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USA

Biden's State of the Union Launches His Campaign Amid Protests

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President Joe Biden used the state of the union speech, the chief executive's annual report to Congress, to launch his presidential reelection campaign as hundreds of protestors blocked Pennsylvania Avenue that leads from the White House to the Capitol to demand a ceasefire in Israel's war on Palestine.

Biden, who has faced skepticism from voters because of his age—he is 81—delivered the one-hour address with energy and enthusiasm, putting himself forward as a strong leader and criticizing former President Donald Trump who he referred to only as “my predecessor.” His speech, full of exaggerations about his own successes, presented what was largely a progressive domestic agenda that would defend women's abortion rights, and improve health and education—though the progressives in his party criticized his positions on immigration and especially on support for Israel's war.

Biden in his prepared speech and impromptu remarks challenged Republicans to pass the bipartisan immigration bill before Congress, which—following Trump's leadership they have refused to do. Trump doesn't want it passed because he wants to be able to attack Biden over border and immigration issue. But the bill is criticized by progressives because it would militarize the border and deny asylum seekers entry into the United States in violation of U.S. and International law.

With hundreds of thousands of Democrats having refused to vote for Biden and instead voting uncommitted in state primaries because of their disappointment with Biden's unconditional support for Israel and failure to call for a ceasefire, the president had to make some gestures recognizing the horrendous situation of the Palestinians in Gaza. In his address he called for “an immediate cease-fire that would last six weeks” in order to get the Israeli hostages released with hope that it might lead to a longer ceasefire. He also announced that the United States will begin delivering aid to Gaza by sea.

Biden's speech while generally well-received by his party did not appear to have moved the public much, according to polls. At the moment, Trump, who has been campaigning for four years, is leading in the polls in the battleground states, but Biden and the Democrats are far ahead in fund-raising and on-the-ground organization.

Trump's principal campaign message delivered over and over in speeches at his mass rallies is that “millions” of immigrants from “jails, prisons, and mental institutions” continue to “invade” the United States. He has said that Biden's border policies are tantamount to “a conspiracy to overthrow the United States of America.” He makes preposterous claims to his believing followers, such as his statement that because of the surge of immigrants, in New York City “there's no more Little Leagues. There's no more sports. There's no more life in New York and so many of these cities.” And he has stood by his Hitlerian statement that “immigrants are poisoning the blood of the country.”

Many Palestinians and other Arab and Muslim voters as well as Blacks and younger voters may sit out the election. With Biden and Trump neck and neck, third parties could determine the election. The No Labels Party, whose slogan is “not left, not right, but forward,” has proposed to run a Republican for president with a Democrats for vice-president, but so far has no candidates. The Green Party's Jill Stein could win enough votes from Democrats and independents in Michigan and other states to ensure that Trump wins the election. The radical Black theologian Cornel West could have a similar impact. The left is divided between those who will vote for Biden to stop Trump, those who will vote for progressives Stein or West, and those who will not vote this election. We will be debating all of this until November 5.

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