

The first Democratic senator has questioned President Joe Biden's election chances, after seven congressmen urged the 81-year-old to step aside.

Michael Bennet of Colorado said that he expected the president to lose to Donald Trump, possibly by a "landslide"

, but stopped short of saying he should withdraw.

Questions have been raised about Mr Biden's fitness for office after a stumbling presidential debate performance against Trump late last month.

Mr Bennet told CNN that remaining in the election was "something for the president to consider"

. Trump, he said, was "on track, I think, to win this election and maybe win it by a landslide"

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He added that the issue was "a moral question about the future of our country"

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Also on Wednesday, Nancy Pelosi signalled her uncertainty about Mr Biden's future, when asked "does he have your support?" in a TV interview.

"I want him to do whatever he decides to do,

" Ms Pelosi told MSNBC's Morning Joe programme.

"And that is the way it is. Whatever he decides to go with.

"

"It's up to the president to decide if he's going to run. We are all encouraging him to make that decision, because time is running short.

"I said to everyone - let's just hold off. Whatever you're thinking, either tell somebody privately, but you don't have to put that out on the table until we see how we go this week. But I am very proud of the president.

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The president had stated his commitment to staying in the race on the same show on Monday, and wrote to congressional Democrats on the same day to say he was "firmly committed to staying in this race"

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On Tuesday, Mr Biden gave brief but vociferous remarks to open the Nato summit in Washington, declaring the alliance to be "more powerful than ever"

. He struck a

markedly clearer tone compared with his debate performance.

Other Democrats have emphasised the importance of party solidarity. Speaking to BBC Radio 4's World Tonight programme, Hank Johnson, a congressman from Georgia, said it was time to "break the circular firing squad" around Mr Biden.

Mr Johnson, a member of the influential Congressional Black Caucus, admitted that Mr Biden had had a "horrible" debate but said the overwhelming majority of voters of colour wanted him as their candidate.

The caucus of about 60 politicians reportedly backed the president during a call on Monday.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, meanwhile, stated "I'm with Joe" on Tuesday.

Others touted Mr Biden's record in the White House or spoke of Democratic unity.

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On the same day, however, a seventh Democrat in the House of Representatives - Mikie Sherrill of New Jersey - publicly called on Mr Biden to withdraw, saying that the stakes were "too high"

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She joined others in Congress that include Adam Smith, who told the BBC earlier this week that the party needed to install a "stronger messenger" as its candidate. Two other senators are reported by CNN to believe that Mr Biden cannot win the White House again, although neither has publicly broken ranks. Meanwhile George Stephanopoulos, a former Democratic operative turned ABC News presenter who interviewed Mr Biden last week, said he does not think the president "can serve four more years"

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The audio was captured by TMZ. Mr Stephanopoulos did not rescind the comment, he later acknowledged he should not have made it.

Mr Biden reportedly also faces doubts from diplomats visiting Washington for the Nato meeting, one of whom anonymously told Reuters they could not see him staying in post for another four years.

Speculation continues to grow over who would replace Mr Biden, with Vice-President Kamala Harris the favourite.

She has remained loyal to her running mate, insisting during a rally this week that he was a "fighter"

.
Mr Biden himself has dared his doubters to either challenge him or unite behind his candidacy, although he has admitted he "screwed up" in the Trump debate.

Trump has suggested Ms Harris would be a "better" competitor but said he expected his adversary to stay in the race.

"He's got an ego, and he doesn't want to quit," he said.