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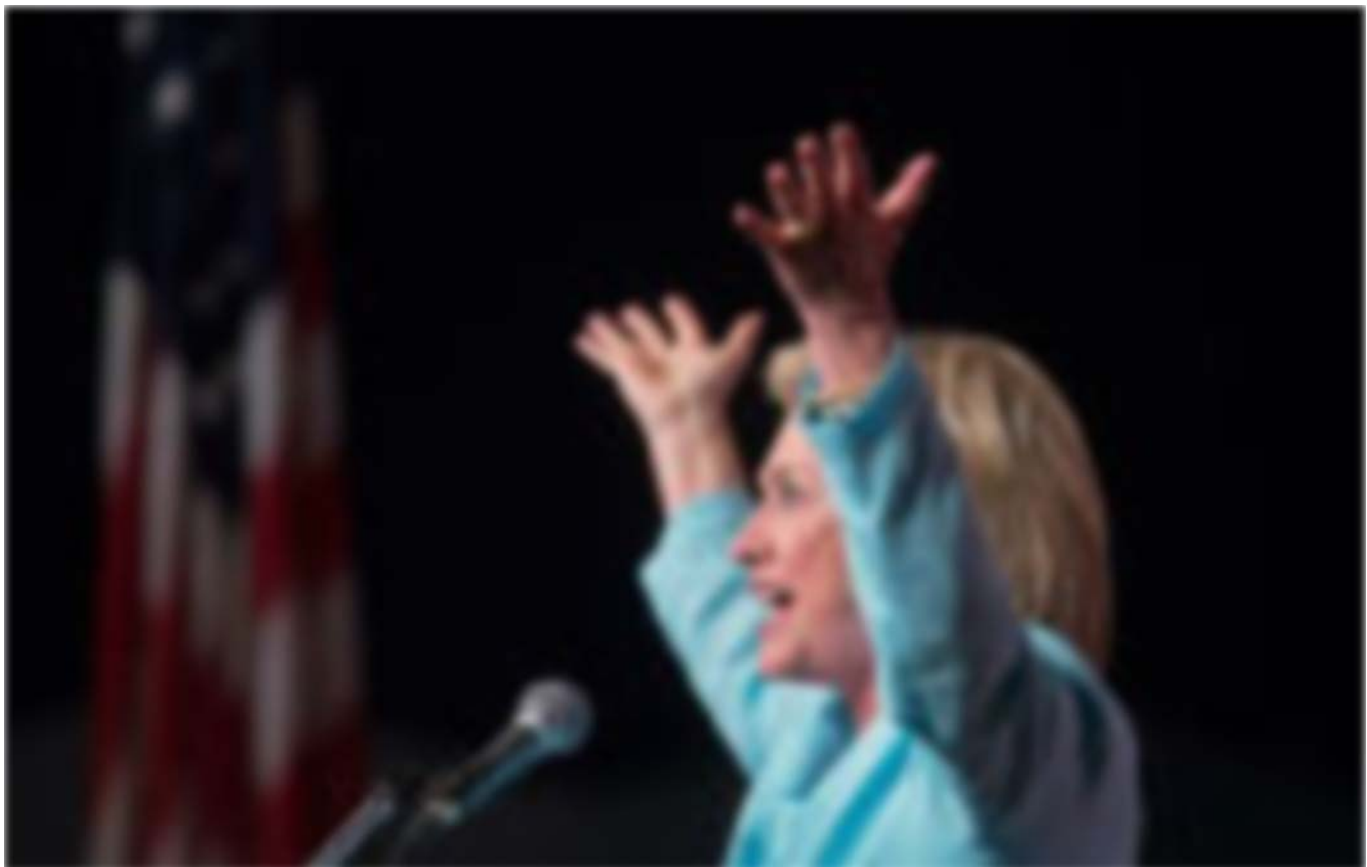
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# THE FAR RIGHT'S OBSESSION WITH HILLARY'S HEALTH

By Margaret Talbot, AUGUST 26, 2016



*For several weeks now, Fox News and a slew of conservative bloggers have been excitedly floating the theory that Hillary Clinton is one sick lady.*

PHOTOGRAPH BY ANDREW HARRER / BLOOMBERG / GETTY

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women, twelve are sixty or above. Ronald Reagan's folksy paternalism was part of his appeal. White-haired, seventy-four-year-old Bernie Sanders was practically a teen idol this election cycle. And the general election will pit a sixty-eight-year-old (Clinton) against a seventy-year-old (Trump). Politicians might skew old, but by self-selection they tend to be people with a lot of stamina; they also tend to be affluent and have access to high-quality health care, so, for the most part, they trundle along pretty nicely. All of which means that if you want to make a politician's age and possible accompanying health deficits an issue, you really have to work at it. You may have to gin something up entirely, relying on certain corners of the Internet least encumbered by facts.

