

# [***Biden keeps needling Trump as he walks a tightrope over his rival's trial***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BWB-MHP1-JBSS-S001-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Byline:** By Kevin Liptak and Kayla Tausche, CNN

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**Body**

Syracuse, New York (CNN) &#8212; President Joe Biden might not be saying much about his Republican [*challenger's criminal trial,*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/04/22/politics/advertising-election-biden-trump/index.html) but as Donald Trump sits in a Manhattan courtroom - irritated, seemingly tired and, by his own declaration, freezing cold - the president is still finding plenty to say about his rival.

The Trump Bibles he's selling? "I almost wanted to buy one just to see what the hell is in it," he said this week in Florida.

Drooping stock prices for Trump's Truth Social? "He might do better under my tax plan than his," Biden deadpanned in Pennsylvania.

Trump's Covid-era musing on injecting bleach? "He missed. It all went to his hair," he told a [*crowd of builders in Washington*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/04/23/politics/biden-building-trades-union-endorsement/index.html).

Sure, there are ample punchlines for a trial that contains, at its center, a hush money payment to an adult film star. Biden has been studiously avoiding those and doesn't plan on changing that approach anytime soon.

Instead, as he goes about a robust schedule of [*policy speeches and campaign events, Biden is finding other ways to needle Trump*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/04/16/politics/joe-biden-scranton-pennsylvania-donald-trump/index.html), all with an eye toward getting under his predecessor's skin without crossing a self-drawn line on providing ongoing trial commentary.

"I haven't had a chance to watch the court proceedings because I've been campaigning," Biden told supporters at a campaign reception in New York Thursday, according to pool reports.

Campaign officials are fully aware the Trump trial could dominate news coverage in the weeks to come. Biden has sought his moments to break through, including a high-profile endorsement from the Kennedy family and a foray into Florida for a speech on abortion rights.

Thursday found Biden in Syracuse, New York, touting a new $6 billion investment in Micron made possible by the CHIPS and Science Act - exactly the kind of policy-minded accomplishment Biden has spent the last year promoting.

"We used to invest significant amounts of money in research and development, but i was determined we were going to do it again," Biden said of the CHIPS and Science Act. "It's one of the most significant science and technology investments in our history."

Some Biden allies grumble that trying to compete for attention with the first-ever criminal trial of a former US president will be a challenge for the incumbent, who is already suffering from an enthusiasm deficit among Democrats and battling a lack of knowledge about his first term accomplishments.

Ultimately, however, many on Biden's team believe the two men's schedules will handily advance the contrast that's been on display for voters this election.

Even some occasional critics of Biden's campaign strategy have not found fault in his approach to the Trump trial.

"I don't think he should be involving himself in the details of" Trump's trial, said David Axelrod, a former senior adviser to President Barack Obama and a CNN senior political commentator.

"But it is an opportunity for him to go out and talk about the future and talk about the contrast on substantive issues. And I think ultimately a message that works for him is, I'm focused on your future. He's focused on his past and this is very much being reflected in what's going on right now," Axelrod told CNN's Dana Bash on "Inside ***Politics***."

Walking a fine line

The former president's trial has not been entirely absent from Biden's day-to-day. On Wednesday, as Biden was preparing to receive an endorsement from North America's Building Trades Unions, the crowd broke into chants of "Lock him up" when an image of Trump flashed in a video.

In multiple pun-filled statements over recent days, Biden's campaign has used the trial to provide a stark contrast between the president and his Republican rival, contrasting, for example, Biden's Pennsylvania blitz last week with Trump's (or as they call him, "Sleepy Don") activities.

"The verdict is in, Donald Trump and his campaign's self-inflicted wounds are not paying off. Their strategy of not campaigning, wasting money, acting like small time thugs, and pushing their extreme agenda is driving away voters," Biden campaign spokesperson James Singer said in a statement Friday.

And, as his comments about Trump's business, Bibles and hair suggest, it's not as if Biden is wary of getting personal.

Still, weighing in directly on Trump's legal issues has been deemed a risky proposition, one that could lend pretext to the former president's false claims that Biden is behind his multiple indictments and criminal cases.

And anyway, some Biden advisers argue, November's election will likely be decided on issues like the economy and abortion, not the complex legal predicament of the Republican nominee.

On the trail during the trial

It is that viewpoint that has largely animated the president's schedule as Trump's first criminal trial gets underway. During the first two weeks of the proceedings, Biden will have traveled to four states touting his policies on clean energy, reproductive rights and manufacturing.

Biden advisers - both at the campaign and the White House - say that robust schedule will continue over the course of the coming weeks, with Trump's trial expected to continue in a lower Manhattan courtroom through mid-June.

On Tuesday, Biden headed to Tampa, Florida - Trump's figurative backyard - to hammer Republicans on abortion. The trip followed swings through battleground Pennsylvania during the court's jury selection and Virginia on the first day of Trump's trial.

A campaign official described the strategy as staying a course that Biden has been on for months now: pounding the pavement while his rival seethes on social media.

"We don't have to do anything out of the ordinary," a campaign official told CNN, comparing the differences in the candidates' schedules in the month of March, before the trial began. "That implicit contrast is already there."

While the White House has preferred to let the visual "split-screen," in aides' parlance, speak for itself, the campaign has been sending out sharply worded missives, needling Trump for being off the campaign trail and lagging his 2020 fundraising benchmarks.

Behind the scenes, campaign staff are using the weekslong trial to recalibrate, plan, and strategize for the spring to November, one official said. And White House and campaign officials say there's no formalized approach to distill the trial developments into strategy - no war room, no daily memos, no staffers tasked with keeping brass at 1600 Pennsylvania and campaign headquarters apprised of each day's happenings.

Instead, they're following along like the rest of the American public: by watching the coverage unfold on television.

This story has been updated with additional developments.

CNN's Sam Fossum contributed to this report.

By Kevin Liptak and Kayla Tausche, CNN

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