

America

Chocolate cookie diplomacy

Biden courts Congress with a personal touch

WASHINGTON, April 24, (AP) — The pictures always make it look so presidential: Joe Biden sitting in a tall-back chair, surrounded by the arrayed members of Congress invited for a meeting at the White House.

But inside the Oval Office, lawmakers tell a different story, of a president so warm, so engaged, so animated — standing up, sitting down, calling on lawmakers by name, swapping stories about their hometowns — and so determined to make them get to work and get things done.



Biden

On their way out the door, they are offered a chocolate chip cookie, that most American of snacks, a to-go boost for the potential partnership between this White House and the Congress.

"It was the day that you will remember, not so much because you were in the Oval Office, but because of the attention the president gave to us — the personal attention, the commitment, the authenticity and the seriousness of caring about people, and especially people who have been marginalized," said Rep. Joyce Beatty, D-Ohio, the chair of the Congressional Black Caucus.

"Very presidential with a personal flair," she said.

The outreach to Capitol Hill is nothing out of the ordinary. New presidents typically check the box of inviting lawmakers to the White House at the start of an administration to set the stage for the legislating to come.

Donald Trump held impromptu White House sessions on a range of topics in freewheeling, often televised gatherings unlike many the country had ever seen. Barack Obama took a more measured approach, even though he, too, sweetened the White House visits with M&Ms candies to go.

Biden has hosted more than 100 lawmakers for a visit during his first 100 days, from powerful committee chairs to influential caucus leaders, Republicans and Democrats alike. Part get-to-know-you sessions, part strategy building, the private meetings are often seen as a bit of political theater for all sides to at least appear to be putting their best selves forward.

But unlike his immediate predecessors, Biden is a veteran of Capitol Hill, who not only knows many of the lawmakers personally, but also understands the rhythms of their workdays in Congress. Digging deep into the roster of lawmakers, he is bringing in the subcommittee chairs handling infrastructure, the former small-town mayors with executive office know-how and those who, despite years on Capitol Hill, have never seen the inner sanctum of the Oval Office.

The invitations convey his understanding of the value of sharing power, assigning prominence and tapping into the pent-up desire of even the most partisan legislators to legislate.

Sending them off with pockets full of cookies wrapped with the golden seal of the presidency doesn't hurt, either, a little chocolate chip cookie diplomacy to carry back to the Hill.

"President Biden has always believed in engaging Congress as a co-equal branch of government," said Rep. Joe Neguse, D-Colo., a rising member of party leadership, who shared his cookies with his staff. "And the proof is in the results — his agenda has moved through Congress very swiftly."

As the president rounds the 100-day milestone, the proceeds of his many hours of outreach will be put to the test as Congress considers the administration's priorities, particularly Biden's \$2.3 trillion infrastructure package.

The president was able to quickly usher passage of the massive \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 rescue, signed into law last month, but the next bills to revamp election laws, gun control and immigration will be

more difficult in the narrowly divided House and Senate, with slim Democratic majorities and the need for some Republican bipartisanship.

Sen. Jon Tester, D-Mont., the chair of the Veterans Affairs Committee, was among an early group visiting the White House at the start of the administration to discuss virus aid.

The senator had never attended an Oval Office meeting, and as the group went around the room, the president "did mostly listening," Tester said.

But when it was done, "The instructions were: Get the damn thing passed."

Still, for all the overtures, the White House quickly rebuffed a group of 10 Republican senators who ventured to the White House with an alternative virus aid package the administration dismissed as insufficient.

"It's very disappointing," said Sen. Rob Portman, R-Ohio.

As the Republicans made their opening offer that day, Sen. Mitt Romney, R-Utah, even showing charts with his ideas and assessments, Portman said the president told them staff would follow up. But it turns out staffers were shaking their heads silently no, signaling the go-it-alone strategy to come.

Republican Sen. Todd Young of Indiana said the atmosphere "was friendly, it was accommodating, there was a whole lot of listening, and back-and-forth exchange. But we never heard back." He said, "That's very troubling."

The next day, the Senate Democratic leader, Chuck Schumer, announced they would move forward under the so-called budget reconciliation procedure, and the coronavirus bill was eventually approved on a straight party-line vote, all Republicans opposed.

Conspicuously absent from the invite list have been some of the top Republican leaders.

The White House considered the COVID-19 relief an emergency package, which needed to be approved swiftly, unlike the infrastructure bill that is expected to take months to bring to passage as the president reaches for bipartisanship.

