

# [***Joe Exotic Says He's 'More Real' Than Trump, Biden Amid Presidential Bid***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6C33-VYC1-DY68-12J7-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Byline:** Ryan Smith

**Highlight:** "Trump never knows when to shut up and Biden can't tell the truth to save his life," Exotic told Newsweek from prison.

**Body**

Joe Exotic has branded himself "more real" than [*Donald Trump*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/donald-trump?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) and President [*Joe Biden*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/joe-biden?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) as he prepares to compete against both men in this year's presidential election.

Exotic, whose real name is Joseph Allen Maldonado, shot to fame in 2020 as the star of the [*Netflix*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/netflix?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) docuseries *Tiger King*, and in March 2023, he [*announced his campaign*](https://www.newsweek.com/tiger-king-joe-exotic-announces-2024-presidential-run-1788103?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) on social media. Exotic is serving a 21-year prison sentence following his conviction in 2019 on multiple charges, including two counts of hiring hit men to murder the [*wildlife activist Carole Baskin*](https://www.newsweek.com/carole-baskin-tiger-unwraps-christmas-presents-1769240?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships). He was also convicted of killing tigers and selling them across state lines.

In an email exchange, Exotic told *Newsweek* from FMC Fort Worth prison in Texas why he believed he was the better candidate compared to Trump and Biden, the presumptive nominees of the [*Republican*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/republican?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) and Democratic parties, respectively.

Exotic, who originally announced that he would run for president as a Libertarian but switched to the [*Democratic Party*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/democratic-party?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) weeks later, said of his fellow candidates, "I am more real than either of them."

"Trump never knows when to shut up and Biden can't tell the truth to save his life," Exotic continued. "Neither one of them knows exactly what the average American person goes through out here to just get by and pay bills."

He continued: "People like Trump and Biden will always look out for their own first and that is why hundreds of millions donated to a campaign should be illegal because when in office they look out for their donors' best interest first. That's why I don't want to take people's money. If I can't do this on my word, I don't want the job."

Earlier in May—after a Federal Election Commission termination report was uncovered and reports began to circulate that Exotic's campaign had been quietly suspended—Exotic told *Newsweek* via a voice message that [*his campaign was "far from over."*](https://www.newsweek.com/joe-exotic-speaks-out-over-presidential-bid-1901380?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) He also blamed his team for the FEC submission.

The TV personality confirmed that he was still "running for 2024. I'm not giving up. Right now I'm the 'no' vote, and the 'no' vote is pretty strong because people are sick of ***politics*** right now."

Exotic previously said the "no" vote meant his candidacy provided an alternative to not voting.

*Newsweek* has contacted representatives of Trump and Biden for comment via email.

On announcing his candidacy in 2023, Exotic said in a statement: "I am here because I have a world platform to make these politicians listen to your and my concerns and give us some answers for once because all they do is lie to all of us, take our hard earned money calling it taxes, and give it away to foreign countries without them giving us anything back."

**Campaign Funds**

Exotic's campaign has since had an unconventional journey. The news site Raw Story recently reported on a termination report submitted by Exotic's campaign committee, Joseph Maldonado to Free America, that said it had less than $1,400 left, having fundraised just over $16,000.

Exotic told *Newsweek* via email that while he planned to press ahead with his campaign, he would "no longer be fundraising."

"There is no need to take money from people in these hard times when I have a social media platform like I do and the media," said Exotic, whose follower count on X, formerly [*Twitter*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/twitter?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships), sat just shy of 70,000 as of press time. "I have always [believed] that there should be a cap of $3 million to spend on a campaign so people cannot buy their way in to a political position. This is what is wrong with American ***politics***—the rich always get their way."

Financing his campaign may prove to be a challenge for Exotic, especially as he is [*serving a lengthy prison sentence*](https://www.newsweek.com/joe-exotic-sends-message-donald-trump-kamala-harris-joe-biden-1901417?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships). There is no legal barrier to a person running for president from prison. During the 1920 presidential election, Socialist Eugene V. Debs ran while imprisoned and won more than 900,000 votes, but no Electoral College votes.

Over the years, Exotic—who has maintained that he was "wrongfully convicted"—has made futile appeals to both Trump and Biden to pardon him.

**Pursuing a Pardon**

Exotic, who described himself as a "political prisoner," told *Newsweek* he doubted Biden would ever pardon him, which he said was because of Vice President [*Kamala Harris*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/kamala-harris?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships)' involvement in the Big Cat Public Safety Act. In April 2020, during the earlier stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, Harris suggested that those socially distancing "catch up on the *Tiger King*" before adding that she was a "cosponsor of the Big Cat Public Safety Act."

Signed into law in December 2022, the Big Cat Public Safety Act [*makes it illegal*](https://www.newsweek.com/america-hunting-hidden-pet-tigers-1807341?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) to privately possess or breed big cats to keep as exotic pets or for commercial purposes. The law prohibits public contact with these animals, including cubs.

The legislation also places new restrictions on the breeding, possession and use of certain big cat species, including for commerce, within the United States.

With Trump's [*hush-money criminal trial*](https://www.newsweek.com/donald-trump-hush-money-trial-five-key-moments-explosive-day-court-1902851?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) continuing in New York, Exotic told *Newsweek* that he hoped their shared legal woes would lead to the Republican to respond favorably to his pleas, should November go his way.

"I still have faith that Trump will come through for me if he wins this election, as he knows now no matter how innocent you are if the DOJ [Department of Justice] wants you for an agenda they will throw no matter how many indictments at you until some stick," he said.

Exotic's campaign website has described him as "passionate about criminal justice reform" and as a candidate who believed "[p]oliticians and lobbyists have too much control over everyone's lives and rights."

Exotic, whose rise to fame coincided with his imprisonment, told *Newsweek* he felt his participation in the Netflix docuseries "was a curse" more than a blessing. He said there was an agenda to "make me out to be this horrible person," which subsequently "put me in prison and ruined my life."

"Everyone got greedy and no one cared about the truth or the animals," Exotic said. "Everyone on the internet is making money from me but me and I can't find anyone to help fight my case because it's about becoming famous. The truth is being ignored for a TV show."

[*Link to Image*](https://d.newsweek.com/en/full/2397167/donald-trump-joe-biden-joe-exotic.jpg)

**Graphic**

Donald Trump, Joe Biden, Joe Exotic

Mark Peterson - Pool/Getty Images;/Anna Moneymaker/Getty Images;/SANTA ROSA COUNTY JAIL

Former President Donald Trump is pictured left on May 20, 2024 in New York City. President Joe Biden is pictured right on May 7, 2024 in Washington, D.C. Joe Exotic is pictured inset in a booking photo provided by the Santa Rosa County Jail in Milton, Florida. Exotic has told Newsweek that he's "more real" than Trump and Biden as he presses on with his presidential bid.

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