

# [***Biden aims to prove he can still stump the old way as his last campaign kicks into gear***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BJK-1241-JBSS-S3GC-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Byline:** By Kevin Liptak and Jeff Zeleny, CNN

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**Body**

Saginaw, Michigan and Milwaukee (CNN) &#8212; President Joe Biden's weeklong tour of swing states is aimed to [*prove he can still stump the old way*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/03/14/politics/biden-trump-harris-president-campaign/index.html) for his last campaign in a long life of ***politics***, [*a state-by-state argument*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/03/13/politics/biden-infrastructure-campaign-event/index.html) to convince voters that he remains the best man for the job.

Across five electoral battlegrounds this week, Biden addressed his supporters from a high school gym, an industrial event space, an indoor tennis court, a Boys-and-Girls Club and a supporter's front porch, hoping to put [*an exclamation point*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/03/05/politics/biden-fundraising-february/index.html) on his impassioned [*State of the Union address last week.*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/03/08/politics/biden-state-of-union-analysis/index.html)

It was a far cry from the same period four years ago when Biden was forced to dramatically scale back his campaign as the Covid-19 pandemic took hold, including long stretches cloistered at his Delaware home.

LuVerda Martin, a nurse and midwife from the Milwaukee suburbs, acknowledged that she's had lingering questions about the wisdom of Biden running again. But she said she was "pleasantly surprised" by the president's performance and rationale for four more years.

"I was actually quite motivated by what I saw," Martin said in an interview on the eve of Biden's stop in Wisconsin. "I felt relieved with the talking points and how he expressed himself, and his energy level was quite impressive."

From the corridors of the West Wing to campaign headquarters in Wilmington, Delaware, advisers to the president were exuberant about the opening volley of the general election. Yet it's an open question whether Biden's performance will move public sentiment and his approval ratings, which have been alarmingly low for a president seeking reelection.

"I just don't think he gets credit simply because he's not as loud and boisterous about what he is doing," Martin said. "We tend to focus on the negative. We tend to think about what's not happening."

As the curtain rises on the general election - a moment Biden's aides have been anxiously awaiting - the contrast on the campaign trail was stark. Trump's and Biden's paths crossed only once as they held events on the same day in Georgia. The rest of the week, Trump was either in a courtroom or doing friendly interviews from his home base in Mar-a-Lago, while Biden was encountering the swing-state voters who will play an outsized role in deciding the November election.

Yet for all of his miles traveled, Biden came face-to-face with a relatively small number of supporters - much less undecided voters. The audiences for his speeches numbered in the hundreds, not thousands, and his invitation-only events were mainly intended for the party faithful and friendly local officials to tout his accomplishments from the first term and his ambitions for a second.

At a YMCA in Goffstown, New Hampshire, Biden worked to sharpen the contrast with Trump on health care, an issue his campaign strongly believes can help woo voters in November. He was assisted in his efforts by an interview Trump gave earlier in the day suggesting he was open to cuts to Medicare and Social Security - a move Biden insisted he was "never going to allow."

The performance was more sedate than his State of the Union - and far quieter, with his words sometimes difficult to discern in the indoor tennis courts where he was speaking. A protester outside chanting "Let's Go Brandon" in a bullhorn was faintly audible during his remarks.

That may have not been a surprise for a policy-focused speech, which still received an enthusiastic reception from the mostly retirement-aged audience. But even Biden seemed, toward the end of his address, to recognize the limits of attention span.

"I'm taking too much of your time," he said. "You're very gracious."

2024 is not a total repeat of 2020

For all the talk of a rematch with Trump, the race is hardly shaping up as simply a sequel of the last campaign that was waged under the specter of a global pandemic. The president's visits to campaign field offices this week were designed to show that his organization is preparing for an entirely different operation in 2024.

"The thing about this campaign - particularly here in Milwaukee, specifically, but Wisconsin generally and several other states - it's going to get down to knocking on doors, the old-fashioned way," Biden said as he dropped by a Milwaukee field office, one of 44 set to open across Wisconsin in the coming weeks.

Biden's campaign plans to dramatically scale up its brick-and-mortal presence in battleground states this month, including opening more than 100 new offices and hiring 350 new team members, who will spend the month training volunteers.

