

# [***Have you heard the one about Trump? Biden tries humor on the campaign trail***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BX7-3RX1-DYMD-62V5-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

WASHINGTON — [*President Joe Biden*](https://apnews.com/hub/joe-biden) is out to win votes by scoring some laughs at the expense of [*Donald Trump*](https://apnews.com/hub/donald-trump), unleashing mockery with the goal of getting under the former president's thin skin and reminding the country of his blunders.

Like a comic honing his routine, the Democratic president has been testing and expanding his jokes over the past few weeks. It started with jabs about his Republican opponent's financial problems, and now Biden regularly pokes fun at [*Trump's coiffed hair*](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2024/04/24/remarks-by-president-biden-at-the-north-americas-building-trades-unions-national-legislative-conference/), his pampered upbringing and his attempt to make a few extra bucks by [*selling a special edition*](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2024/04/23/remarks-by-president-biden-at-a-campaign-event-tampa-fl-2/) of [*the Bible*](https://apnews.com/article/trump-god-bless-usa-bible-greenwood-2713fda3efdfa297d0f024efb1ca3003).

The jokes are the latest attempt to crack the code on how to clap back at Trump, whose own insult comedy schtick has redrawn the boundaries of what is acceptable in modern ***politics***. Few have had much luck, whether they try to take the high road or get down and dirty with Trump, the presumptive Republican nominee for president.

“This is a constant challenge,” said Eric Schultz, a senior adviser to former President Barack Obama. Trump is “not someone who plays by the rules. So it’s up to Biden to figure out how to adapt and play by new rules of engagement.”

So far, Biden has been trying to thread a delicate needle to boost his chances of a second term. He uses humor to paint Trump as a buffoon unworthy of the Oval Office, but the president stops short of turning the election into a laughing matter.

Sometimes he finds that a few jokes can energize an audience even more than a major policy victory and draw precious attention away from an opponent who otherwise commands the spotlight even while stuck in a New York courtroom for [*his first criminal trial*](https://apnews.com/article/trump-hush-money-supreme-court-fake-electors-72a13a37ece0a71daf45b5d7d819ae03).

The latest example came at the White House Correspondents' Association dinner on Saturday night. After years of Trump constantly needling Biden as “sleepy” and mocking his age (Biden is 81, Trump is 77), Biden lobbed the insult back after Trump appeared to doze off in court. Trump's campaign disputed that he was asleep, and with no video camera in place and trained on him there’s no way of knowing for sure.

Still, Biden nicknamed his rival “Sleepy Don,” adding, “I kind of like that. I may use it again.”

”Of course the 2024 election’s in full swing and, yes, age is an issue," he said. "I’m a grown man running against a 6-year-old.”

Trump didn't seem to appreciate the ribbing, posting on his social media platform that the dinner was “really bad” and Biden was “an absolute disaster.”

But jokes at the annual black-tie affair, which also features a professional comedian (this year it was [*Colin Jost*](https://apnews.com/article/colin-jost-white-house-biden-snl-2cf45f972fcbb64b8cc21c6b26b27822) of NBC's “Saturday Night Live”), are nothing new. The real meat of Biden's routine comes during campaign speeches in which he devotes a few moments to taking digs at Trump in between recitations of policy proposals and legislative accomplishments.

“Remember when he was trying to deal with COVID? He suggested: Inject a little bleach in your vein,” Biden said Wednesday to a labor union, describing Trump's guidance from the White House during the pandemic. “He missed. It all went to his hair.”

In Tampa, Florida, the day before, he assailed Trump for the [*Supreme Court's ruling that overturned abortion protections*](https://apnews.com/article/abortion-supreme-court-decision-854f60302f21c2c35129e58cf8d8a7b0) — with three justices nominated by Trump voting in the majority of Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization — and then pivoted to the former president's hawking of a $60 “God Bless the USA” Bible.

“He described the Dobbs decision as a ‘miracle,’” Biden said of Trump. “Maybe it’s coming from that Bible he’s trying to sell. Whoa. I almost wanted to buy one just to see what the hell is in it.”

Biden rarely references Trump's court cases, but jokes about [*financial problems*](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2024/03/20/remarks-by-president-biden-at-a-campaign-reception-dallas-tx/) that began soon after the former president was ordered to pay [*$454 million*](https://apnews.com/article/trump-civil-fraud-trial-appeal-bond-9c727602732c683fde6edd64879611e7) in a [*civil case in New York*](https://apnews.com/article/trump-civil-fraud-verdict-engoron-244024861f0df886543c157c9fc5b3e4).

"Just the other day," Biden said at a fundraiser in Dallas last month, “a defeated-looking guy came up to me and said, ‘Mr. President, I need your help. I’m being crushed with debt. I’m completely wiped out.’ I had to say, 'Donald, I can’t help you.'”

Even when Biden tries his hand at humor, he rarely strays far from talking about policies. He likes to note that he signed a $1 trillion bipartisan infrastructure law — after his opponent failed to do so despite repeatedly holding White House events to drum up support for an idea that never materialized.

“He promised ‘Infrastructure Week’ every week for four years and never built a damn thing,” Biden said this month to a group of laughing union members.

The dilemma is that Trump, who tells voters the whole American political system is hopelessly corrupt, can get away with name-calling that would backfire on other candidates. During his rallies, Trump imitates Biden as a feeble old man who cannot find the stairs after giving a brief speech, and he calls the president “crooked” and “a demented tyrant.”

The Republican's campaign said the insults will only intensify as Biden tries to give them a taste of their own medicine.

Steven Cheung, a Trump campaign spokesman, said Biden is “shuffling his feet like a short-circuited Roomba,” referring to the robot vacuum, while failing to address the “out-of-control border” and “runaway inflation.”

Rick Tyler, who worked on the presidential campaign of Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, in 2016, said voters have a double standard because expectations are different for Trump, who first became famous as a real estate developer and the star of the reality TV show “The Apprentice.”

“Celebrities don’t really have standards, and Trump is in that lane,“ Tyler said. For a politician going up against Trump, "it’s like trying to play a sport with the wrong equipment.”

[*Sen. Marco Rubio*](https://apnews.com/senate-elections-united-states-senate-united-states-government-united-states-congress-a25ded689f0b41f7be7426a3614a89d1), R-Fla., found that out the hard way in the Republican primary in 2016. After Rubio joked about Trump having “small hands” — suggesting that another part of him was small, too — Trump swung back by saying, “I guarantee you there’s no problem.”

“Nobody has ever beaten Trump by getting in the ring with him,” said Alex Conant, communications director for Rubio's campaign.

Karen Finney, who advised Democrat Hillary Clinton in her 2016 White House run, said Trump can bait opponents into "communicating on his terms, not your terms.”

“It’s the kind of thing where you have to have a balance," she said. "You could spend all day just responding.”

But if Trump's humor is blunt, Biden sometimes tries to get the most mileage by staying subtle. During a Pittsburgh stop earlier this month, Biden spoke elliptically about Trump's trial, betting his audience was already in on the joke.

Trump, he said, is “a little busy right now.”

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