



President Barack Obama listens as Vice President Joe Biden speaks in the Rose Garden of the White House in Washington on Wednesday where he announced that he will not run for the presidential nomination.

AP Photo/Jacquelyn Martin

Biden farewell

Bookended by tragedy, storied career nears the end

By JOSH LEDERMAN
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Joe Biden's storied political career will come to an end much the way it started nearly half a century ago: shaped by crushing personal tragedy that shook his deep-seated confidence in his own ability to lead.

In deciding not to run for president, Biden turned away from months of intensive preparations and countless hours that had put him on the verge of a third presidential campaign, with almost everything ready to go except the candidate himself.

"Unfortunately, I believe we're out of time — the time necessary to mount a winning campaign," Biden said, flanked by his wife and President Barack Obama in an extraordinary appearance in the Rose Garden.

Biden's world ground to a halt in May when his son died of brain cancer. For the vice president, 46-year-old Beau Biden's death ended any possibility that the popular former Delaware attorney general would carry on his father's legacy, perhaps with a presidential campaign of his own.

Even months later, when Biden began anew to seriously consider running, he steadfastly refused to be rushed, and said the decision hinged on whether he and his family had the emotional mettle to campaign while still roiled by grief.

In fact, Biden had predicted his denouement in September, when he said he might not be ready to make a decision before the realities of the campaign calendar would make the decision for him. "If that's it, that's it," he said.

Biden, who will turn 73 next month, will probably never again appear on a ballot. So his decision to forego another run for the White House sets him on a glide path toward the end of his long turn on the national political stage, which began in 1972 and will culminate when the Obama



AP Photo/George Widman, File

In this 1987, file photo, Sen. Joseph Biden, D-Del., right, walks with his wife Jill after announcing his candidacy for president in Wilmington, Del.



AP Photo/Barry Thumma, File

In this 1978, file photo, President Jimmy Carter listens to Sen. Joseph R. Biden, D-Del., as they wait to speak at a fundraising reception at Padua Academy in Wilmington, Del.

administration ends in early 2017.

Although Biden hasn't said exactly what he'll do after leaving the White House, he has told friends he has no plans to retire in a traditional sense. He's previously discussed starting a foundation, launching an institute at the University of Delaware or becoming a special envoy if called upon by future administrations, said several friends and aides, who requested anonymity to disclose private conversations.

And under a picturesque blue sky in the Rose Garden, Biden hinted at another venture in his future: a "moonshot" to cure cancer, sparing other families the profound loss that his has endured.

"I'm going to spend the next 15 months in this office pushing as hard as I can to accomplish this," Biden said, calling his son Beau "our inspiration."

Yet in a bittersweet reminder that the job he's always wanted is the one he'll never attain, he added, "If I could be anything, I would have wanted to be the president that ended cancer, because it's possible."

For Biden, the decision to bow out means his political career will have been book-ended by heartbreak and adversity that robbed him of the people he loved most.

The scrappy lawyer from Scranton, Pennsylvania, was 27 years old when he was elected to county council

harboring much greater aspirations. Yet a month after Biden was elected to the Senate at age 29, his wife and baby daughter died when their car collided with a tractor-trailer.

Biden considered relinquishing his seat, but instead was sworn in at the hospital where his sons, Beau and Hunter, were recovering.

Over six terms in the Senate, he rose in the ranks to chair the Senate's judiciary and foreign relations committees, developing broad expertise in global affairs and presiding over contentious Supreme Court confirmation hearings for Clarence Thomas and Robert Bork. He was perhaps most proud of his work authoring the Violence Against Women Act, which Biden still brings up regularly.

With a penchant for speaking his mind, Biden developed a reputation for a plainspoken, unpredictable approach to politics. Although it frequently got him in trouble, some Democrats suggested his freewheeling style was uniquely suited for this year's presidential campaign.

Biden ran for president twice before; neither venture was successful.

His most recent attempt, in 2008, ended after he garnered less than 1 percent in the Iowa caucuses. His first run in 1987 ended even quicker, following allegations he plagiarized some speeches from a British politician. A few months later, he had a pair of surgeries for brain aneurysms, and said doctors had told him the campaign might have killed him.

Through it all, the sprawling Biden clan of siblings, kids and grandkids was at the center of his orbit, and his daily trips back home to Delaware on an Amtrak train became a thing of lore in Washington, where most lawmakers live nearly full time when Congress is in session. Not Biden.

"Our whole family — and this sounds corny — but we found purpose in public life," Biden said.

BRIEFLY

Bush would move Interior Department HQ to the West

RENO, Nev. (AP) — Jeb Bush said Wednesday that he would rein in regulation at the Interior Department as president and try to move its headquarters from Washington, D.C., to the West, home to 90 percent of federally owned land.

"There is a tradition of having a secretary from the West," the former Florida governor said at a discussion organized by his presidential campaign. "But the folks that actually do the work ... all live in Maryland, Virginia and Washington, D.C., and I think they ought to be living out amongst us."

The proposal was part of Bush's land and resource management plan, which is aimed at building consensus between federal, state and local governments.

Bush didn't say in his speech where he would locate the headquarters, although an outline suggested his proposed agency would do a better job of keeping in touch if it was based in a place like Denver, Salt Lake City or Reno. The West is home to 90 percent of the federal government's nearly 1 billion square miles of land.

