

Barack Obama Returns to the Campaign Trail After Raising More Than \$4 Million for Joe Biden



President Barack Obama and Vice President Joe Biden arrive on the West Front of the U.S. Capitol on January 20, 2017 in Washington, DC. Joe Raedle—Getty Images

BY ALEXANDRA JAFFE / AP

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(WASHINGTON) — Former President Barack Obama raised more than \$4 million from 120,000 individual donors ahead of his first fundraiser for presumptive Democratic nominee Joe Biden.

The small dollar fundraiser Tuesday night will be held online and offers a fresh test of Obama's ability to transfer his popularity to Biden, his former vice president who is now seeking the White House on his own. It's a kickoff of what Obama's team says will likely be a busy schedule heading into the fall, as he looks to help elect not just Biden but Democrats running for House and Senate.

Obama sometimes struggled to lift other Democratic candidates while he was in the White House, notably losing control of the House in 2010 and the Senate in 2014. But in the era of President Donald Trump, Democrats believe Obama's appeal, especially among Black and younger voters, can help boost energy for Biden.

"There's two groups of voters that Biden needs to move," said Dan Pfeiffer, former White House communications director. "You have the 4 million Obama 2012 voters that sat out in '16, Obama obviously has cache with them. And you have to **persuade** some number of voters who voted for Barack Obama in 2012 and either Trump or a third party candidate in 2016, and Obama obviously is very, very high-performing with those as well."

Obama **endorsed** Biden with a video message in April, but kept an otherwise low profile throughout the primary and largely avoided wading into national politics. In recent weeks, however, he's reemerged publicly to speak out on policing and the civil unrest that followed the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis.

Some Democrats say that, in the wake of Floyd's killing, Obama's voice as an advocate for Biden and a leader for the party is needed.

"Biden doesn't have the strongest record on **criminal justice reform** so having Obama there is helpful in reinforcing that issue," said Ben Tulchin, who polled for progressive Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders' presidential campaign.

"Given what's going on with criminal justice reform and Black Lives Matter, having the first African American president out there publicly backing Biden is extremely helpful."

But Obama's reemergence is not without risks for Biden.

For Trump's campaign, it offers an opportunity to resurface some of their favorite political attacks — charges that the Obama administration's policies undermined the American middle class and U.S. interests abroad.

They believe the focus on Obama will help **reinvigorate** Trump's base, and remind waffling Trump voters — those considering voting for Biden, or staying home — of their dissatisfaction with the prior administration. And they see a potential opportunity to **drive a wedge between** Biden and his base by resurfacing issues from the Obama administration — like the high rate of **deportations** — that riled progressives during the Democratic primary.

Trump campaign **deputy** communications director Ali Pardo said that together, Obama and Biden “put ‘kids in cages’ and failed to stop China from **ripping off** Americans while overseeing the worst economic recovery since the Great Depression and **stagnant** wage growth for American workers.”

Trump himself has pushed unfounded **conspiracy** theories about Obama, hoping to taint Biden by association.

Still, Democrats say Obama is eager to take Trump on to defend his legacy in a debate over whose policies have better benefited Americans.

“Trump’s election just devastated the country and Obama’s legacy,” Tulchin said. “Beating Trump is important for his legacy and important for the country.”

Biden’s embrace of Obama during the Democratic primary created some headaches for the former vice president within his own party as well.

Biden was criticized by some opponents as too focused on returning to the status quo of the Obama years at a time when the progressive base of the party was **clamoring for** significant structural change.

But by the end of the primary contest, at least five candidates — including Sanders — aired ads featuring praise from the former president or photos of the candidate alongside him. And both Biden and Sanders have made overtures toward progressives, with Biden embracing some of Sanders’ policies and Obama praising him by name in his endorsement video for Biden.

But Stephanie Cutter, who served as Obama’s 2012 campaign manager, said that if Obama’s reemergence into the campaign raises any further debates about the policies of his administration, he’ll be prepared to respond.

“There’s nobody better to answer those questions than Obama,” she said.

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