

# [***Biden makes it clear that he wants 2024 to be a referendum on Trump***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6B8T-33N1-JBSS-S03F-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

New York City (CNN) &#8212; [*President Joe Biden*](https://www.cnn.com/politics/joe-biden) on Wednesday gave his clearest sign yet that his reelection strategy will hinge on making this fall's vote a referendum on [*Donald Trump*](https://www.cnn.com/politics/president-donald-trump-45).

As he traversed New York City for a series of fundraisers, Biden labeled his predecessor - and likeliest rival this year - an "existential threat" who has wrestled the Republican Party into a stranglehold, intensifying his direct criticisms of the former president and offering one of the starkest windows yet into how he regards the stakes of November's contest.

"There is one existential threat, it's Donald Trump," Biden told Democratic donors in New York, where he was on a three-stop fundraising swing.

"It's not about me," Biden said, "it's about Trump."

Later in the day, Biden told another group of donors that Trump's brand of ***politics*** was "dangerous."

"It's not that I'm so good. But you have to have someone to beat somebody," he said.

After spending the last year working to promote his own record - and seeing little improvement in his approval ratings - Biden is now increasingly going after Trump, the Republican front-runner, as a threat to democracy, a danger to personal freedoms and, lately, as a Svengali-like leader of the GOP.

He was given a fresh opening this week after congressional Republicans torpedoed a bipartisan immigration bill following Trump's intervention, a move Biden said exposed toxic election year ***politics*** and the GOP's fealty to its de facto leader.

On Wednesday, he took harsh aim at Republicans lawmakers, using the party's dysfunction on Capitol Hill to accuse his rivals of blind adherence to the former president.

Biden said Trump "would rather weaponize the issue than actually solve it," referring to the failed border compromise package.

"Republicans have to decide who they serve," Biden said. "Are they here to solve problems or just weaponize them?"

He said this week's collapse of a border deal illustrated the depths to which the GOP has fallen.

"I tell you, I've been around," said Biden, who spent 36 years as a senator. "Never thought I would see something like I'm seeing in the House."

He said even Republicans who'd previously supported the provisions included in the border bill were "now walking away at the last minute because Donald Trump called them and threatened them with retribution if they stick to their position."

The remarks, delivered behind closed doors to donors on Manhattan's Upper West Side, were a preview of how Biden plans to use the failed border vote to his political advantage in the months ahead.

It was also a sign that Biden [*hopes to weaponize*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/06/politics/biden-border-bill/index.html) the current state of the Republican Party as he looks to discredit Trump on the campaign trail. In addition to the border legislation that collapsed following Trump's intercession, House Republicans brought up an [*impeachment vote*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/06/politics/house-vote-mayorkas-impeachment/index.html) against Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas on Tuesday that failed, and a [*standalone funding package for Israel*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/06/politics/house-vote-israel-aid-package/index.html) that similarly did not gain enough votes for passage.

The leader of the Republican National Committee, Ronna McDaniel, has also [*offered to leave her position*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/06/politics/ronna-mcdaniel-donald-trump-rnc/index.html) following the South Carolina primary later this month to allow Trump to install his own party chair, two party advisers told CNN, despite having been the former president's pick to lead the party years ago.

Watching from the White House, Biden has been paying close attention to the developments, often wondering aloud what has happened to the GOP.

The consolidation of the party around Trump isn't a new phenomenon. But the extent of Republicans' subservience has allowed Biden to open a fresh line of attack, accusing the party this week of lacking a backbone.

The president's advisers believe the more this year's contest becomes a choice between Biden and Trump, the more voters will come to recognize the high stakes and look past their serious concerns about a second Biden term.

Polling bears out some of that belief. In a CNN poll conducted by SSRS taken in late January, 68% of Biden supporters say they'd be voting against Trump rather than for Biden, while 60% of Trump supporters say they'd be voting more for him than against Biden.

Speaking Tuesday, Biden said from the White House that Republicans "owe it to the American people to show some spine and do what they know to be right."

He said he would be taking his argument to the American people in the run-up to the election.

"Every day between now and November, the American people are going to know that the only reason the border is not secure is Donald Trump and his MAGA Republican friends," he said.

In total, Biden used Trump's name 10 times during his speech from the State Dining Room - one of the most forceful condemnations of his predecessor he's ever delivered from the White House, and a remarkable moment for a president who once avoided even saying Trump's name out loud.

Officials said Biden was intent on delivering a speech that clearly laid out the stakes of the bill and of Trump's involvement in its demise,and asked for it to be toughened up to go after the former president more directly.

By Kevin Liptak, CNN

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