

# [***Biden spoke with ceasefire advocates as his team grapples with reality of regular protests***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6B63-SNT1-DY7V-G00N-00000-00&context=1516831)

CNN Wire

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**Body**

(CNN) &#8212; [*President Joe Biden*](https://www.cnn.com/politics/joe-biden) was working a photoline backstage on Wednesday after receiving the United Auto Workers' [*coveted political endorsement*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/01/24/politics/biden-uaw-endorsement/index.html) at its' annual conference in Washington, DC, when a small group of union members supporting a ceasefire in [*the Israel-Hamas war*](https://www.cnn.com/middleeast/live-news/israel-hamas-war-gaza-news-01-25-24/index.html) approached him.

Biden briefly spoke with the members about their concerns, in an exchange that multiple people - including Michigan Rep. Debbie Dingell, who was present - described as "respectful" and "cordial." The president also shook hands with the group and poised for photos, according to one source familiar with the matter. (Dingell declined to share other details with CNN, saying private conversations should remain precisely that.)

One attendee told CNN that prior to the UAW conference, they had reached out to the White House to offer them a courtesy note of caution: There were certain to be pro-ceasefire protesters in the audience. The union itself had endorsed a ceasefire in December.

The White House responded that the president was prepared to take some time to speak with those individuals if they asked to have that conversation with him, according to that attendee.

That attendee happened to be right: Biden's remarks to the union members were interrupted by protesters, including one who unfurled a Palestinian flag and shouted: "Call for a humanitarian ceasefire!" The group was quickly led out of the room as Biden paused his speech.

Afterward, however, the president listened closely to the concerns of some union members backstage about the situation in Gaza before departing the venue to return to the White House.

"I know, he knows how to talk to people. It's an issue we're going to have to talk about and deal with," Dingell said Wednesday on CNN.

Even as Biden remains staunchly supportive of Israel in its campaign against Hamas, aides say he is acutely aware of the anger and passion the war has generated, particularly among young progressives. The outcry would be hard for him to miss: [*protests have now sprung up*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/01/09/politics/joe-biden-protests-israel-hamas-war/index.html) during private fundraisers, at a Christmas tree lighting, outside the White House and ever near his secluded home in Delaware.

Biden's conversation with the UAW members backstage following the speech interruption came the day after a campaign rally in northern Virginia that was [*paused more than a dozen times*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/01/24/politics/joe-biden-campaign-donald-trump/index.html), including by people unfurling a banner reading "Genocide Joe."

Advisers say the president and his team are prepared for his speeches to be interrupted going forward as the war in Gaza rages on, even if exactly when and where can be hard to predict. While aides have been irritated when protests obscure the message of the president's speech, they say the moments aren't out of the ordinary for a public figure.

Biden is also open to meeting with critics of his policies, White House officials say, as he navigates the fraught ***politics*** of the Gaza war.

At previous speeches, Biden has sought to succinctly explain his position to the people shouting in the audience: "I understand the passion and I've been quietly working with the Israeli government to reduce - significantly get out of Gaza," Biden said as the protesters were led out.

At Tuesday's speech - which was intended as a fiery defense of abortion rights, a galvanizing issue for Democrats - Biden flashed moments of irritation as protester after protester prevented him from proceeding with his speech.

"This is going to go on for a while," he said when it had become clear the protesters had carefully planned their one-after-another interruptions.

Yet he did not publicly tell the protesters to quiet down or leave the venue - a distinction with his predecessor that his team has been eager to highlight. Volunteers and staff at events have also not attempted to bar people from attending, even if they suspect they will disrupt the president's speech.

"I think what you saw yesterday was a president who understands and respects Americans' fundamental First Amendment rights to peacefully protest. I think that stands in stark contrast to Donald Trump and the Republicans, who don't seem to understand the same thing, who only want to use these situations to fan the flames and further divide people," Biden campaign communications director Michael Tyler said Wednesday.

Since the October 7 Hamas terror attacks that launched the Gaza war, the administration has sought to engage Arab and Muslim American leaders in conversations about the conflict, including a meeting in October between Biden and leaders of community groups.

At that session - during which the leaders called for a ceasefire and encouraged Biden to show more empathy for Palestinians - the president listened and sought to clarify some of his positions, attendees said afterward.

Since then, however, the White House hasn't publicly disclosed additional meetings between Biden and activists who are calling for a ceasefire.

"I can't speak to a direct conversation that he's had, but he hears from Americans all the time about their different views that they have," White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said this week. "That is something that the president is very aware of."

By MJ Lee and Kevin Liptak, CNN

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