

# [***A new Biden is on display in public***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BF2-6RC1-DY7V-G073-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

(CNN) &#8212; Who is this new Joe Biden we're seeing, just in time for election season?

He's spitballing about the Middle East during a stop for ice cream in New York and cracking jokes at Donald Trump's expense on late-night television.

He's getting directly involved in government funding, [*calling congressional leaders down to the White House*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/27/politics/biden-hill-leaders-shutdown-ukraine/index.html) to negotiate in front of a crackling fire.

Later this week, he'll head down to the border to see the migrant crisis for himself.

After months of stories about Democrats in distress about weak poll numbers and the growing perception that Biden lacks the stamina for the job, there's a perceptible tweak in how much people are seeing Biden and what he has to say on key issues.

Talking about a ceasefire

Facing a protest vote from pro-Palestinian Democrats in Michigan in Tuesday's primary, Biden was sharing some optimism on the Middle East.

"My hope is by next Monday, we'll have a ceasefire," Biden said, a massive cone of mint chip halfway to his mouth. The [*comments*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/26/politics/hamas-demands-gaza-negotiations/index.html), made during a Monday outing in Manhattan with the late-night host Seth Meyers, took the diplomatic negotiators working on a temporary ceasefire halfway across the world by surprise.

The Democratic divide on the Middle East is a growing political issue at home for Biden. Arab American voters play an important role in the swing state of Michigan, and progressives, pointing to US support for Israel and the plight of Palestinians, are urging Michigan Democrats to [*vote "uncommitted"*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/26/politics/michigan-primary-uncommitted-biden-gaza/index.html) instead of for the incumbent who is sure to be their candidate in November.

Cracking jokes about Trump

In tandem withthe ice cream stop, Biden appeared on "Late Night" and tried to [*deflect questions about his age by flipping the script*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/27/politics/biden-campaign-trump-age/index.html) on the Republican front-runner Trump, who is 77 compared with Biden's 81.

"You got to take a look at the other guy - he's about as old as I am, but he can't remember his wife's name," Biden said, referring a recent appearance where Trump seemed to refer to his wife, Melania, as "Mercedes."

Directly involved in talks with the House speaker

Biden is hopeful Republicans and Democrats can work together, as they will need to, in order to avoid a partial government shutdown at the end of this week.

"I think we can do that," Biden said Tuesday, sitting in front of the fire with leaders from both parties and Vice President Kamala Harris seated around him. Republican House Speaker Mike Johnson left the meeting expressing optimism about keeping the government open. Johnson also promised to address Biden's priority, renewing US aid to Ukraine in a "timely" way.

Johnson's first priority is for Biden to act on the border, but he did not reject the idea of the House also considering the issue.

Biden pushed back on "Late Night" when Meyers mentioned the bipartisan immigration deal that was clearly not going to be taken up in the House. "It will be," Biden said confidently.

He'll get plenty more time to talk about the border this week when he [*visits Brownsville, Texas, to view the border*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/26/politics/biden-southern-border-thursday/index.html) and talk to border patrol agents. Asked Monday at the ice cream stop if he would meet with migrants on the trip, Biden deflected the question, arguing the Secret Service doesn't like him to say too much about his plans in advance.

Trump will certainly be telling a much different story when he also travels to the border at Eagle Pass, Texas, on Thursday.

Immigration tops voter issues

CNN polling director Jennifer Agiesta notes there's been a sharp rise in the share of Americans who call immigration the most important problem facing the country, and it now tops every other individual issue named, according to [*polling this month from Gallup*](https://news.gallup.com/poll/611135/immigration-surges-top-important-problem-list.aspx).

The shift in the new survey comes largely among Republicans: 57% of Republicans now call immigration the top problem facing the country, up from 37% who said so in January, she adds. The share of independents (22% now vs. 16% in January) naming immigration as the top problem has risen by a smaller amount, while among Democrats it has largely held steady (10% now vs. 9% in January).

Problems related to the government or poor leadership rank second behind immigration, with 20% naming those, 12% naming the economy in general and 11% the high cost of living or inflation.

Where do perceptions end and reality begin?

Biden's optimism for a Middle East ceasefire is a good topic to dissect.

The CNN foreign affairs analyst BarakRavid, who also writes for Axios, appeared on CNN on Tuesday to discuss the issue with Wolf Blitzer after CNN got surprised responses from both the Israeli government and the Hamas political bureau that any ceasefire - permanent or temporary - is days away.

In return for any temporary ceasefire or pause, Ravid said Israelis will want "a guarantee from the US that once the pause is over, the US will still support the continuation of the military operation in Gaza."

Ravid also argued that Biden is clearly trying to separate the Israeli government from Israelis. Biden was [*critical of the conservative Israeli government*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/27/politics/joe-biden-israel-international-support/index.html) during his appearance on "Late Night," but also referred to himself as a committed Zionist.

"It's a very gentle balancing act," Ravid said. "I'm not even sure it's possible, but that's what Joe Biden's trying to do."

That kind of geopolitical chess may be lost on Arab American Democrats in Michigan horrified by Israel's military action in Gaza and organizing to send a message to Biden.

Alabas Farhat is a Democratic state representative in Michigan, and he acknowledged Biden would win the primary, but he hopes that a large number of voters - Muslims, Christians, Arab Americans, African Americans and young voters - come together in a coalition pressuring the White House to support a ceasefire.

"We want to see our White House reflect the values that we know it should reflect. I think that's the bigger message today," Farhat told CNN's Boris Sanchez.

How will Johnson do this?

Changing US policy toward Israel might be the simplest thing Biden can do since solving other problems - funding the government, changing border policy and giving Ukraine additional aid - requires bipartisanship on Capitol Hill.

Johnson's optimism, even in the face of growing frustration from right-wing Republicans, that a shutdown can be avoided before funding lapses, is an indication that he has acknowledged he will be working with Democrats to get it done.

"Mike Johnson has almost zero leverage in this fight, and a huge reason is because he can't pass bills just with Republicans," CNN's Capitol Hill reporter Melanie Zanona said on "Inside ***Politics***" on Tuesday. "They can't even pass basic, procedural votes right now. So, yes, he is going to need Democrats in order to get a bill to fund the government over the finish line."

Anything Johnson does with Biden, even keeping the government open, will probably be frowned upon by Trump, who is also turning toward a general election footing.

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