Over the course of a week, Biden met with the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus and the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, and his 30-minute session with the Congressional Black Caucus stretched for two hours.

The president "knows that all politics is personal," said White House deputy press secretary Andrew Bates. "He enjoys hosting members of both parties and looks forward to holding more bipartisan meetings to find common ground."

At Monday's meeting with the former mayors and governors about his infrastructure plan, Biden opened with a direct approach about the importance of investing in the United States, particularly as the country competes with China.

"The president very much stressed that he wants to work with Republicans on this, but we are serious," said Rep. Norma Torres, D-Calif., a former mayor.

As the Republicans suggested alternatives, balking at Biden's proposal to raise the corporate tax rate from 21% to 28% to pay for it, the president gave them an assignment.

"I will wait to hear from you," Biden told the group, as Torres recalled. But he also put them on a quick timeline and said he wanted "a reasonable compromise."

And then there are the meetings that sometimes go without notice.

At the end of a Rose Garden ceremony over gun violence, as the crowd of lawmakers and families of those killed in mass shootings began to disperse, Biden quietly did a U-turn and gathered some of them inside the Oval Office, discussing gun control legislation in Congress.

"Joe Biden is nothing if not gracious, and generous with his time," said Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., who was among those in the room that afternoon, and had a cookie. "We've known him for a lot of years. He's Joe, even though he's Mr. President."

WASHINGTON, April 24, (AP) — The world moved closer to curbing the worst of global warming after this week's climate summit. But there's still a long way to go, and the road to a safer future gets even rockier from here.

With the world trying to prevent more than another half-degree of warming (0.3 degrees Celsius) or so to achieve the most stringent of goals set by the 2015 Paris climate accord, scientists and politicians alike say this decade is crucial for any chance of getting that done. And that means 2021 is a "make-or-break year for people and the planet," U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said.

Everything culminates in November with heavyweight climate negotiations in Glasgow, Scotland. While these climate meetings happen annually, every five or so years there is a weightier session of the type that in the past has led to major deals or disappointments. It's that time again.

By November, the U.N. climate negotiating process calls for 200 nations to ratchet up commitments to cut emissions of heat-trapping greenhouse gases by 2030. The rich countries need to come up with more money to help the poor countries develop greener power and adapt to climate change's harsh realities. And nations need to agree on a price on carbon pollution after several years of gridlock. They must figure out essentially how to make it all work.

"Glasgow is the world's last best hope," said U.S. special climate envoy John Kerry.

There will be important stops in Germany in May for a minister's level meeting, in a British seaside town in June for a meeting of leaders of big economies and a final push at U.N. headquarters in September, but everything is about what President Joe Biden called "a road that will take us to Glasgow."

Biden's summit, organized in less than 100 days, was designed to send the world off on a fast start toward Glasgow, and experts said it did so. They figure it pushed the globe anywhere from one-eighth to more than halfway along the journey, with

News in Brief

Biden recognizes atrocities: President Joe Biden on Saturday plans to follow through on a campaign pledge to formally recognize that atrocities committed against the Armenian people by the Ottoman Empire more than a century ago in modern-day Turkey were genocide, according to US officials familiar with the president's deliberations.

Biden spoke to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Friday in anticipation of his plan, in a presidential proclamation to mark Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day, to use the term genocide to describe the killings and deportations of hundreds of thousands of Armenians. US presidents for decades have acknowledged Remembrance Day to mark the events of 1915 to 1923 but have avoided using the term "genocide" to sidestep alienating Turkey.

The U.S. and Turkish governments, in separate statements following Friday's call, made no mention of the American plan to recognize the Armenian genocide. The White House said Biden told Erdogan he wants to improve the two countries' relationship and find "effective management of disagreements." The two also agreed to hold a bilateral meeting at the NATO summit in Brussels in June. (AP)

Jenner for governor: Caitlyn Jenner begins her campaign for California governor with a prized commodity for a candidate — celebrity. But while her name is widely recognized, what she would do in the job remains a mystery.

Nearly two decades ago, Hollywood fame helped elevate another Republican, Arnold Schwarzenegger, to the governor's chair. But he had already made a name in state politics, working to enact hundreds of millions of dollars in funding for school programs. He once headed a fitness council for then-President George H.W. Bush, and was married to Maria Shriver from the Kennedy political dynasty.

