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Inside the White House workings to keep a 'diminished' Biden informed while dealing with age-related problems

Lawmakers, donors, and aides told *The Wall Street Journal* that the gatekeeping grew more intense and the walls around the president became higher over time

Gustaf Kilander in Washington, D.C. • Thursday 19 December 2024 21:20 GMT • 12 Comments



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President **Joe Biden**'s closest aides and advisers told visitors to keep meetings short and focused as his meetings with **Democratic members of Congress and top cabinet officials grew rarer during his presidency.**

Legislative leaders had a difficult time getting in touch with the president, including as the U.S. was pulling its troops out of Afghanistan, according to *The Wall Street Journal*.

Top staffers took on roles that administration officials and some lawmakers believed the president himself should have. Press aides were told to exclude negative stories about Biden as they put together news clips for him. Biden also wasn't speaking to his own pollsters even as polls revealed that he was behind in his re-election bid. Some believed he was being shielded from bad numbers as Trump was consistently ahead before the president departed from the race, the paper reported.

Lawmakers, donors, and aides told *The Journal* that the gatekeeping grew more intense and the walls around him became higher over time. Restrictions were placed on who he spoke to, what they told him, and the sources from which he got his information.

A number of aides have always been close to the president during his term, especially during trips and when he speaks publicly.

“They body him to such a high degree,” one person told *The Journal*, adding that there has been more “hand holding” compared to other presidents.

However, many of those who criticized how insular Biden became while speaking to *The Journal* also noted that his agenda remained on track during his presidency.

A **White House** spokesperson told the paper that Biden “earned the most accomplished record of any modern commander in chief and rebuilt the middle class because of his attention to policy details that impact millions of lives.”

The spokesperson, Andrew Bates, also didn’t agree with the idea that Biden has been diminished and said that the president has often taken on opinions from outside experts.

Bates added that it’s part of the job of top White House staff to have meetings regularly and that they were enacting Biden’s agenda at his direction. He added that staff made Biden aware of “significant” negative news stories.



Joe Biden and Jill Biden depart St. Joseph on the Brandywine after a church service in Wilmington, Delaware, on December 18, 2024. Biden always has aides within earshot during his travels, according to a report (*AFP via Getty Images*)

Biden couldn't remember lines that he discussed with staff ahead of his interview with special counsel Robert Hur, who investigated his handling of classified documents. During events, his staff often repeated things such as where to enter and exit the stage, *The Journal* reported. The Biden team also tasked Hollywood mogul and campaign co-chair Jeffrey Katzenberg with finding a voice coach for Biden.

The structure around Biden that was constructed during the Covid-19 pandemic to prevent infection was never fully taken down, according to *The Journal*. As he aged, the structure was strengthened, intended to prevent him from making gaffes.

The protection around Biden appeared to function well until June 27 when he faced off against Donald Trump in a debate that was the beginning of the end of his campaign.

Officials within the administration noted early during his term of office that Biden would grow tired and make mistakes during long meetings. That's when the message was issued to those wanting face time with the president that the meetings should be short and focused, those who received the message said, according to *The Journal*.

The meetings would also start later in the day. However, the White House rejected the notion that Biden's age led to an altered schedule. Meetings could also be fully removed from the schedule if Biden was having a bad day.

Outgoing Independent West Virginia Senator Joe Manchin, a former Democrat, told *The Journal* that Biden's staff took on more responsibility than what he experienced in other administrations.

"They were going, 'I'll take care of that,'" Manchin said.

Ron Klain, Biden's first chief of staff, told the paper that "the agenda and pace" was at the "president's direction and leadership."

A former top cabinet aide told *The Journal* that one member of the cabinet simply stopped asking for calls with the president. Meetings with cabinet members were often mostly scripted and were infrequent.

Meanwhile, Bates told the paper that Biden has daily interactions with his cabinet members.

Cabinet members often met with senior staff, who would bring the issue to Biden and report back, according to *The Journal*.

Biden's team also made donors read pre-approved questions from notecards during campaign events. Biden still made mistakes, which surprised the donors who were aware that the president had the questions ahead of time, the paper noted.

Biden also had aides within earshot or eye distance during travel to a larger degree than previous presidents, people who viewed interactions with the president told the outlet.

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