is not a relevant factor in judging the fitness of presidential candidates to hold the nation’s highest office, according to the first-ever study that estimates the longevity and survival probabilities of candidates seeking the White House.

“Age is just a number,” says study author S. Jay Olshansky, PhD, a leading researcher on aging at the University of Illinois at Chicago School of Public Health and board member of the American Federation for Aging Research (AFAR). “This research for the first time provides science-based calculations that show that the age of a candidate should not be considered at all.”

In a new AFAR-published white paper, [Longevity and Health of U.S. Presidential Candidates for the 2020 Election](#), Olshansky and his colleagues used data from national vital statistics to estimate lifespan, healthspan (years of healthy living), disabled lifespan, and four- and eight-year survival probabilities for U.S. citizens with attributes matching those of all 27 current candidates for the next two election cycles.

The study’s science-based estimates, which are referred to as “intentionally conservative,” suggest that nearly all of the candidates meet the criteria to live in health, and without disability, not only through a first term, but through a second term as well.

“Nevertheless, the estimates provided here (favorable or unfavorable) should not be interpreted as destiny for any of the candidates,” Olshansky wrote.

A Matter of Health, Not Age

Four of the leading contenders in both parties are in their 70s: U.S. senators Joe Biden (76), Bernie Sanders (77) and Elizabeth Warren (70) on the Democratic side, and Republican incumbent Donald Trump (73), who became the oldest American elected president at age 70 in 2016. Overall, seven of the 27 candidates currently in the race would be aged 70 and older on inauguration day in January 2021, increasing the odds that the oldest person ever elected president could be sworn into office that day.

That fact has given rise to considerable discussion and media attention regarding the question of the role age plays in deciding whether a candidate is fit to be president. Almost four in 10 people surveyed in a June 2019 *Economist/YouGov* Poll said they considered anyone in their 70s “too old to be president.”

The scientific answer, according to the study, is that “chronological age itself should not be used as a sole disqualifier to run for or become president.”

AFAR Executive Director Stephanie Lederman, Ed.M, says the number of candidates in their 70s is in part a result of “the revolution in healthy aging that has occurred over the past century. Life expectancy has increased by an astounding 30 years. More of us are living healthier and longer than ever before. And biomedical research continues to open new paths for all of us to extend not only how long we live, but how many of those years we live independently, in good health, and contributing in significant ways to society.”

The study also took note of a suggestion by Dr. David Scheiner, former President Obama’s personal physician, calling on presidential candidates to make their medical records public. Olshansky wrote: “The voting public and legal scholars need to weigh in on whether or not medical records should be required to be disclosed by candidates or a sitting president.”

Lederman notes: “The question, Dr. Olshansky’s study reminds us, shouldn’t be, ‘How old is too old?’ It should be, ‘How healthy is the candidate, regardless of their age?’”

About AFAR. The American Federation for Aging Research (AFAR) is a national non-profit organization that supports and advances pioneering biomedical research that is revolutionizing how we live healthier and longer. For nearly four decades, AFAR has served as the field's talent incubator, providing more than \$178 million to more than 4,100 investigators at premier research institutions nationwide. A trusted leader and strategist, AFAR also works with public and private funders to steer high quality grant programs and interdisciplinary research networks.

AFAR-funded researchers are finding that modifying basic cellular processes can delay—or even prevent—many chronic diseases, often at the same time. They are discovering that it is never too late—or too early—to improve health. This groundbreaking science is paving the way for innovative new therapies that promise to improve and extend our quality of life—at any age. Learn more at www.afar.org or follow AFARorg on Twitter and Facebook.

About S. Jay Olshansky, PhD. S. Jay Olshansky received his Ph.D. in Sociology at the University of Chicago in 1984. He is currently a Professor in the School of Public Health at the University of Illinois at Chicago, Research Associate at the Center on Aging at the University of Chicago and at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, and Chief Scientist at Lapetus Solutions, Inc. The focus of his research to date has been on estimates of the upper limits to human longevity, exploring the health and public policy implications associated with individual and population aging, forecasts of the size, survival, and age structure of the population, pursuit of the scientific means to slow aging in people (The Longevity Dividend), and global implications of the re-emergence of infectious and parasitic diseases.

Dr. Olshansky is on the Board of Directors of the American Federation of Aging Research; he is the first author of *The Quest for Immortality: Science at the Frontiers of Aging* (Norton, 2001) and *A Measured Breath of Life* (2013); and co-edited *Aging: The Longevity Dividend* (Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory Press, 2015). Dr. Olshansky is the first scientist to have published an article on the longevity of all U.S. presidents. He's been honored with the Donald P. Kent Award from the Gerontological Society of America, the Irving S. Wright Award from the American Federation for Aging Research, and was named as one of Next Avenue's Influencers in Aging.