Jenner lacks the roots Schwarzenegger had in politics, and his international celebrity far eclipsed her own. But her 3.5 million Twitter followers gives her a foothold to reach out directly to voters through social media, similar to the way Schwarzenegger could attract TV cameras from around the globe.

"It would be a mistake to view her of one of these 'circus candidates,'" said Thad Kousser, a political science professor at the University of California, San Diego. (AP)

130 migrants feared dead: More than 100 Europe-bound migrants are feared dead in a boat wreck off Libya, independent rescue groups said, in the latest loss of life as attempts to cross the Mediterranean increase during the warmer months.

Humanitarian organizations have accused the Libyan coast guard and European authorities of failing to meet their responsibilities to save lives. A Libyan coast guard official told The Associated Press that they searched for the boat but could not find it with their limited resources.

SOS Mediterranean, which operates the rescue vessel Ocean Viking, said late Thursday that the capsized rubber boat, which was initially carrying around 130 people, was spotted in the Mediterranean Sea northeast of the Libyan capital, Tripoli. The aid vessel did not find any survivors, but could see at least ten bodies near the wreck.

"We think of the lives that have been lost and of the families who might never have certainty as to what happened to their loved ones," it said in a statement. (AP)

'This decade is crucial'

World moves to curb global warming

Gas-fueled vehicles imperil US climate goals

DETROIT, April 24, (AP) — For President Joe Biden to reach his ambitious goal of slashing America's greenhouse gas emissions in half by 2030, huge reductions would have to come from somewhere other than one of the worst culprits: auto tailpipes.

That's because there are just too many gas-powered passenger vehicles in the United States — roughly 279 million — to replace them in less than a decade, experts say. In a typical year, automakers sell about 17 million vehicles nationwide. Even if every one of the new ones were electric, it would take more than 16 years to replace the whole fleet.

What's more, vehicles now remain on America's roads for an average of nearly 12 years before they're scrapped, which means that gas-fueled vehicles will predominate for many years to come.

"We're not going to be able to meet the target with new-car sales only," said Aakash Arora, a manag-

ing director with Boston Consulting Group and an author of a study on electric vehicle adoption. "The fleet is too big."

So unless government incentives could somehow persuade a majority of Americans to scrap their cars and trucks and buy electric vehicles, reducing tailpipe emissions by anything close to 50% would take far longer than the Biden timetable. Last year, fewer than 2% of new vehicles sold in the United States were fully electric.

"If every new vehicle sold today was an electric vehicle and it was entirely powered by renewable energy overnight, it would take 10 years or more for us to achieve a 50% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions," said Chris Atkinson, a professor of mechanical engineering and director of smart mobility at Ohio State University.

Which means that other sectors of the economy would have to slash greenhouse gas emissions deeply enough to make up the shortfall in

the auto industry.

Transportation as a whole, which includes not only cars and trucks but also ships and airplanes, is the single largest source of such pollution. Of the nearly 6.6 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide that were emitted in the United States in 2019, transportation produced 29%. Next was electricity generation at 25%. Then came factories at 23%, commercial and residential buildings at 13% and agriculture at 10%.

Electricity generation is the most likely source of faster reductions. That sector has already made major strides. Last year, carbon emissions from electricity generation were 52% lower than the government had projected they would be in 2005, according to government's Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory. The reasons: more use of natural gas, solar and wind power, as well as reduced demand as the economy has evolved to achieve gains in energy efficiency.

mixed opinions on whether the United States did enough.

"If it were 100 miles to Glasgow, we have just done the first 12 miles on the lowlands, and we have a 88 hard miles to go, with a lot of difficult terrain to cross before we get there," said Bill Hare, director of the German think tank Climate Analytics. Hare said while countries showed a significant increase in ambition to fight climate change, he was "hoping for slightly more."

Climate scientist Zeke Hausfather, who directs climate issues at the Breakthrough Institute, was more optimistic: "I'd say this gets us about half the way (say, 50 miles) to where we need to get by Glasgow."

Nate Hultman, director of the University of Maryland's Center for Global Sustainability, was even more optimistic: "This has ended up being a critical international moment that provided a strong boost ... We're now, I'd

say, about 70 miles toward Glasgow."

For his part, Kerry concluded the climate summit by saying that countries representing more than half of the world's economic output have committed to a path that would achieve the Paris goal of limiting warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) since pre-industrial times. Beyond that level, environmental problems get substantially worse, with possible dangerous tipping points, scientists say. The world has already warmed 1.2 degrees Celsius (2.2 degrees Fahrenheit).

