

US Vice President Biden declines to run for president

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US Vice President Joseph Biden put an end to nearly three months of speculation about his political intentions, announcing Wednesday that he would not be a candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2016. Biden made the announcement in the White House Rose Garden, flanked by his wife Jill and President Barack Obama.

Biden delivered what had the appearance of a campaign-launching address, with a preamble awkwardly inserted stating that he would not run. This had the effect of suggesting that the vice president had been leaning towards entering the race until the very last moment, and that he was pulling out with reluctance, and even some bitterness.

While not a candidate, Biden said, “I intend to speak out clearly and forcefully, to influence as much as I can where we stand as a party and where we need to go as a nation. And this is what I believe.

“I believe that President Obama has led this nation from crisis to recovery, and we’re now on the cusp of resurgence. I’m proud to have played a part in that. This party, our nation, will be making a tragic mistake if we walk away or attempt to undo the Obama legacy. ... Democrats should not only defend this record and protect this record, they should run on the record.”

What Biden portrays as economic recovery is a bonanza for the Wall Street financial elite, who have fully recovered their losses from the 2008 crash and gone on to new heights of wealth and privilege, while the vast majority of working people have experienced seven years of economic stagnation, declining living standards and incessant attacks on public services and jobs.

Biden was implicitly opposing not only the scattered and mild criticisms of the Obama administration voiced by Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders in the course of his rhetorical attacks on Wall Street influence in Washington, he was also rejecting any adaptation to Sanders by Clinton

in an effort to win over his supporters.

In the course of his remarks, Biden directed a series of barbs at Clinton without using her name. With Obama standing at his side, Biden seemed to be sending a message to Clinton not to make any further concessions to the Sanders campaign, as in opposing the Obama administration on the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade deal.

This impression was underscored by the sarcastic tone of several Biden comments over the last few days, all directed against former secretary of state Clinton, who now appears to have a clearer path to the Democratic presidential nomination. Biden had seemed to downplay Clinton’s role as the chief diplomat for the Obama administration, observing that when he, the vice president, spoke with a foreign government, that government could always be sure it was getting the viewpoint of the Obama White House.

In his remarks Wednesday, Biden made a clear reference to a Clinton comment during the October 13 Democratic debate in Las Vegas, in which she said she considered the Republicans to be among her main enemies. “I don’t think we should look at Republicans as our enemies,” Biden said. “They are our opposition. They’re not our enemies. And for the sake of the country, we have to work together.”

He called for reaching a consensus with the Republicans, warning, “Four more years of this kind of pitched battle may be more than this country can take.”

The implication of this statement is remarkable. More than a year before the 2016 election, the No. 2 elected official in the Democratic Party is effectively calling for bipartisan unity on the basis of a right-wing agenda approved by the Republicans.

Ever since *New York Times* columnist Maureen Dowd wrote in mid-August that Biden was considering a late entry into the presidential race, based on a leak traced back to the vice president himself, a potential Biden

challenge to frontrunner Hillary Clinton has been the subject of intense media discussion.

A possible Biden candidacy never attracted any great popular following. He never passed the 20 percent mark in polls of likely Democratic primary and caucus voters, an exceedingly low mark for a sitting vice president. He invariably placed third in the polls, behind Clinton and Sanders.

The Democratic Party establishment was keeping Biden in reserve, in case the Clinton campaign disintegrated, buffeted by a combination of Republican attacks, including over her use of a private email server while Obama's secretary of state, and a lack of popular enthusiasm.

However, favorable media coverage of Clinton's performance in the first Democratic debate October 13 has helped drive up her poll numbers. The Republican investigations into Clinton's emails and her role in the attack on a US mission in Benghazi, Libya in 2012, in which four American diplomats and security officers died, suffered a self-inflicted blow when House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy admitted that they had been used to damage Clinton's political standing in the 2016 elections.

Both the Democratic Party establishment and its base of wealthy political donors have stayed in Clinton's camp. Clinton has amassed a war chest of \$75 million already, while the Sanders campaign has raised \$40 million. Biden's supporters have not even opened a bank account. As the *New York Times* election blog put it Wednesday, "Joe Biden Ran in the Invisible Primary, and Lost to Hillary Clinton."

The whole process unfolded without a single voter going to the polls. The Biden trial balloon was floated, failed to gain altitude, and crashed to earth more than three months before the first votes are cast in Iowa and New Hampshire. This underscores the highly manipulated character of the election campaign in both of the capitalist parties.



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