

# [***One Detroit man's ride with Joe Biden in the presidential motorcade***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6B7K-YBH1-JBSS-S032-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

Detroit (CNN) &#8212; When Air Force One touched down at Selfridge Air National Guard Base Thursday afternoon, Darren Riley found himself standing on the tarmac [*in the bitter Michigan cold,*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/01/politics/joe-biden-uaw-michigan/index.html) waiting for [*President Joe Biden.*](https://www.cnn.com/politics/joe-biden)

Earlier in the day, the 32-year-old Detroit native had gotten an unexpected question from the Biden campaign: Would he want to go for a ride in the presidential motorcade? Riley readily accepted, and just hours later he was shaking Biden's hand and climbing into a heavily armored SUV.

Speaking to CNN afterwards, Riley was initially apologetic as he searched for words to describe the encounter.

"It was a shock," he said. "I'm still processing it."

First, Biden was eager to show Riley some of the trappings of the presidential SUV, turning on the seat massager for him to enjoy during the ride.

As the motorcade began to make its way through the Detroit suburbs to They Say - a local restaurant in Harper Woods - Riley said the president wanted to dive in right away. During the course of the half-hour ride, Biden inquired about Riley's upbringing and childhood, education and his business.

"He really asked me who I really am, and what I'm about," he said.

Riley - who runs his own environmental tech company called JustAir - said he never could have imagined having a conversation with the president. Then with little warning, he found himself with the surreal opportunity to ask the president of the United States for some advice, on everything from his company to how he could be a better leader.

"He grabbed my hand and looked at me in the eye," Riley said. The president, according to Riley, told him that it didn't matter whether the issue was something significant, like ***politics***, or a little more trivial, like sports teams.

"Even if you're on different sides of the spectrum ... it's important that we're in this together. You have to build that rapport and that trust," Biden told Riley.

The president's trip to Michigan comes as the campaign is making a full pivot to the general election. Following the New Hampshire primary last month, Biden's team declared that former President Donald Trump had all but locked up the Republican nomination.

Campaign officials said Biden's travel will pick up quickly and there will be growing emphasis on retail ***politics*** - drop-bys at local eateries and businesses [*and more intimate settings where the president*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/01/19/politics/biden-return-to-retail-politics/index.html) can shake hands, take selfies and have organic conversations. The decision to have Biden spend half an hour in the car with Riley on Thursday, one campaign official said, boiled down to simply trying to give the president more time and space hear directly from a constituent.

The campaign has seen strong evidence that testimonials from family and friends appear to hold more sway than ever before, according to senior campaign advisers, and that one-on-one encounters can often have a deeper impact than campaign speeches or news articles.

Riley, who is Black, said that he had voted for Biden in 2020 and plans to vote for him again in 2024. Until he heard it directly from the president during their car ride, Riley said, he didn't realize that unemployment rate among Black Americans had fallen to record lows during the Biden administration.

The two men didn't discuss the Israel-Hamas war - a conflict that hung over Biden's Thursday visit to Michigan, [*a state with a sizable Arab-American population.*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/01/27/politics/bidens-gaza-problem/index.html) At Biden's third stop of the day in Warren, pro-ceasefire protesters lined the streets, and some could be heard shouting, "Shame on you!"

Riley, who lives in southwest Detroit and knows and works with many Arab Americans, said he feels the community's pain. He said that he and Biden broadly discussed the widespread pain and suffering in the world.

And there was one thing in particular about watching Biden up close that had surprised him, Riley said. He was aware of the clips circulating online that highlight the president's mistakes and fumbles - tripping over his words during remarks, for example.

"He talked about multiple topics, the things he's juggling and navigating and processing. He is very sharp," Riley said. "That man? He's sharp. He's with it."

Asked whether he is inclined to share much about his car ride with friends and family, Riley said he has already started - beginning with his mother.

By MJ Lee, CNN

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