

Politics

Biden year one takeaways

Grand ambitions, humbling defeats

WASHINGTON, Jan 18, (AP): Joe Biden's long arc in public life has always had one final ambition: to sit behind the Resolute Desk of the Oval Office.

He achieved it — albeit, at 78, as the oldest person to assume the presidency. After the turbulence and chaos of his predecessor, **Donald Trump**, Biden was seen by voters as one who could restore a sense of normalcy and a reassuring tone to the White House.



Trump

But Biden also found out, as all his predecessors have, that events beyond his control would shape his time in office and the public's assessment of him.

Takeaways from The Associated Press' White House team on Biden's first year as president:

■ **Big ambitions**

Biden started his presidency with more than \$4 trillion worth of big ideas — his eyes larger than what the Senate could stomach.

\$1.9 trillion worth of coronavirus relief passed in March, which in many first years in office would have been considered a signature achievement.

But Biden kept asking for more: an additional \$2.3 trillion for infrastructure and jobs, and another \$1.8 trillion for families.

After some tortuous negotiations, he got a version of his infrastructure plan passed and even got more than a dozen Republicans in the Senate to vote for it.

But attention spans are short. Biden's \$1.8 trillion package, which he labeled "Build Back Better," had elements that included a wish list of Democratic priorities for the past decade — a child care tax credit, climate legislation, paid family leave and universal prekindergarten, among other provisions.

■ **He still thinks like a senator**

Biden was a senator for nearly four decades, so it's perhaps no surprise that he brings a legislator's mindset to his presidency.

Known as an adept negotiator from his time in the Senate, Biden still immerses himself in legislative negotiations and is versed in the minutiae of his proposals. He believes in the value of personal connections and face-to-face conversations in negotiating details, frequently calling key senators or having lawmakers meet with him at the White House.

■ **Shooting high and falling short**

Biden inherited a long list of unfulfilled Democratic policy priorities when he took office, but despite his best efforts, most remain so.

Taking office after Trump's efforts to subvert the will of voters, no issue seemed so urgent for Biden as the push for legislation on voting protections.

Biden's attempt to break a logjam on the legislation by pushing the Senate to change its rules to pass bills by a simple majority was quashed before it even really began by two moderate members of his own party.

It was emblematic of how Biden's central rationale for his presidency — his nearly four decades in Washington uniquely positioned him to deliver on an immensely ambitious agenda — seems increasingly out of step with today's politics.

■ **No Obama 2.0**

Biden came to office trumpeting "America is back," his shorthand message to allies and adversaries that the days of Trump's inward-looking "America first" foreign policy were over.

But his approach to the world has also been notable for its determination to avoid some of the missteps of his old boss, Barack Obama.

Biden stood by his pledge to meet an August deadline to end the war in Afghanistan even as military commanders and some political allies urged him to slow down what ended up being a chaotic and bloody US military withdrawal. As vice president, Biden had opposed Obama's move to surge more US troops into the country. But the exit Biden presided over was widely criticized for its haste and execution, which included US troop casualties.

■ **A Gilded Cage**

For a man who wanted to get to the White House in the worst way for decades, Biden doesn't seem that enamored with the place.

Over his first year in office, he's spent at least a portion of 99 days in his home state of Delaware, mostly during weekend trips and amounting to more than a fourth of his presidency. It's a short jaunt that requires a massive operation involving security contingents, press pools, helicopters and buses.

As for the White House, Biden calls his accommodations on Pennsylvania Avenue a bit of a "gilded cage in terms of being able to walk outside and do things."

"I said when I was running, I wanted to be president not to live in the White House but to be able to make the decisions about the future of the country," he said in a CNN interview.

■ **All About Beau**

Biden's late son, Beau, sometimes seems as much a part of Biden's presidency as Biden himself.

Biden works references to his son into speeches and other public remarks, and sometimes wears a baseball cap bearing the logo of Beau's child protection foundation.

