

# Biden launches 2020 presidential bid warning 'soul' of America is at stake

By STEVE PEOPLES and THOMAS BEAUMONT  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Declaring the “soul of this nation” at stake, former Vice President Joe Biden pushed into the crowded 2020 presidential contest on Thursday and quickly sparked a fierce debate over the direction of the modern-day Democratic Party.

Ignoring the political noise in his own party, Biden aimed directly at Donald Trump in an announcement video seizing on the Republican president’s response to the deadly clash between white supremacists and counter-protesters in Charlottesville, Virginia, two years ago. That was the spur for him to launch a third presidential bid, Biden said, noting Trump’s comments that there were some “very fine people” on both sides of the violent encounter, which left one woman dead.

“We are in the battle for the soul of this nation,” Biden declared. “If we give Donald Trump eight years in the White House, he will forever and fundamentally alter the character of this nation — who we are. And I cannot stand by and watch that happen.”

Yet Biden will get a chance to take on Trump only if he survives a Democratic field that now spans at least 20 contenders. And his party’s more liberal wing was far from welcoming in the hours immediately after



The Philadelphia Inquirer via AP/Jessica Griffin

**Democratic presidential candidate and former Vice President Joe Biden greets people at Gianni’s Pizza, in Wilmington Del., on Thursday.**

he declared his candidacy. Justice Democrats, a group created from the remnants of Bernie Sanders’ failed 2016 campaign, came out against Biden on Thursday and spent much of the day assailing him on social media.

As an older white man with often-centrist views, Biden must now prove he’s not out of step with Democrats trying to push the party to the left.

He’s been taking steps in recent weeks to clean up perceived missteps from his long record in elected office, including his role as a senator in allowing sexual harassment accuser Anita Hill to be grilled

by an all-male committee during the Clarence Thomas Supreme Court confirmation hearings.

A campaign aide said Biden has privately contacted Hill to share “his regret for what she endured and his admiration for everything she has done to change the culture around sexual harassment in this country.” But *The New York Times* reported Thursday that Hill said in an interview she was “deeply unsatisfied” and unconvinced by his apology.

Biden has also highlighted his role in authoring the Violence Against Women Act nearly three decades ago, legislation

that is credited with reducing domestic violence nationwide.

Still, the 76-year-old Scranton, Pennsylvania, native’s political liabilities are many.

He would be the oldest person ever elected president — Trump was 70 in 2016 — even as his party embraces a new generation of diversity. He’s also yet to outline his positions on issues defining the 2020 Democratic primary, most notably “Medicare for All,” the universal health care plan authored by Sanders that has been embraced in one form or another by virtually the entire Democratic field.

## Report: N. Korea sought \$2M from U.S. for captured American

WASHINGTON (AP) — North Korea reportedly insisted the U.S. agree to pay \$2 million in medical costs in 2017 before it released detained American college student Otto Warmbier while he was in a coma, according to a report published Thursday.

*The Washington Post*, citing two people familiar with the situation, reported that Joseph Yun, a U.S. envoy sent to North Korea to retrieve the 21-year-old student, signed an agreement to pay the \$2 million on instructions passed down from President Donald Trump. They spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the matter publicly.

The bill went to the Treasury Department, where it remained — unpaid — throughout 2017, the newspaper said. It is unclear whether the Trump administration later paid the bill, or whether it came up during preparations for Trump’s two summits with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

White House press secretary Sarah Sanders said the administration does not comment on hostage negotiations. U.S. policy is to refuse to pay ransom for the release of Americans detained abroad.

While the majority of Americans detained by North Korea have been released in relatively good condition, Warmbier, a student at the University of Virginia, died in June last year shortly after he was flown home comatose after 17 months in captivity.

Warmbier was seized from a tour group while visiting North Korea in January 2016 and convicted on charges of trying to steal a propaganda poster and sentenced to 15 years of hard labor.

## Ex-officer sentenced to 25 years in black motorist’s killing

By TERRY SPENCER  
Associated Press

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. — A former Florida police officer was sentenced to 25 years in prison Thursday for the fatal on-duty shooting of a black musician whose SUV had broken down after a late-night concert.

