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# What's All The Malarkey About?



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Leadership Strategy



It's all just a great, big bunch of malarkey. SCOTT OLSON/GETTY IMAGES

Joe Biden's words rarely make headlines. He doesn't have the eloquence of Barack Obama or the shock value of Donald Trump, leaving his prose and his stances susceptible to paraphrasing. What he does have is a bunch of malarkey.

In Michael Steinberger's recent *New York Times Magazine* profile on the former vice president, he wrote that Biden "may be all that stands between the word 'malarkey' and its extinction." During last night's debate, the word was trending, and not just on

Twitter. When a friend texted me to ask how the debate was going, the only response I could think to give was, “It’s malarkey.”

Within moments of the candidates’ giving their closing statements, a *New York Times* notification popped up on my phone: “Malarkey” was the first word.

Biden’s catchphrase has [been a topic of conversation in the past](#), but now it’s finding its way back into our lexicon. Merriam-Webster editor-at-large Peter Sokolowski explains that the website saw a spike in searches for “malarkey” after Biden used it on the air in 2012, in 2016 and again last night, when the word made its way into the dictionary’s “trend watch” section.

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He is not merely standing between the word and its extinction—he’s single-handedly bringing it *back* from extinction. The popular response to Biden’s use of “malarkey”—a word [born from nothingness](#) that means nonsense—is a testament to the influence leaders can have over our vocabulary.

It brings to mind Donald Trump’s perceived use of “bigly” during the 2016 debates. His repeated use of the word made it one of the most-searched words of the year and even earned it a spot among Merriam-Webster’s [words of 2016](#).

Though Biden has [received much criticism for his speaking abilities](#), by using a word from the 1920s, he has summed up the zeitgeist of 2019. Our world and our politics are such a jumbled mess that no one can really understand them. It all seems to be, well, just so much . . . malarkey.

But the language leaders wield can also provide insight into their character. Just as Trump’s “bigly” and “covfefe” revealed that he is not an orator of distinction, Biden’s “malarkey” demonstrates that he may be just a smidgen out of touch with today’s younger voters. Perhaps his use of the word shows his desire to return to yesterday’s politics and civility, along with its language.

Given the internet’s excited response, perhaps that’s what Americans want: a mix of the past and the future, all encapsulated by tweeting a GIF of Biden screaming “Malarkey!



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