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# **'Remains to be seen': Among congressional Democrats, lots of anxiety, little consensus on Biden**

House and Senate Democrats air their anxieties about the president in a pair of candid closed-door meetings.



Rep. Nancy Pelosi, the speaker emerita, arrives at the Democratic National Headquarters with other Democratic House members to discuss the future of President Biden's candidacy on Tuesday. (AP Photo/John McDonnell)

## Casey Wooten and Lauren Green and Melos Ambaye

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**T**wo days into perhaps the most consequential week for congressional Democrats this year, there is little consensus yet over the messaging on President Biden's future as a presidential candidate.

One thing many do agree on: They don't want to talk about it just yet because they're still trying to figure it out among themselves.

In separate closed-door meetings, House and Senate Democrats aired the issue of President Biden's disastrous June debate performance, in which the 81-year-old at times appeared to stumble over his words or become confused about what the moderators were asking. The performance only confirmed worries from some lawmakers about Biden's ability to convince voters he can carry on the campaign and govern for another four years.

Emerging from the meetings, most lawmakers had little to say, and the ones who did speak offered differing takes on how to handle the candidate at the top of their ticket in November. House leadership said Tuesday was the beginning of conversations that will continue throughout the week.

Asked by reporters if Democrats were on the same page regarding Biden's future, Rep. Steve Cohen responded: "We're not even in the same book."

The intra-caucus meetings failed to move the needle. At least seven Democrats have publicly called on Biden to step aside, with more discussing serious doubts about his candidacy in private conversations. Rep. Mikie Sherrill of New Jersey on Tuesday joined the small but growing chorus saying that he should not run for reelection.

“I’d certainly support President Biden, but I think we would be less endangered by a Trump presidency if we had a different candidate,” Rep. Lloyd Doggett told reporters as he left the House Democratic Caucus meeting Tuesday morning.

Doggett last week became the first sitting House Democrat to call on Biden to withdraw from the race. He didn’t elaborate on what he said in Tuesday’s closed-door party meeting but emphasized he will “certainly” vote for Biden if he is the nominee.

The same goes for Rep. Adam Smith, who remains opposed to Biden’s candidacy but said Tuesday that if he’s formally nominated at the Democratic convention in August, he’d back the president.

The mood in the House meeting was serious, lawmakers said, as Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries opened the floor to members to air their grievances about Biden’s debate performance or to convince skittish members to back the president. Aides were barred from attending, and member’s phones were confiscated, a precaution that only happens when leadership doesn’t want details of a meeting leaking to the press.



DAILY

## **OUTLOOK: Democrats on Capitol Hill brace for painful talk about Biden’s age**

PLUS: Ukraine lawmaker seeks support during NATO summit, rule that could yank funds from antiabortion centers delayed, and minority students with disabilities experience higher arrest rates in

schools.

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Members opposed to Biden's candidacy made their case to the group. But the vast majority of the House caucus remains publicly in support of the president, with key factions beginning to firm up support for Biden.

Democratic leadership on both sides of the Capitol is publicly backing Biden but has yet to formulate a unified message.

"I'm with Joe," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer told reporters when asked three separate times whether Biden should be the nominee.

The Senate Democratic meeting, in which Schumer let members have the floor to discuss their opinions on Biden's future, hit the same impasse. There was no consensus following the gathering, leaving many members apprehensive to comment on where they stand.

"It still remains to be seen," Sen. Dick Durbin told reporters when asked whether Biden should remain on the ticket.

Sen. Jon Tester of Montana, a moderate Democrat in a tough reelection race, said he still stands by his earlier statement that Biden must prove his fitness for office.

Since his debate misstep, Biden has said he plans to remain in the race, and he penned a letter to congressional Democrats on Monday telling them he's got no plans to exit. On Tuesday, White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said Biden is committed to a full second term if elected. Biden would be 86 at the end of his tenure.

The polling remains close between Biden and Donald Trump. An [Emerson College Poll](https://emersoncollegepolling.com/july-2024-national-poll-trump-46-biden-43/) (<https://emersoncollegepolling.com/july-2024-national-poll-trump-46-biden-43/>) released Tuesday shows Trump leading with 46 percent and Biden trailing close to the margin of error at 43 percent.

Tuesday did provide one win for the White House.

More lawmakers had been expected to come out and call for Biden to exit the race after the meetings. That didn't happen, meaning Biden had mostly stopped the public erosion of support.

One new lawmaker on Tuesday did call for Biden to step aside, however. In a statement Tuesday afternoon, Sherrill of New Jersey said she was asking Biden to “declare that he won't run for reelection and will help lead us through a process toward a new nominee.”



DAILY

### **Events are complicating Biden's decision—and his timing**

The NATO meetings, followed closely by the Republican convention, may buy the president a precious few days—and shine a light on his foreign policy expertise.

CHARLIE COOK



The question hanging over the Capitol now, though, is what happens next as another recess week looms. Factions within the Democratic caucus have held meetings ever since lawmakers got back Monday, but there is a diversity of opinion on messaging even within those subsets.

Biden is set to speak with the Congressional Progressive Caucus, but no date has been set, nor is there an official position on his future from the caucus, Chairwoman Pramila Jayapal said Tuesday.

“I am fully behind him as our nominee until he’s not our nominee,” Jayapal said.

Little opposition was shown Monday after Biden joined the Congressional Black Caucus Zoom meeting, an effort to appease worries from members of the key faction.

Throughout the chaos, members remain united under one consensus—beating Donald Trump.

“I am not distracted by a 90-minute debate. I am focused on guarding against 90 years of harm if Project 2025 becomes a reality,” said Rep. Ayanna Pressley, a member of the CBC, referring to a blueprint for a second Trump presidency being circulated by some conservative groups.

Rep. Dean Phillips was the dark-horse candidate against Biden in the early phase of the 2024 primary. Phillips's argument hinged in part on Biden's age, and the Minnesota lawmaker was dismissed for it at the time. Phillips says he was trying to start the conversation the caucus is now having.

“Am I disappointed in those in power in my party for not heeding that call at a time when they all knew the same thing I did? Absolutely,” Phillips said. 