Beau was being groomed to follow his father into national politics — and perhaps one day be president. He was a Delaware attorney general, served in the state's Army National Guard and advised his father politically.

Brain cancer took him away from his wife and two young children in 2015 at age 46. He's the second child Biden has buried; a 1972 car wreck killed the president's first wife and baby daughter.

Biden said during his 2020 presidential campaign that Beau should have been the candidate.

■ **Better at being a VP than having a VP**

Obama did not choose Biden because the two were personally close. He chose him because he added some foreign policy heft and experience and could serve as a bridge to Congress.

But over time, the two became personally closer. Obama tasked Biden with being the "sheriff" to oversee how money in the 2009 stimulus bill was spent during the financial crisis. He also assigned him to help fashion a plan to end the war in Iraq.

When Biden was considering a run to succeed Obama in 2016, the president was cool to the idea and his vice president bowed out in favor of Hillary Clinton.

Still, Obama's regard for his vice president was on display at the end of their tenure, when he presented Biden with the Medal of Freedom in an emotional ceremony.

Biden's relationship with Vice President Kamala Harris hasn't been nearly as smooth.

Her role in the job is historic: She's the first woman and first Asian and Black vice president. But she's struggled to find her footing, and

■ **All The President's Czars**

From infrastructure to COVID-19 response, Biden has hired White House coordinators to marshal the resources of the federal government to implement his policies. In the case of combating climate change, Biden went so far as to put two in place — Gina McCarthy to lead the domestic initiative and former Secretary of State John Kerry to lead it globally.

Biden knows a thing or two about czars: He was one, when he led the implementation of the American Recovery Act for President Barack Obama. But it's telling that rather than relying on Cabinet secretaries or his own vice president, he's chosen experienced and often politically connected managers like Gene Sperling, who leads implementation of the COVID-19 relief bill, and Jeff Zients, who runs the government response to the virus.

This reflects not just the Biden White House' technocratic streak but also the centralization of power within the West Wing.



President Joe Biden speaks before a bill signing ceremony in the South Court Auditorium on the White House campus, Nov. 30, 2021, in Washington. Harris is capping off a controversial first year in office, creating history as the first woman of color in her position while fending off criticism and complaints over her focus

and agenda. While she's sought to make the office her own, Harris has struggled at times with the constraints of a global pandemic and the realities of a role focused squarely on promoting the president. (AP)

Diplomacy

Move to resolve stark disagreements

Blinken to visit Ukraine as tensions escalate

WASHINGTON, Jan 18, (AP): Secretary of State Antony Blinken will visit Ukraine this week and meet with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy as tensions between the US and Russia escalate over a possible Russian invasion of its neighbor, the State Department said Tuesday.

Blinken will be in Kyiv on the hastily arranged trip to show US support following inconclusive diplomatic talks between Moscow and the West in Europe last week that failed to resolve stark disagreements over Ukraine and other security matters.

Instead, those meetings appear to have increased fears of a Russian invasion, and the Biden administration has accused Russia of preparing a "false flag operation" to use as a pretext for intervention. Russia has angrily denied the charge.

From Kyiv, Blinken will travel to Berlin, where he will meet with his German, British and French counterparts to discuss a possible response to any Russian military action. Russia has massed some 100,000 troops with tanks and other heavy weapons on its own soil near the Ukrainian border in what many observers believe may be preparation for an invasion.

Blinken's "travel and consultations efforts to de-escalate the tension caused by Russia's military buildup and continued aggression against Ukraine," the State Department said in a statement.

Blinken will meet with Zelenskyy and Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba on Wednesday "to reinforce the United States' commitment to Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity," the State Department said.

"The trip follows extensive diplomacy with our European Allies and partners about a united approach to address the threat Russia poses to Ukraine and our joint efforts to encourage it to choose diplomacy and de-escalation in the interests of security and stability," it said.

