

Politics

Biden Faces Mounting Speculation, Pressure to Drop Bid

- Campaign aides say not considering Biden alternative scenarios
- Hickenlooper latest prominent Democrat to call for exit

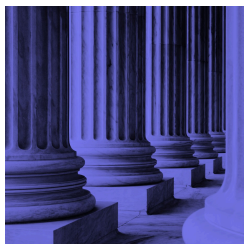


Biden Faces Intensified Calls to Step Aside in 2024 Race

By [Jordan Fabian](#), [Josh Wingrove](#), and [Hadriana Lowenkron](#)

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President Joe Biden’s grasp on the Democratic presidential nomination appeared to be slipping Thursday, as he weighed increasingly public warnings from his party’s top lawmakers while in isolation for a Covid-19 infection at his Delaware beach house.

Biden surrogates insisted that he was “not wavering” and remained dedicated to running, but the pressure kept building. The president, experiencing mild symptoms, fielded phone calls from his campaign team

and discussed the political crisis threatening to consume his reelection bid.

Speculation over if, when, or how Biden might step aside dominated the political conversation ahead of rival Donald Trump's formal acceptance of the Republican presidential nomination in Milwaukee.

The harshest blow: a [report in the Washington Post](#) that former President Barack Obama told allies Biden's pathway to victory was greatly diminished and that he believes his former running mate needs to seriously consider if his campaign remains viable.

Then, [reporting in the New York Times](#) cited several people close to the president who said he had begun to accept the notion he may not be able to win and would need to drop out of the race.



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Reports also surfaced that former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has told fellow Democratic lawmakers that she thinks Biden can be persuaded to leave the race relatively soon. And a House Democrat said Pelosi and Jeffries have been very active in working to explain to Biden the dire outlook he and the party face.

One senior Biden aide insisted the president was still running and there had been no change in his view, while other allies who remained loyal to him suggested a manufactured pressure campaign. But even longtime Biden associates acknowledged his rapidly degrading support within the party.

Read More: [Some Biden Cabinet Members Discussed If Time For Him to End Bid](#)

Chris Coons, a Democratic senator from Biden's home state of Delaware, said the president had been asking for advice on polls and about his standing among senators.

"I think he weighs very seriously the input of those he trusts and admires, those who've served with him," Coons said in an interview with CNN, adding that Biden deserved time "to make the path forward clearer for the American people."

On Thursday night, Jon Tester of Montana became the latest Senate Democrat to urge Biden not to seek reelection. Peter Welch of Vermont was the first.

[Read More: Jon Tester Becomes Latest Democrat Urging Biden to Leave Race](#)

Senator John Hickenlooper, a Colorado Democrat, said it was in the interest of the country for Biden to step aside. House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries joined Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer in issuing statements stopping well short of denying they had pressured the president to exit the race or expressing support for Biden's candidacy.

And Blackstone Inc. executive and billionaire Democratic donor Jon Gray said he hoped Biden considered that the presidency was "a very challenging physical job."

Democratic senators in competitive races are on the precipice of calling on Biden to step aside, with the only question being when and how to announce their position, according to a Senate aide who requested anonymity to discuss internal thinking.

Those close to Biden described a rising sense among allies that the end might be near, or even inevitable. With the president isolated due to his diagnosis and increasingly relying on a small circle of loyal aides, however, it was difficult to discern how exactly Biden was processing the latest developments, according to people familiar with the matter.

Biden still planned to proceed with scheduled campaign travel next week, ABC News reported. But the president was also more receptive to hearing

out calls to exit the race and had asked for polling on how Vice President Kamala Harris would perform atop the ticket, the network said.

Some Biden allies believed that outsiders were looking to drive the president from the race by suggesting he was open to stepping aside. Others said it was clear that Biden would reconsider his standing, considering the damage his campaign has sustained.

Read More: [Blackstone's Gray Hopes Biden Weighs 'Physical Toll' of New Term](#)

In either case, the president's illness is virtually certain to stymie his efforts to respond to critics who have called on him to demonstrate he has the stamina to make the case against Trump and serve another four years.

The result is a political environment that has left Biden aides exasperated, and with few opportunities to escape the death spiral consuming his campaign. Prediction markets on Thursday saw Harris as more likely than the incumbent president to win the election.

Senior Democrats are betting the rising pressure from party lawmakers and close friends will convince Biden to drop out of the race as soon as this weekend, Axios reported Thursday morning.

Read More: [Can Democrats Replace Biden? A Guide to the Party's Options](#)

In Milwaukee, the frustration was palpable as deputy campaign manager Quentin Fulks spoke with reporters. Fulks chided the media for focusing their questions on fellow Democrats' calls for Biden to exit the race, while insisting the president was "feeling fine" and "continuing to make calls and do work."

"The sooner we get past talking about this and talking about what's at stake and what we've heard for the first three nights of this convention, and what we're going to hear tonight from Donald Trump, the better off," he added.



Donald Trump arrives at the RNC in Milwaukee on July 17. *Photographer: Al Drago/Bloomberg*

Yet Biden's illness is likely to sideline him for days after Trump's nominating convention. That will hamper the president's ability to regain momentum at a time when the Democratic uprising over his candidacy has intensified, with more prominent party members nudging him to exit.

In an interview with Univision taped Wednesday shortly before his diagnosis, Biden said he did not feel betrayed by those urging him to step aside – while acknowledging that questions about his age were valid after his “terrible” debate.

“And so people are now saying, ‘Well, that was only one thing, but he’s 81 years old. What happens in – ‘84 years old, he’s 85 years old?’” Biden said, amid bouts of coughing.

If Biden continues to test positive for the coronavirus for an extended period, he'd be unable hold the type of rallies, interviews and other events fellow Democrats have urged him to do. Even if he does return to the campaign trail or participate in interviews from home, he could deliver poor performances if his cough, fatigue and congestion persist.

Biden is “still experiencing mild upper respiratory symptoms” and continues to take Pfizer Inc.'s Paxlovid to ease them, his doctor, Kevin

O'Connor, said in a letter released Thursday by the White House.

Read More: [Biden Faces Intensified Calls to Step Aside While Ill With Covid](#)

Nor has the president proved able to change the narrative, even in the days before his diagnosis.

Hickenlooper said in an interview with Reuters late Wednesday that he believed Biden was “working towards” a decision on whether to stay in the race.

“That’s his decision to make, but certainly there’s more and more indications that that would be in the best interests of the country, I think,” Hickenlooper said when asked about Biden stepping down.

Schumer flatly told Biden it would be better for Democrats if he ended his bid, ABC News reported earlier Wednesday. Jeffries said to Biden he was a drag on the party’s congressional campaigns, according to the Washington Post. Pelosi told him privately he could not defeat Trump, CNN reported.



John Hickenlooper *Photographer: Al Drago/Bloomberg*

Asked about the report, Jeffries's office offered no signal of support for the president.

“On behalf of the House Democratic caucus, he directly expressed the full breadth of insight, perspective and conclusions reached about the path forward – after extensive colleague-to-colleague discussions,” according to a statement.

Biden's team had sought to use a two-day visit to the battleground state of Nevada to quiet talk about his age and acuity and shore up support among Black and Latino voters, who have shown signs of drifting away from him.



Attendees cheer as Joe Biden speaks during the NAACP convention in Las Vegas on July 16. *Photographer: Kent Nishimura/AFP/Getty Images*

– *With assistance from Jenny Leonard, Erik Wasson, Steven T. Dennis, and Billy House*

(Updates with Tester, in 10th paragraph.)