Former Palm Beach Gardens officer Nouman Raja was the first person in Florida in nearly 30 years to be convicted and sentenced for an on-duty killing — and one of only a few nationwide.

The 41-year-old defendant was sentenced by Circuit Judge Joseph Marx as family and friends of the 31-year-old victim, Corey Jones, looked on in a hushed courtroom jammed with supporters on both sides.

Raja was convicted last month of manslaughter and attempted murder in Jones’ death. Marx on Thursday imposed a sentence of 25



AP Photo/Lannis Waters, File

**In this Feb. 28, 2019, file photo, Nouman Raja listens to testimony during his trial in West Palm Beach, Fla.**

years on each count, to be served concurrently.

Prosecutors had said Raja had escalated what should have been a routine interaction into a deadly confrontation in 2015 when he encountered Corey, a housing inspector and part-time drummer whose SUV had stalled on a dark highway ramp.

Raja had faced a possi-

ble sentencing range from 25 years to life in prison, and both Prosecutor Adrienne Ellis and the father of the victim had urged the judge to impose the maximum.

Previously, Marx has rejected motions by Raja’s attorneys to throw out the verdicts. They argued the evidence didn’t support his conviction and that Marx should have instructed jurors to consider whether Raja’s use of force was justified under Florida’s “stand your ground” law. They plan to appeal.

At Thursday’s hearing, Clinton Jones Sr. told the judge he still has his son’s number programmed into his cellphone because he can’t stand the finality of deleting it. He said he wanted Raja to receive a life sentence, not out of hatred but because of the pain he had caused the Jones family.

“It was painful for us to go through this because I knew the kind of son we had raised,” Jones said.

## Trump administration reevaluating offshore drilling

By MATTHEW DALY and ELLEN KNICKMEYER  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Trump administration said Thursday it is reevaluating its controversial plan to sharply expand offshore drilling as it responds to a court ruling that blocked oil and gas development off Alaska.

Governors and lawmakers from both Republican and Democratic-led states have strongly opposed the expanded drilling. And a federal judge last month ruled against President Donald Trump’s executive order to open the Arctic and parts of the Atlantic to broader oil and gas development, saying Trump had exceeded his authority.

Interior Secretary David Bernhardt told *The Wall Street Journal* on Thursday that the legal challenges may be “discomfiling” to the administration’s overall drilling plans. Bernhardt says the administration may have to wait for the challenges to



AP Photo/David Goldman, File

**In this July 16, 2017, file photo, ice is broken up by the passing of the Finnish icebreaker MSV Nordica as it sails through the Beaufort Sea off the coast of Alaska.**

fully play out in court.

Interior spokeswoman Molly Block said that given the court setback, the agency “is evaluating all of its options.”

The Interior Department’s Bureau of Ocean Energy Management “will carefully consider all public input received, including comments from governors of affected states, before making final decisions” on expanded drilling off

the country’s coasts, Block added.

Environmental groups welcomed what they said amounted to a delay in the administration’s coastal drilling expansion plans. Collin O’Mara of the National Wildlife Federation said the administration “needs to go one step further and fully and permanently scrap its plan to open our coasts to unfettered offshore drilling.”

## Ban: ‘Enough is enough. We’re nickel-and-diming our citizens’

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“I do fear the transition from the polystyrene, which is fully recyclable, to the clamshell, fully hard plastic, hinged to-go containers — which is a lot more harmful to the environment,” said Rep. David Brock Smith, R-Port Orford, a coastal legislator who owns a restaurant, the Port & Starboard, in his hometown. “We should be discussing how we can make it easier to get these materials to the recycling facility so that we can make a difference, rather than banning this product.”

However, the number of recycling facilities that accept polystyrene foam is limited — there is one in Tigard, Agilyx Corp. — and most curbside services won’t pick it up unless it’s being disposed of as garbage. “Most people will simply trash their food containers,” Rep. Janeen Sollman, D-Hillsboro, said. “They do not go to the extent that I do, where I rinse and I store my takeout containers to later drive them to Tigard, to Agilyx, for them to recycle. ... When we rely on customers to self-transport the recycle material to a singular facility in Tigard, it means that a limited amount is recycled, and it ends up in the landfill.”

