

# Meet the Candidates: Joe Biden

By Newsela staff on 02.19.20

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Image 1. Former Vice President and Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden speaks to reporters after eating at a taco restaurant on May 8, 2019, in Los Angeles, California. Photo: Mario Tama/Getty Images

From his days as a Delaware senator to becoming the vice president of the United States, Joe Biden's career has been defined by creating shared interests and compromise between Democrats and Republicans. Biden's life has been full of trial, tragedy and triumph — and he hopes to triumph over incumbent President Donald Trump in 2020.

## Early Life

Joe Biden was born on November 20, 1942, in Scranton, Pennsylvania, and moved to Delaware when he was 13. Biden went to the University of Delaware, then went to Syracuse University in New York to obtain a degree in law.

## Senate Career

At age 29, Biden was elected to serve as a U.S. senator in the state of Delaware. This major accomplishment was shortly celebrated, though, as two weeks later Biden's wife and daughter were killed in a car accident. His two sons, Hunter and Beau, survived.

Despite the tragedy, Biden continued his career as a senator and became Delaware's longest-serving senator after winning reelection six times. As a senator, Biden became known for getting policies passed by collaborating and compromising across party lines.

### Key Policy Initiatives

In the 1990s, rising crime rates across the country inspired Biden, along with a contingent of other Senate Democrats and Republicans, to write a bill that would impose tougher prison sentences at the federal level and encourage states to follow suit by offering federal funding. The bill was signed into law by then-President Bill Clinton. Today, some critics of this 1994 crime legislation say the law contributed to problems with mass incarceration, particularly the mass incarceration of people of color, that exist today. Biden has contended that these criticisms don't bear out in data as it pertains to federal incarceration, which is what the bill affected, and 88 percent of people incarcerated in the U.S. are held in state prisons or local jails. Parts of the bill also became the Violence Against Women Act, which continues to be supported by most Democrats today.

Biden also twice served as the Chairman for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 2001 to 2003, then again in 2007 to 2009. In 2002, he voted to authorize military intervention in Iraq, then later became critical of the U.S. involvement there.



### Presidential Bid

In August of 2008, Barack Obama officially selected Joe Biden to be his running mate in the race against opponent John McCain and his running mate, Sarah Palin. On November 4, 2008, the Obama-Biden ticket won and Joe Biden became vice president of the United States. As a vice president, Biden was a vocal supporter of President Obama and tended to fare well in approval polls. President Obama and Biden won two elections and both served two terms as president and vice president.



In 2015, during Biden's last term as vice president, his son Beau died of brain cancer. Devastated from the tragedy, Biden announced he would not be running for president himself in 2016 and instead, supported the campaign of Hillary Clinton who was running as the Democratic nominee.

An active critic of Donald Trump, Biden announced in April 2019 that he would be running in 2020 and joined an already crowded Democratic field.

## Why Biden Could Win

In a country where party lines have never seemed more divisive, supporters of Biden were excited for a candidate that seemed a bit more moderate. While candidates like Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren are advocating for dramatic shifts in American policy and government expansion, Joe Biden's policies seem more familiar. Much of his campaign is based around continuing the work he had already been doing alongside President Obama.



Some voters have also been drawn to Biden's ability to reach across the aisle and build relationships with Republican lawmakers. They hope a moderate candidate like Biden could unite moderate voters with Democrats in the general election, taking the race from the divisive incumbent, President Donald Trump.

## Why Biden Could Lose

As the front-runner in the polls from the beginning, Biden has gotten the most criticism of any Democratic candidate. He's been accused by multiple women of inappropriate behavior, and his son serving on the board of a Ukrainian company has raised questions about corruption.

Several women claimed that Biden hugged or kissed them without consent and made them feel uncomfortable. Biden initially denied the allegations, then later apologized, saying, "I'm sorry I didn't understand more ... I'm not sorry for anything that I have ever done. I've never been disrespectful intentionally to a man or a woman."

Biden is also under scrutiny for his son Hunter Biden's role as a board member at a Ukrainian natural gas company called Burisma Holdings, Ltd. Hunter Biden told ABC in an interview that he now realizes that it was unwise to join the board of a foreign company during his father's tenure as vice president. Still, he denied that he did anything unethical. Joe Biden echoed his son's denials, adding that while his son served on Burisma's board, he had removed a chief prosecutor because of their inability to tackle corruption in Ukraine. Many Republicans, including President Donald Trump, have called for a formal investigation into the Bidens's relationship with Ukraine.

Beyond any media controversy, Biden may lose the election based on his moderate policy proposals and inability to get young people to turn out the way they did when he ran with President Barack Obama. With polls showing young voters backing more progressive candidates like Sanders and Warren, there is some fear that a moderate candidate like Biden will lose to President Trump in the general election just as Hillary Clinton did in 2016.

## Quiz

1 Read the following sentence from the Introduction [paragraph 1].

*From his days as a Delaware senator to becoming the vice president of the United States, Joe Biden's career has been defined by creating shared interests and compromise between Democrats and Republicans.*

Which sentence from the article BEST supports this idea?

- (A) Devastated from the tragedy, Biden announced he would not be running for president himself in 2016 and instead, supported the campaign of Hillary Clinton who was running as the Democratic nominee.
- (B) Much of his campaign is based around continuing the work he had already been doing alongside President Obama.
- (C) Some voters have also been drawn to Biden's ability to reach across the aisle and build relationships with Republican lawmakers.
- (D) They hope a moderate candidate like Biden could unite moderate voters with Democrats in the general election, taking the race from the divisive incumbent, President Donald Trump.

2 Read the following paragraph from the section "Key Policy Initiatives."

*In the 1990s, rising crime rates across the country inspired Biden, along with a contingent of other Senate Democrats and Republicans, to write a bill that would impose tougher prison sentences at the federal level and encourage states to follow suit by offering federal funding. The bill was signed into law by then-President Bill Clinton. Today, some critics of this 1994 crime legislation say the law contributed to problems with mass incarceration, particularly the mass incarceration of people of color, that exist today. Biden has contended that these criticisms don't bear out in data as it pertains to federal incarceration, which is what the bill affected, and 88 percent of people incarcerated in the U.S. are held in state prisons or local jails. Parts of the bill also became the Violence Against Women Act, which continues to be supported by most Democrats today.*

Which of the following conclusions can be drawn from the paragraph above?

- (A) Biden feels remorse for creating crime legislation in the 1990s that led to mass incarceration.
- (B) Biden created the Violence Against Women Act to make his 1994 crime legislation more acceptable today.
- (C) Biden has created legislation throughout his career that most Democrats and Republicans support.
- (D) Biden still stands behind his 1994 crime legislation despite the criticism he received over it.

3 Read the last three paragraphs in the article.

What is the MOST LIKELY reason the author includes these paragraphs in the conclusion of the article?

- (A) to focus on the media controversies that Biden has successfully overcome
- (B) to show that Biden's popularity is high among Democrats but not in general
- (C) to illustrate how Biden's personal tragedies have affected his political career
- (D) to highlight some of the reservations people have about Biden's presidential bid

4 What purpose is served by including examples in the article of Joe Biden's moderate views?

- (A) It highlights an aspect of Biden's character that could be beneficial or detrimental to his campaign.
- (B) It highlights a problem with Biden's political leanings that he has been moving away from recently.
- (C) It demonstrates how Biden's political career has evolved drastically since he became a senator.
- (D) It demonstrates the main reason why Barack Obama chose him to be vice president and is endorsing him today.