

President Biden Should Not Run Again in 2024

Opinion - [David Ignatius](#)

Joe Biden launched his candidacy for president in 2019 with the words “we are in the battle for the soul of this nation.” He was right. And though it wasn’t obvious at first to many Democrats, he was the best person to wage that fight. He was a genial but also shrewd campaigner for the restoration of what legislators call “regular order.”

Since then, Biden has had a remarkable string of wins. He defeated President Donald Trump in the 2020 election; he led a Democratic rebuff of Trump’s acolytes in the 2022 midterms; his Justice Department has systematically prosecuted the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection that Trump championed and, now, through special counsel Jack Smith, the department is bringing Trump himself to justice.

What I admire most about President Biden is that in a polarized nation, he has governed from the center out, as he promised in his victory speech. With an unexpectedly steady hand, he passed some of the most important domestic legislation in recent decades. In foreign policy, he managed the delicate balance of helping Ukraine fight Russia without getting America itself into a war. In sum, he has been a successful and effective president.

But I don’t think Biden and Vice President Harris should run for reelection. It’s painful to say that, given my admiration for much of what they have accomplished. But if he and Harris campaign together in 2024, I think Biden **risks undoing his greatest achievement** — which was stopping Trump.

Biden wrote his political testament in his inaugural address: “*When our days are through, our children and our children’s children will say of us: They gave their best, they did their duty, they healed a broken land.*” Mr. President, maybe **this is that moment when duty has been served.**

Biden would carry **two big liabilities into a 2024 campaign.** He would be 82 when he began a second term. According to a recent Associated Press-NORC poll, 77 percent of the public, including 69 percent of Democrats, think he’s too old to be effective for four more years. Biden’s age isn’t just a Fox News trope; **it’s been the subject of dinner-table conversations across America this summer.**

Because of their concerns about Biden’s age, voters would sensibly focus on his presumptive running mate, Harris. She is less popular than Biden, with a 39.5 percent approval rating, according to polling website FiveThirtyEight. Harris has many laudable qualities, but the simple fact is that she has **failed to gain traction in the country or even within her own party.**

Biden could encourage a more open vice-presidential selection process that could produce a stronger running mate. There are many good alternatives, starting with now-Mayor of Los Angeles Karen Bass, whom I wish Biden had chosen in the first place, or Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo. But breaking up the ticket would be a free-for-all that could alienate Black women, a key constituency. Biden might end up more vulnerable. Politicians who know Biden well say that if he were convinced that Trump were truly vanquished, he would feel he had accomplished his political mission. He will run again if he believes in his gut that Trump will be the GOP nominee and that he has the best chance to defeat Trump and save the country from the nightmare of a revenge presidency.

Biden has never been good at saying no. He should have resisted the choice of Harris, who was a colleague of his beloved son Beau when they were both state attorneys general. He should have blocked then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s visit to Taiwan, which has done **considerable damage to the island’s security.** He should have stopped his son Hunter from joining the board of a Ukrainian gas company and representing companies in China — and he certainly should have resisted Hunter’s attempts to impress clients by getting Dad on the phone.

Biden has another chance to say no — to himself, this time — by withdrawing from the 2024 race. It might not be in character for Biden, but it would be a wise choice for the country.

Biden has in many ways remade himself as president. He is no longer the garrulous glad-hander I met when I first covered Congress more than four decades ago. He’s still an old-time pol, to be sure, but he is now more

focused and strategic; he executes policies systematically, at home and abroad. As Franklin Foer writes in "The Last Politician," a new account of Biden's presidency, "he will be remembered as the old hack who could."

Time is running out. In a month or so, this decision will be cast in stone. It will be too late for other Democrats, including Harris, to test themselves in primaries and see whether they have the stuff of presidential leadership. **Right now, there's no clear alternative to Biden** — no screamingly obvious replacement waiting in the wings. That might be the decider for Biden, that there's seemingly nobody else. But maybe he will trust in democracy to discover new leadership, "in the arena."

I hope Biden has this conversation with himself about whether to run, and that he levels with the country about it. It would focus the 2024 campaign. Who is the best person to stop Trump? That was the question when Biden decided to run in 2019, and it's still the essential test of a Democratic nominee today.