

Former Vice President Biden officially enters Democratic presidential race

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Former Vice President Joe Biden officially announced his campaign for president yesterday, effectively completing the Democratic field, which has now swelled to 21 candidates, most of them little-known.

Biden announced his candidacy in an online video posted early Thursday morning. His first media interview of the campaign will air today, and his first official campaign stop will take place next Monday in Pittsburgh.

Even before he officially announced, the media had dubbed Biden the frontrunner in the crowded Democratic primaries, since he was leading in most polls where he was included as a candidate, with Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders trailing by a few percentage points. The same polls showed more than half of prospective Democratic voters favoring neither candidate, dividing their support among the record number of alternatives.

Biden will likely be the favored candidate among major Democratic donors and the party apparatus, including Barack Obama, who has declined to endorse a candidate at this stage, but issued a statement hailing Biden's political record after his former vice president entered the race.

For months, whether Biden would ultimately run was the subject of much speculation. An attempt last month to scuttle his campaign before it began with a #MeToo-type complaint over his "inappropriate" touching of women appears to have fizzled.

Biden's announcement video focuses exclusively on Donald Trump, to the exclusion of any reference to the candidate's own political biography or campaign platform. Biden's newly launched campaign website is similarly vague, with no concrete positions or policy proposals.

This suggests that the main thrust of his primary campaign will be to present himself as the candidate best positioned to defeat Donald Trump in the general election, and to attempt to use the threat of another four years of Trump to suppress all other political issues.

The video opens with footage of the neo-Nazi rampage in Charlottesville, Virginia, in 2017, resulting in the death of one counterdemonstrator, which had been organized with the

support of former Trump campaign aides. Biden then appears on camera to denounce Trump's infamous claim that there were "very fine people on both sides." He speaks in sharper than normal terms, at least by the standards of the Democrats, who have largely ignored Trump's cultivation of fascistic layers.

"With those words, the President of the United States assigned a moral equivalence between those spreading hate and those with the courage to stand against it," Biden says. "I believe history will look back on four years of this president and all he embraces as an aberrant moment in time, but if we give Donald Trump eight years in the White House, he will forever and fundamentally alter the character of this nation—who we are. And I cannot stand by and watch that happen."

There is an obvious contradiction here: if Trump is such an aberration, how could his presidency fundamentally alter the character of the United States? Trump did not come out of the blue but is the consequence of the breakdown of American democracy and the turn to the right by both political parties and the American ruling class as a whole. Biden, who was first elected to the Senate in 1973 and has long been one of the most influential Democratic politicians in Washington, has played no small role in this process.

Specifically, Trump emerged as a consequence of eight years of the Obama-Biden administration, which left millions of working people poorer and more desperate than before, particularly in hard-hit deindustrialized areas like Michigan, Wisconsin and the whole of Appalachia.

The Obama-Biden administration funneled trillions to the banks, set a pattern of wage-cutting for the auto industry that spread throughout manufacturing, and oversaw an unprecedented rise in social inequality. It was the first US administration to spend two full terms continuously at war.

The election of Trump was in part a repudiation of Obama's chosen successor Clinton, who sought to exclude social issues from her general election campaign and ran as the candidate of Wall Street and the military. That Trump's victory was a legacy bequeathed by the reactionary policies

of austerity and imperialist war carried out by the Obama-Biden administration is the last thing Biden wants voters to remember, of course.

Biden's claim to be the center of opposition to Trump's far-right politics is belied by his longstanding reputation as a "centrist" Democratic, a term which indicates his willingness to collaborate with Republicans on right-wing policies.

Notwithstanding his media persona as a jovial "Uncle Joe," Biden is an experienced and ruthless representative of American imperialism. As Obama's former vice president, he had a hand in all of the administration's war crimes, including the bloodbaths in Libya and Syria and the continuation of Bush's wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The administration made drone assassination a key element in its foreign policy, and even declared the right to assassinate American citizens, exercising this "right" to murder Anwar al-Awlaki in 2011. Obama also bolstered the repressive apparatus of the state, expanding government surveillance programs and funneling billions of dollars in military hardware to local police forces.

The Obama administration led a major assault on democratic rights. This included the prosecution of more whistleblowers than any other president, including the arrest and torture of Chelsea Manning, and the campaign against WikiLeaks editor Julian Assange for exposing US war crimes. Biden called Assange a "high tech terrorist" in 2010, and then-Secretary of State Clinton asked her staff whether they could "drone" him.

Obama also deported more than 2.5 million immigrants, more than any previous administration, earning him the sarcastic nickname "Deporter in Chief." Obama's policies included the imprisonment and deportation of thousands of unaccompanied children, a direct precursor to Trump's cruel and inhumane policy of separating families.

In other words, Obama and Biden paved the way for a more overtly authoritarian form of imperialist reaction, of which Trump is the personification.

The Obama administration's intervention in Ukraine in 2014 demonstrates the hypocrisy of Biden's declared opposition to Trump's ties to fascists. The US and NATO-sponsored overthrow of pro-Russian president Viktor Yanukovich was spearheaded by neo-Nazi groups such as the Svoboda Party and the Right Sector. As long as these layers directed their violence against individuals targeted by American imperialism, they were universally hailed in the media as fighters for "democracy" and "human rights."

Biden's own family was personally enriched by the coup, when his son Hunter Biden was appointed to the board of directors of the Ukrainian natural gas company Burisma Holdings. Biden later strong-armed the Ukrainian

government into firing a prosecutor who was leading a corruption probe against Burisma, a fact which he publicly bragged about in 2018.

The real basis of the Democrats' opposition to Trump is not his cultivation of far-right forces, but foreign policy issues, particularly his perceived insufficient aggressiveness against Russia. This is why they have made the campaign over bogus Russian "meddling" in the campaign and supposed "collusion" by the Trump campaign the central element of their attacks on Trump since the election.

Within more politically astute layers, there is concern that the Democrats' focus on the anti-Russian campaign, which has little popular support, could damage their electoral chances in 2020. Speaking at a CNN town hall, Bernie Sanders said, "If for the next year, year-and-a-half, going right into the heart of the election, all that the Congress is talking about is impeaching Trump and 'Trump, Trump, Trump' and 'Mueller, Mueller, Mueller,' and we're not talking about health care, we're not talking about raising the minimum wage to a living wage, we're not talking about combating climate change, we're not talking about sexism and racism and homophobia, and all of the issues that concern ordinary Americans, what I worry about is that works to Trump's advantage."

Sanders, of course, is offering a somewhat different flavor of Democratic Party snake oil to the American population, but one that is entirely compatible with the core interests of the American ruling elite, both on Wall Street and in the military-intelligence apparatus.

The focus on the anti-Russian campaign reflects the overriding fear by the Democratic Party establishment of waging any campaign that could mobilize broader layers of the population, under conditions of a growing movement of strikes and protests. The hysteria over Russian "meddling" also serves to whip up a crisis atmosphere to justify internet censorship and other repressive measures, whose ultimate target is an increasingly restive working class, whom the Democrats fear far more than the danger of an authoritarian Trump or his fascist supporters.



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