Hare's calculations show the world didn't quite make as much progress as Kerry claims. For example, to be on the path to limit warming to 1.5 degrees, the United States needs to cut greenhouse gas emissions 57% below 2005 levels by 2030, he said. The Biden target announced this week was 50% to 52%. The European Union's goals also came close but didn't quite

get there. The only major economy now on track with 1.5 degrees is the United Kingdom, Hare said.

But there's disagreement on that because of the different ways calculations can be made. The Rhodium Group, a research institute, said Biden's target puts America in line with the 1.5 degrees goal.

Climate Action Tracker, a group of scientists including Hare who monitors nations' pledges of carbon pollution cuts, calculated that targets announced since last September cut about 12% to 14% from the emissions gap. That emissions gap is that big area between what nations promise to do and the pollution reductions needed by 2030 to limit future warming to the 1.5 degrees goal. The announcements cut somewhere between 2.9 billion and 4.1 billion tons (between 2.6 billion and 3.7 billion metric tons) of carbon from the gap, the tracker calculated.

An innovative and creative marketing campaign fully developed by KIB seeks to push the boundaries and redefine the traditional realms of marketing

KIB Family: a new original animated series that sets a precedent in the Kuwait market



KIB Family Poster

In the first of its kind marketing project to be launched by a brand in the GCC, Kuwait International Bank (KIB) announced the launch of a brand new original animated series, KIB Family, which will be released by the Bank during Ramadan across its social media platforms.

The weekly series was conceptualized and fully developed by KIB, in collaboration with a leading global animation studio, as part of the Bank's ongoing efforts to deliver innovative campaigns and products to market, beyond the scope of its financial services and solutions. The animated series follows the antics and daily activities of the six-member 'KIB Family', a modern nuclear Kuwaiti family that is navigating the endless demands of contemporary Kuwaiti life — with the help of KIB's comprehensive suite of digitally-focused banking solutions. In each one-minute episode, the show follows members of the KIB Family in various comical situations that are common for many living in Kuwait today.

Speaking about the series, Othman Tawfeeq, General Manager of KIB's Retail Banking Department, said: "Innovation and creativity: these are the two biggest motivators and drivers for us at KIB. We are determined to be innovative and creative, yet strategic and business-focused — in everything that we do and everything that we offer our customers, including our marketing campaigns and initiatives. We are extremely proud of this series, which we believe is truly a turning point in the Kuwaiti market and sets a precedent for what brands can and should offer the public."

On his part, Fadi Kamal, Executive Manager -

Mr. Othman Tawfeeq
General Manager of KIB's
Retail Banking DepartmentMr. Fadi Kamal
Executive Manager - Marketing
& Customer Proposition at KIB

Marketing & Customer Proposition at KIB said: "This series redefines the traditional realms of marketing and creates a whole new way for us to engage with people, as we interweave comedy and storytelling with information about our own products and services. This is marketing for a new generation of digital-savvy and entertainment-loving consumers."

Adding: "We all know that series consumption goes up drastically during Ramadan, and the medium has shifted from TV to digital platforms and streaming services. So we decided to capitalize on that trend and create a whole new digital marketing platform just for us. In this day and age, we don't need to rely solely on existing media channels and formats — we can create our own."

The concept for the show was developed from scratch by the in-house marketing team at KIB. The animation studio was then brought on-board to bring the series to life, an arduous and complex process that took more than 18 months of hard work, from character development and storyline creation to the final rendered animation. Teams across locations and departments worked seamlessly together to bring the series to life, adapting quickly and in real time to the travel and social distancing restrictions imposed by the pandemic to ensure production never stopped.

Tawfeeq further added: "When we first started putting together the concept of the show, we wanted to represent the modern Kuwaiti family in a way that people can truly relate to. From the young entrepreneur looking for smart financial solutions, to the head of a family seeking out premier banking services catering to his and his family's needs, all the way to the young child who is just now starting to understand the concepts of money and saving — the KIB Family is a typical Kuwaiti family that genuinely represents our customers and their own families. Our offering is tailored to suit the needs of today's consumer across all segments, it's that simple"

The six-minute pilot episode premiered on KIB's social media channels on the first day of Ramadan, with subsequent episodes released on a weekly basis. A total of 15 episodes have been produced so far for the show's first season, with production already underway on season two of the show.