That's what's been happening lately in the tabloid-y realm of Hillary health conspiracies, and in the insidious rhetoric from the Trump camp that echoes it. For several weeks now, Fox News and a slew of conservative bloggers have been excitedly floating the theory that Clinton is one sick lady. A video making the rounds shows her, at a public appearance in D.C. in June, exaggeratedly recoiling and making a face in response to a question from a reporter in the scrum. Sean Hannity, among others, has been airing the theory that what the video actually shows is Clinton having a seizure, which somehow went unnoticed by any of the people standing around her at the time. Setting aside the unexamined implication that a person with a seizure disorder would be unfit to hold office, there is no evidence that Clinton has such a disorder. (Lisa Lerer, the AP reporter who asked the question, and whose expression the health-conspiracy theorists have characterized as "scared," says she was no such thing.)

A photo of Clinton in which she looks as if she's being helped up a flight of stairs after slipping generated the theory that she's not physically strong enough to be President. (The many photos and videos of Clinton walking comfortably up and down stairs are presumably all

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February, was a wearable defibrillator. (As many people have pointed out, it was most likely a transmitter pack from a wireless microphone; the same object was not visible in other photos taken on the same occasion, whereas a defibrillator obviously would be.) Not content with mere speculation, some enterprising sort released, via Twitter earlier this month, a set of fake medical documents allegedly from Clinton's doctor, Lisa Bardack, diagnosing the Presidential candidate with dementia. Snopes.com quickly determined that they were forgeries, and Bardack disavowed them.

Trump, of course, is an old hand when it comes to unfounded insinuation, so he's taken up the health conspiracy with nearly as much zeal as he brought to birtherism. In early August he gave speeches two days in a row in which he said that Clinton lacked the "physical and mental strength and stamina" to fight Islamic terrorism. He's taken to tweeting about how much she supposedly needs to nap. (If she does nap—as opposed to, say, nodding off—that's a good thing, strategic napping being a healthy habit.) Even more irresponsibly, his campaign spokesperson, Katrina Pierson, in an interview on MSNBC last week, referred to Clinton's "dysphasia"—the partial or total inability to communicate verbally because of a brain injury. Maybe if Clinton were a younger woman, they could resort to the timeworn slur against female politicians that their hormonal cycles will surely lead them astray. (Trump could resurrect his line about blood coming from her "wherever.") But, since that's out, they're left with making stuff up about how doddering and inarticulate Clinton is.

Last year, Bardack, who is an internist, released an actual letter that described Clinton as "a healthy 67-year-old female" who was "in excellent physical condition and fit to serve as President of the United States."

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suggested why Trump might have picked him: “Mr. Trump, I can state unequivocally, will be the healthiest individual ever elected to the presidency.” (Unequivocally, really? Mightn’t Barack Obama, he of the abstemious, almond-eating habits, give him a run for his money?) Trump’s results were not just excellent but “astonishingly excellent.”

Still, I’m willing to accept both Trump and Clinton’s basically clean bills of health; I don’t expect either to be a perfect physical specimen. In 2012, Clinton suffered a concussion after a fall—she’d apparently contracted a stomach virus, become dehydrated, and fainted. An examination at the time revealed a blood clot between her skull and brain that had to be removed, and for which she now takes blood thinners. (That chain of events triggered the first rumormongering about her unfitness.) Bardack’s report also mentions hypothyroidism, which is easily treatable, and seasonal pollen allergies. For his part, Trump has the kind of choleric temperament and penchant for fast food that doesn’t always do wonders for your long-term health, however bullish his doctor sounded. But running for President is its own physical test. Make it through that Olympiad of unrelenting stress and judgment, germ-laden crowds, constant travel, and dubious dining and you are probably in reasonable shape. Besides, some of our finest Presidents were elected while suffering from serious illnesses voters knew nothing about—F.D.R.’s polio, J.F.K.’s long list of ailments—and those health conditions were not, as it happened, what killed them.

The ethicists Art Caplan and Jonathan Moreno argued in an op-ed recently that Presidential candidates should undergo examinations by an independent panel of doctors, not just their own, because “even competent physicians’ judgments and recommendations can vary, especially when they know what the stakes are for their wannabe-president patients.” But I’m not sure how well that would work, or how necessary it is. The people who are convinced, for example, that Hillary

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Reed. And the rest of us will select our Presidents based on their politics and values, not their cholesterol levels.



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