Like Smith, Rep. Margaret Doherty, D-Tigard, said she wants to create a “transfer system” to make recycling foam products more feasible. Doherty, normally a reliable Democratic vote, voted against HB 2883 both times. “The intent of this bill is honest, and we don’t want things that you can’t recycle out there,” Doherty said. “But these, you can.”

To Schouten, it doesn’t make economic or environmental sense for far-flung Oregon communities to truck small polystyrene food containers to Tigard when restaurants could simply use more eco-friendly alternatives instead. “If it’s going to go in the landfill, let’s make it something that will biodegrade,” Schouten said.

House Bill 2509, the bag ban, would make Oregon the fourth state to ban plastic checkout bags. California has a similar law, which voters approved in 2016. Seventeen Oregon cities have already banned plastic bags at stores, including Portland, Salem, Eugene, Bend and Hillsboro. HB 2509 is based in large part on Hillsboro’s ban, which also applies to restaurants, Sollman noted.

Critics of plastic bag bans argue that targeting plastic bags won’t move the needle on greenhouse gas emissions, which are the primary driver behind climate change. Several studies suggest that manufacturing plastic bags takes less energy than paper bags, and paper bags have a larger “carbon footprint” than plastic.

However, unlike paper and other wood products, plastic is non-biodegradable. Experts aren’t sure how long it would take a typical plastic bag to decompose — they haven’t existed for long enough to observe their decomposition — but it’s likely to be on the order of centuries. Plastic waste also frequently makes its way into waterways and oceans, where it can pose a choking or suffocation hazard for animals.

“It is ending up in our own food chain,” Sollman said. “We are consum-

ing this by consuming the animals that are getting this in their own system.”

HB 2509 also includes a 5-cent fee for paper bags, to which the paper industry objects. “The charge will increase costs for working families and discourage consumers from choosing paper bags that are easily recycled and do not create hazards for wildlife,” warned Mike Draper, chairman of the Forest Products Industry National Labor-Management Committee.

Doherty and Smith voted for HB 2509 on Thursday, but they said they hope the bag fee provision will be changed before the bill passes the Senate. Legislators who spoke against the bill also cited the fee as a reason to vote against it.

“Enough is enough,” said Rep. Jack Zika, R-Redmond, who opposed the bill in Thursday’s vote. “We’re nickel-and-diming our citizens.”

Retailers will collect the fee. Essentially, it’s a surcharge on any purchase for which a customer requests a paper bag — although those paying with WIC or Oregon Trail card benefits are exempt — thereby helping to cover businesses’ own costs for replacing cheaper plastic bags with paper.

Beyond that, grocers argue it will prod shoppers to bring their own bags, thus discouraging waste.

“The five cents is really a trigger to change behavior — to move to reusable,” said Shawn Miller, Northwest Grocery Association lobbyist, at a committee meeting Monday.

“We’re not, in any way, demonizing the paper bag,” Sollman said.

Businesses could be fined up to \$250 for every day they violate the plastic bag ban, if it becomes law.

An earlier version of the polystyrene bill contained a similar provision, but it was stripped from the bill before it went to the House floor.

Sollman said consumer pressure can ensure compliance with the ban if it becomes law. “It’s going to be impacted by people,” she said. “They know the ban. They’re going to tell restaurants, and continue to tell folks, ‘This is something that’s a state law. You should adhere to that state law.’ And I think that people shop and use their dollars where companies respect the law and they respect the environment.”

The plastic bag ban would take effect on Jan. 1, 2020. The polystyrene ban would take effect on Jan. 1, 2021.

The polystyrene bill was originally slated to pass the House on Monday, April 22, which was Earth Day. With two representatives absent, the bill suffered a rare failure on the House floor, appearing to pass before Reps. Mike McLane, R-Powell Butte — who had not intended to vote “aye” — and Jeff Barker, D-Aloha, switched their votes to “nay.”

HB 2883 was brought up for reconsideration the following morning with all 60 House members present, at which point it passed with the “aye” vote of Rep. Rachel Prusack, D-West Linn, who had been out sick on Monday. Rep. Brad Witt, D-Clatskanie, also changed his vote to “aye.”

Both bills still require Senate approval.