Visiting the front porch of one of his supporters Thursday in Saginaw, Michigan, Biden worked to motivate a crowd of his backers and volunteers, who later participated in a training session on door knocking. The location wasn't disclosed ahead of time, and Biden couldn't be heard by reporters while he was addressing the crowd.

Saginaw County is one of the nation's few true bellwethers, voting for the winner of the last four presidential elections. Support from its large concentration of Black voters will be essential for Biden as his popularity wanes among other parts of his coalition in Michigan, in particular Arab-Americans in the Detroit area angry over his handling of the war in Gaza.

Outside the Saginaw Post Office, many residents said they haven't yet tuned into the presidential election. Those who have been paying attention expressed mixed sentiments toward the president.

"I think that he's doing a pretty good job so far," said Deadra Bond, who voted for Biden in 2020 but remains undecided this year. She said issues like education and the economy were front of mind - and that she would have liked to raise them herself with Biden, if his whereabouts in town Thursday hadn't been kept a secret.

"I have a problem with that, because I think the people should be able to be there to express our concerns for the city of Saginaw," she said.

Asked whether she was enthusiastic about Biden running again, Bond paused for a moment before saying "no."

Rallying the base

This month, advisers say, the president's first order of business is to excite Democrats and ease any concern about his decision to run. He then will take steps to try and persuade voters who are either torn or exhausted by the Biden-Trump rematch.

Some of those who attended Biden's events over the past week came away enthused - even as they acknowledged the headwinds he still faces over the coming months.

"I don't give a damn about his approval ratings," said Mary Ellis, a resident of Georgia who saw Biden speak at a rally in Atlanta on Saturday. "Not since college years have I felt this passionate - and I graduated from college in '81 - have I felt this passionate about the plight of our country and where we are. It's a very serious situation."

Rashawn Spivey, a Milwaukee plumber who met Biden on a visit to the city late last year, said Trump may hold a broader appeal to rank-and-file voters than many Democrats would like. But he said it was far too early for any panic about the president's reelection chances.

"Everybody likes to look at the circus of it all, and by the time they make it to the ballot box, they have to get real," Spivey said in an interview as he kept watch on a project to replace lead pipes across the city with copper ones, courtesy of Biden's signature bipartisan infrastructure law.

Asked whether that meant voting for Biden, Spivey said: "Yeah, because he's the most experienced."

The path ahead crystallizes

As Biden and Trump [*effectively clinched their respective party nominations*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/03/12/politics/biden-trump-presidential-nominees/index.html) by crossing the delegate threshold from the first two months of primary contests, the outlines of the race ahead came into sharper view.

The fight to protect abortion rights hangs over the race in a whole new way, given the Supreme Court's ruling two years ago that overturned Roe v. Wade. Vice President Kamala Harris, seen by many Democrats as a more natural messenger than Biden on the issue, became the first sitting vice president or president to visit an abortion clinic when she [*stopped at a Planned Parenthood in Minnesota*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/03/13/politics/kamala-harris-planned-parenthood-minnesota/index.html) on Thursday, a dramatic demonstration of her commitment to the issue.

A set of complex policy and political challenges also loom large, particularly the Israel-Hamas war.

While the White House took great care to keep protestors at bay during Biden's stops this week, the sound of anti-war demonstrations reverberated throughout downtown Milwaukee, where the president spent the night Wednesday.

"We want a permanent ceasefire. We want an end to this non-stop arming of Israel," said Janan Najeeb, president of the Milwaukee Muslim Women's Coaliton. "With no change in policy, he will be the reason Democrats lose."

For Biden, that is both a warning and an opportunity. While he remains staunchly supportive of Israel's campaign against Hamas, he has begun calling for an "immediate ceasefire" as part of a hostage deal. And one of his top allies in Washington, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, spoke from the Senate floor Thursday to call for new leadership in Israel - a position the White House neither endorsed nor condemned.

Next week, however, it's back on the trail.

The White House announced the president will make stops in Nevada and Arizona as his general election campaign enters high gear. The monthlong sprint will be capped by a joint appearance with the vice president on March 26 in North Carolina, a state his campaign is trying to turn blue - an insurance policy, of sorts, as the fight to the fall begins in earnest.

CNN's Priscilla Alvarez contributed to this report.

By Kevin Liptak and Jeff Zeleny, CNN

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