Blinken spoke by phone Tuesday with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, discussing the diplomatic talks and meetings held last week. The State Department said Blinken "stressed the importance of continuing a diplomatic path to de-escalate tensions" surrounding the Russia-Ukraine situation and "reiterated the unshakable US commitment" to Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

■ **Allegations**

On Monday, Lavrov, Russia's top diplomat, rejected the US allegations that his country was preparing a pretext to invade Ukraine. Speaking to reporters, he dismissed the US claim as "total disinformation."

Lavrov reaffirmed that Russia expects a written response this week from the US and its allies to Moscow's request for binding guarantees that NATO will not embrace Ukraine or any other ex-Soviet nations or station its forces and weapons there.

Blinken underscored to Lavrov on Tuesday that any discussion of European security "must include NATO Allies and European partners, including Ukraine," the State Department said.

Washington and its allies firmly rejected Moscow's demands during last week's Russia-US negotiations in Geneva and a related NATO-Russia meeting in Brussels.

The White House said Friday that US intelligence officials had con-

cluded that Russia had already deployed operatives to rebel-controlled eastern Ukraine to carry out acts of sabotage there and blame them on Ukraine to create a pretext for possible invasion.

Ahead of Blinken's visit to Kyiv, a delegation of US senators was visiting Ukraine to emphasize congressional support for the country.

"Our bipartisan congressional delegation sends a clear message to the global community: the United States stands in unwavering support of our Ukrainian partners to defend their sovereignty and in the face of persistent Russian aggression," Sen. Jeanne Shaheen, a New Hampshire Democrat, said in a statement.

Speaking Monday on a visit to Kyiv, German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock warned that "any further escalation would carry a high price for the Russian regime — economic, political and strategic," and she emphasized the need to continue negotiations.

"We are prepared to have a serious dialogue with Russia, because diplomacy is the only way to defuse this highly dangerous situation at the moment," she said.

Russia seized the Crimean Peninsula after the ouster of Ukraine's Moscow-friendly leader and in 2014 also threw its weight behind a separatist insurgency in eastern Ukraine. More than 14,000 people have been killed in nearly eight years of fighting between the Russia-backed rebels and Ukrainian forces in the country's industrial heartland called Donbas.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has warned that Moscow will take unspecified "military-technical measures" if the West stonewalls its demands.



New York Mayor Bill de Blasio delivers remarks at the New York State Financial Control Board annual meeting, in New York, Aug. 3, 2021. De Blasio announced Tuesday, Jan. 18, 2022, he will not run for governor, but will instead devote himself to fighting inequality in New York. (AP)



Sinema



Manchin

America

■ **O'Rourke raises \$7m:** Democrat Beto O'Rourke said Tuesday that his campaign for Texas governor raised \$7.2 million in the first six weeks of a race that could wind up as one of the nation's most expensive in 2022.

The announcement, made on the deadline in Texas for campaigns to submit their latest finance reports, is an early marker of whether O'Rourke can remain a fundraising powerhouse in his latest comeback after failed bids for the U.S. Senate and president.

The haul is significant by the standards of other Texas Democrats who have run for governor but have failed to succeed for more than 30 years. At the same time, Republican Gov. Greg Abbott for years has shown an ability to raise millions of dollars in a matter of days from executives of some of Texas' largest corporations and energy firms.

Abbott, who is running for a third term, has yet to publicly report his latest figures but as of last summer was sitting on more than \$55 million. (AP)

■ **Hostage-taker in shelters:** An armed man who took four people hostage during a 10-hour standoff at a Texas synagogue had spent time in area homeless shelters in the two weeks leading up to the attack, and was dropped off at one by someone he appeared to know.

Malik Faisal Akram, a 44-year-old British national who authorities identified as the hostage-taker, was brought to the shelter in downtown Dallas on Jan. 2 by a man who hugged him and had conversations with him, said Wayne Walker, CEO and pastor of OurCalling, which provides services to homeless people.

