

**Joe Biden**

## **Biden bids to reboot faltering presidency as he marks one year in office**



Commander-in-chief seeks to reclaim public confidence in his administration as midterm elections loom

**James Politi** and **Lauren Fedor** in Washington YESTERDAY

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During his lengthy, freewheeling news conference this week, Joe Biden identified how to reboot his presidency and rescue Democratic hopes in November's midterm elections.

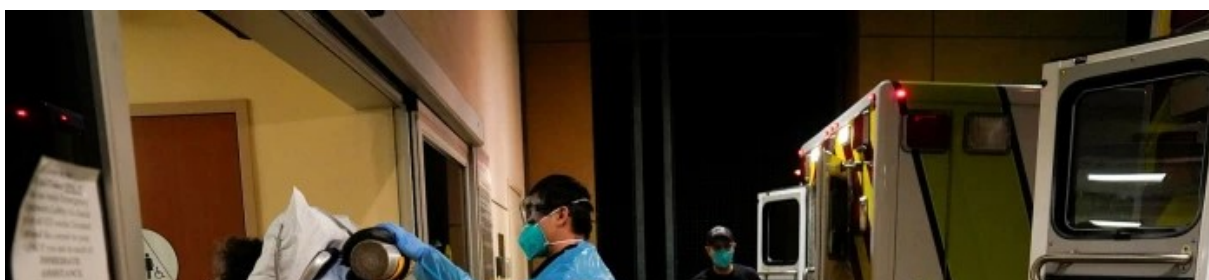
"I'm going to be out on the road a lot, making the case around the country," said the 79-year-old US president. "Making the case of what we did do, and what we want to do, what we need to do."

It will probably take far more than an intensive travel schedule for Biden to reclaim the ground he has rapidly lost with America's restive public in the past few months, as he marks a year as US president.

Not only do just 40.7 per cent of Americans approve of the job Biden has done in his first 12 months, while 54.1 per cent disapprove, but a bipartisan survey released by NBC this week showed voters also give him low marks on a broad range of presidential qualities. These range from being "knowledgeable and experienced" and "competent and effective" to being "easy-going and likeable" and a "good commander-in-chief".

"His profile has shrunk since he's taken office — in his image and stature — and I think it's really important for him to repair that and define who he is," said Jeff Horwitt, a Democratic pollster at Hart Research which conducted the survey. "Personally, but also professionally, what is the Biden presidency? That's where I think Americans are kind of searching for and looking for some guidance from their president."

The woes dogging Biden include the high inflation that continues to strain the purchasing power of households and businesses despite strong job growth, while the Omicron coronavirus surge has left US hospitals reeling, families exhausted and the administration playing catch-up.





A Covid patient is brought to an emergency room in Placentia, California. The Omicron coronavirus surge has left US hospitals reeling © Jae C Hong/AP

Biden's legislative agenda has also stalled after two Democratic senators joined every Republican in blocking his \$1.75tn flagship [Build Back Better](#) economic package and landmark legislation to protect voting rights. In the midst of this, Russian troops are positioned for a possible invasion of Ukraine, in a crisis that is testing Biden's foreign policy acumen and US alliances around the world.

To some analysts, Biden's difficulties are part of the natural — and reversible — backlash faced early on by presidents.

“The first year of presidencies are about legislating and reaching for the stars. All presidents do it. All presidents fall short. Bill Clinton didn't get healthcare done. Barack Obama didn't get cap and trade done. Donald Trump didn't repeal the Affordable Care Act,” said Matt Bennett of Third Way, a centrist Democratic think-tank.

Lara Brown, director of the Graduate School of Political Management at George Washington University, said there had been “missteps” and “too much zigzagging across issues” by the Biden administration. But she also stressed that the past 12 months had been “much more normal than any of the last five years that we have had, from the time Trump announced his candidacy to the time that he left office”.

Others see Biden as having a more fundamental and perhaps unexpected difficulty in connecting and communicating with ordinary Americans, and addressing their concerns — which for a son of Scranton, Pennsylvania, with working-class roots, was not supposed to be a particular weakness.

“Biden does not understand the hopes and dreams of the average American, he does

He has adopted a more openly critical tone towards Republican obstructionism and extremism, which he toned down as he sought to forge a semblance of national unity last year. This more combative stance earned him a rebuke last week from Mitt Romney, the Republican senator.

But Biden is also seeking more distance from the left of his own party. “I like him, but I’m not Bernie Sanders. I’m not a socialist, I’m a mainstream Democrat,” Biden said on Wednesday.

The US president does not, for now, seem to be inclined to shake up any personnel, including the inner circle of White House advisers such as Ron Klain, chief of staff, or any cabinet members. “Joe Biden does not do that, that is just not how he operates,” said Bennett.

Biden may, however, need to be more precise in his public speaking. The White House was forced to clarify two comments made during this week’s press conference, including the suggestion that a [“minor incursion” into Ukraine](#) could trigger a lighter western response.

Mitch McConnell, Republican leader in the Senate, called the appearance “a bizarre and devastating performance” by the president.

Despite the bleak picture for Biden, some Democrats hope he can turn things round. If at least a portion of his remaining economic agenda can be passed, inflation and the pandemic recede and he begins to benefit from the legislation he enacted last year, including the \$1.9tn stimulus bill and the \$1.2tn infrastructure package, then Biden’s fortunes may rebound.

“He’s lost ground with people who voted for him,” said Horwitt, pointing to young and minority voters, but “there’s an ability for them to be with him again in the future”.

Scott Mulhauser, a Democratic strategist, said: “He didn’t get everything he wanted

