

What's the real reason Kevin McCarthy wants to impeach Biden?

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What's happening

On Tuesday, GOP House Speaker Kevin McCarthy launched an impeachment inquiry into President Biden, calling it the “logical next step” now that “House Republicans have uncovered serious and credible allegations into [Biden’s] conduct.”

The only problem? Impeachment inquiries — Congress’s most powerful constitutional check on the executive branch — typically **require more than mere “allegations” of presidential wrongdoing**. The Constitution’s “high crimes and misdemeanors” standard creates a high threshold for impeachment — only three

presidents have been impeached — and historians and constitutional law experts overwhelmingly agree that McCarthy & Co. **don’t yet have** the kind of **incriminating evidence** that triggered previous inquiries.

Since 2018, the president’s son Hunter Biden has been under investigation — first by the Justice Department, then by House Republicans — for an array of alleged misdeeds, the most significant of which is **trading on his family name and proximity to power to rake in millions of dollars** from foreign business associates. But while there’s a credible case to be made against the younger Biden — he was indicted this week on a gun offense and may face additional charges in the future — Republican investigators **have so far failed to find any evidence that the president profited off** of his son’s deals or altered U.S. policy in connection with them. Even some far-right Republicans have been critical of McCarthy’s decision. “*The time for impeachment is the time when there’s evidence linking President Biden — if there’s evidence linking President Biden — to a high crime or misdemeanor,*” Colorado Rep. Ken Buck, a Freedom Caucus member and former prosecutor, said on Sunday. “*That doesn’t exist right now.*”

Why there’s debate

McCarthy said launching an impeachment inquiry **will make it easier for House investigators** to do their job. “*An impeachment inquiry is simply empowering the House to a greater level to get the documents,*” he told reporters this week. “*We don’t have the president’s bank statements.*” But most analysts concur that politics — rather than subpoena power — is McCarthy’s main motivation right now. McCarthy made a major concession to MAGA members in order to secure the speakership after 14 deadlocked rounds of voting: He would allow any one member to force a House-wide no-confidence vote (known as “a motion to vacate”) at any time. It’s probably no coincidence, then, that McCarthy uncorked impeachment — which Trump himself has been privately pushing for — right after those same members started **threatening to oust him** “every single day” over spending cuts.

Then there’s 2024: What better way to muddy the waters around Trump’s upcoming criminal trials than by generating a steady stream of headlines about his rival’s own impeachment woes — regardless of whether impeachable offenses ever really materialize?

What’s next

House Republicans **have so far not subpoenaed Hunter and Joe Biden’s personal bank accounts** because courts would be unlikely to grant them access without evidence. Now GOP investigators will likely try to get a hold of those records, on the assumption that courts will give more leeway to an impeachment proceeding.

Initially, McCarthy vowed not to launch an impeachment inquiry without a full House vote. But he bypassed that step this week when it became clear that some of his most vulnerable Republican members were worried about backlash among constituents to save them from having to cast a vote that could harm them in either a primary or a general election. To impeach Biden, Republicans would need nearly every one of their members to vote yes — **and even then, the Democratic Senate would almost certainly acquit the president.**

Perspectives:

Republicans will have more 'power' to investigate Biden now

"An impeachment inquiry doesn't require a legislative purpose, which gives its subpoenas more force in the courts. It also gives the House more negotiating leverage with, say, Justice and the IRS." — William McGurn, The Wall Street Journal

An impeachment inquiry would 'force' a 'conversation' heading into the election

"It will force the American public as we go into a general election cycle to reckon with an opinion they may not have solidified yet on the issue of Hunter Biden and foreign influence. I'm not sure that the American public yet has really rendered a solid opinion on it, and so it's gonna force that conversation to be had. I think that's probably a net positive for Republicans." — Republican strategist John Thomas, to ABC News

But that's not what impeachment is for — and it risks setting a dangerous new precedent

"There is a colloquial legal term for McCarthy's approach: It's a fishing expedition. He's unilaterally opening a rare inquiry into a sitting president not because of the evidence that does exist but rather because of the evidence Republicans believe might exist. This is a remarkable expansion of the House's conception of its role in impeachment, one that potentially places every future president in jeopardy whenever the House is controlled by the opposing party." — David French, The New York Times

Impeachment is the new Benghazi

"Between now and Nov 2024 the public will hear a lot of under-oath testimony about Trump's alleged criminality. He may be a convicted felon on election day. [The] GOP need[s] voters to replace 'Trump's corrupt' with **'both guys are corrupt.'** That's entirely the point of the impeachment inquiry. Is there a precedent? Why yes: In '15, and w[ith] Kev[in] McCarthy. He was questioned about the point of a 2-y[ear]r investigation finding essentially no wrongdoing by Hillary Clinton, the Dem nominee. His answer: It was a success. Look how we killed her poll numbers." — Todd Zwillich of Vice, on X, formerly known as Twitter

Republicans just want revenge for Trump's impeachments

"In December 2019, when he was facing impeachment for his scheme to extort Ukraine into smearing his leading political opponent, President Donald Trump warned that his party would take revenge when it had the opportunity. ... What has transformed this longstanding desire into an actual impeachment investigation is not any investigative finding, but simply an impatience by Trump and his supporters to get on with it. 'Either impeach the bum, or fade into oblivion,' Trump posted. 'They did it to us!'" — Jonathan Chait, New York

McCarthy is trying to save his own skin

"It wasn't that the accumulated evidence had finally crossed some threshold or reached some tipping point. It was that a group of rabidly right-wing Republicans high on their own power were coming for him. The impeachment inquiry is chum for approaching sharks, meant to distract and divert them, at least partly." — Frank Bruni, The New York Times