Rabbi Charlie Cytron-Walker told "CBS Mornings" that he'd let Akram into Congregation Beth Israel on Saturday morning because he appeared to need shelter. The synagogue is in Colleyville, a city of about 26,000 people located 30 miles (48 kilometers) northwest of Dallas. (AP)

■ **Sinema, Manchin slammed:** Facing stark criticism from civil rights leaders, senators return to Capitol Hill under intense pressure to change their rules and break a Republican filibuster that has hopelessly stalled voting legislation.

The Senate is set to launch debate Tuesday on the voting bill with attention focused intently on two pivotal Democrats — Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona and Joe Manchin of West Virginia — who were singled out with a barrage of criticism during Martin Luther King Jr. Day events for their refusal to change what civil rights leaders call the "Jim Crow filibuster."

Martin Luther King III, the son of the late

civil rights leader, compared Sinema and Manchin to the white moderate his father wrote about during the civil rights battles of the 1950s and 1960s — a person who declared support for the goals of Black voting rights but not the direct actions or demonstrations that ultimately led to passage of the landmark legislation.

"History will not remember them kindly," the younger King said, referring to Sinema and Manchin by name.

This will be the fifth time the Senate will try to pass voting legislation this Congress, as elections officials warn that new state laws are making it more difficult to vote in some parts of the country. (AP)

■ **Bloomberg funds cities:** Bloomberg Philanthropies is supporting the innovative

solutions of 15 cities to try to get others to use them as blueprints to battle the world's urban problems.

The winners of this year's Global Mayors Challenge, announced Tuesday, span 13 nations and will make their solutions available to cities worldwide to replicate. They will each receive \$1 million and technical support from the philanthropic organization of former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg to help develop and expand their programs.

They range from using technology to support tree maintenance in Sierra Leone to creating new farm models in the Philippines and addressing the opioid crisis in New Jersey through a public-private partnership that quickly delivers medication to reverse opioid overdoses.

"As the world works to address the pro-



Texas Democrat gubernatorial candidate Beto O'Rourke speaks during a campaign event in Fort Worth, Texas Friday, Dec 3, 2021. O'Rourke said Tuesday, Jan 18, 2022, that his campaign for Texas governor raised \$7.2 million in the first six weeks of a race that could wind up as one of the nation's most expensive in 2022. (AP)

found public health and economic effects of the ongoing pandemic, cities can implement innovative ideas at a pace that national governments simply can't match." Bloomberg, the billionaire founder of Bloomberg Philanthropies and Bloomberg L.P., said in a statement. "Our 15 winners offer bold, achievable plans to improve health, reduce unemployment, empower women, and more." (AP)

■ **Victim's family sues Amazon:** The family of a delivery driver who died last month when a tornado collapsed the central Illinois Amazon facility where he worked filed a wrongful death lawsuit Monday in Madison County.

The action on behalf of Austin McEwen, 26, claims that Amazon failed to warn employees of dangerous weather or provide safe shelter before a tornado slammed the Edwardsville facility Dec. 10, killing McEwen and five others.

It is believed to be the first legal action taken in response to the deaths. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration has opened an investigation.

McEwen's parents, Randy and Alice McEwen, allege that Amazon administrators knew severe weather was imminent but had no emergency plan nor evacuated employees from the fulfillment center. (AP)

■ **3 Calif teenagers killed:** Three teenage boys were killed in Southern California when the car they were in struck a curb, collided with a fence and rolled over on an embankment, authorities said.

The single-vehicle crash happened around 8:30 p.m. Sunday near an intersection in Pasadena, according to the California Highway Patrol.

Preliminary reports that the 2005 Honda plunged off an elevated section of nearby Interstate 210 were inaccurate, the highway patrol said.

The sedan came to rest upside-down on a sidewalk underneath the highway overpass. (AP)