Assad-Putin meeting signals push to end crisis

MOSCOW (AP) — Bashar Assad's surprise meeting with Vladimir Putin could signal that Russia ultimately seeks a political settlement after weeks of heavy airstrikes in Syria. But the terms of such an arrangement are uncertain, and questions remain about whether Moscow will seek the departure of its longtime ally or try for a power-sharing agreement.

In a further sign that a diplomatic push might be underway to end the four-year crisis, Russia announced Wednesday that Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry had agreed to meet Friday in Vienna with their counterparts from Saudi Arabia and Turkey — both firm Assad critics.

The Syrian president's visit to Moscow, his first known trip abroad since war broke out in 2011, was announced on Wednesday, the morning after it happened, and raised intense speculation about the two leaders' motives — and a strong response from Washington.

"We view the red-carpet welcome for Assad, who has used chemical weapons against his own people, at odds with the stated goal by the Russians for a political transition in Syria," said White House spokesman Eric Schultz.

If nothing else, it underscored how emboldened the embattled Syrian leader has become

in the wake of the Russian airstrikes that began on Sept. 30 and Iran's deployment of hundreds of ground forces to fight alongside Syrian government troops.

Russia says it is targeting militants, especially those of the extremist Islamic State group. But critics, including the U.S., say Moscow's military intervention props up Assad and is likely to fan the violence.

The oblique references Wednesday by both leaders to their meeting did little to shed light on their ultimate strategy.

WikiLeaks publishes CIA director John Brennan's emails

WASHINGTON (AP) — The WikiLeaks organization posted material Wednesday from what appears to be CIA Director John Brennan's personal email account, including a draft security clearance application containing personal information.

The material presumably was taken in a compromise of Brennan's email account by a hacker who told *The New York Post* he is a high school student protesting American foreign policy. The hacker claimed he posed as a Verizon employee and tricked another employee into revealing Brennan's personal information.

Brennan was seeking a security clearance while applying for a job as White House counterterrorism adviser. It was not immediately clear whether any national security information was compromised in the release of the clearance application, which includes his wife's Social Security number and the names of people Brennan worked with over a long prior career at the CIA.

Man detained in road-rage killing of 4-year-old girl

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP) — Police detained a man on Wednesday in connection with the road-rage killing of a 4-year-old girl who was shot in the backseat of her father's truck after he picked up her and her brother from school, signaling a possible break in a case that has horrified the public.

Albuquerque police would not say if they believe the person of interest taken into custody is the shooter, but they said he matched the description of the gunman. His name was not immediately released.

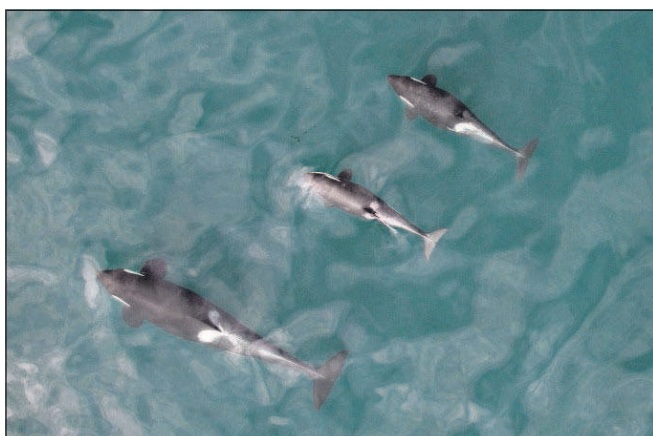
Four-year-old Lilly Garcia was riding in the backseat of her dad's truck with her 7-year-old brother Tuesday when someone in a Toyota opened fire on the family as they traveled down the main east-west freeway in Albuquerque.

Biologists fly drone to track health of endangered orcas

SEATTLE (AP) — Federal biologists flying a drone have taken thousands of rich images of endangered Puget Sound orcas showing the whales are in good condition this year and that several appear to be pregnant.

The drone flights near Washington's San Juan Islands captured striking photographs of all 81 members of the small population of orcas that spend much of their time in the state's inland waters. They also documented endangered killer whales that spend time in Canada's waters.

Researchers with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and Vancouver Aquarium in British Columbia are using those images to measure and track the health and growth



NOAA Fisheries, Vancouver Aquarium via AP

This September 2015 photo provided by NOAA Fisheries shows a female orca and her two offspring.

of individual whales over time.

"We're really answering a simple question. Are these killer whales getting enough to eat?" said John Durban, a marine mammal biologist

with NOAA's Southwest Fisheries Science Center in La Jolla, California.

This year it appears that the population is in good shape, even experiencing a baby boom with five new

calves born in the past 12 months or so. It suggests that feeding has been good, Durban said.

Researchers want to know how fat or long the whales are from year to year, how well they are reproducing, how their body conditions change and how those factors might correlate with the amount of salmon they have to eat.

Several appeared to be pregnant, but Durban said they won't know how many until they do more analysis.

Scientists are using drones to track and monitor wildlife in the U.S. and elsewhere. They have used drones to count penguins and seals in Antarctica, stellar sea lions in Alaska's Aleutian Islands and to take breath samples of humpback whales off New England.

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