

Full transcript of Biden's special counsel interview paints nuanced portrait

The president doesn't come across as absent-minded as Hur has made him out to be — and Hur doesn't appear as crass as Biden has made him out to be



By [Matt Viser](#)

March 12, 2024 at 8:00 a.m. EDT

President Biden was in the early stages of his interview with special counsel [Robert Hur](#) when the topic of Beau Biden came up — initially with Biden raising it and later as Biden was attempting to get his chronological bearings and wondered aloud when, exactly, it was that his son died.

“What month did Beau die? Oh God, May 30,” he said, naming the correct day, according to a transcript of the exchange reviewed by The Washington Post.

Two others in the room chime in with the year, and Biden questions again, “Was it 2015 when he died?”

Not long after the exchange, Hur suggested they consider taking a brief break.

“No,” Biden responds, before launching into a long explanation of [Beau's death and its impact on him](#) deciding not to run for president in 2016. “Let me just keep going to get it done.”

The exchange between Biden and Hur has become one of the focal points of a [lengthy interview](#) over two days in October that led the special counsel to conclude that [Biden would not be prosecuted](#) for mishandling classified documents — in part because Biden's “poor memory” would make it difficult to convince a jury.

Hur is [expected to testify Tuesday before Congress](#) about his conclusions, which [drew anger from Biden as well as his lawyers and advisers](#) over scathing assertions about the president's cognitive abilities. Biden took particular offense to the inclusion of his son's death in the report, telling reporters, “How the hell dare he raise that?”

“Frankly, when I was asked the question, I thought to myself, was it any of their damn business?” Biden said at a news conference the evening that the report was released, on Feb. 8.

Biden and his likely November rival, former president Donald Trump, have each been investigated by special counsels over their alleged mishandling of classified documents. But while Biden was largely transparent and cooperative — earning praise for doing so from Hur — prosecutors came to suspect Trump was misleading them and hiding highly sensitive papers, resulting in a criminal case pending in Florida.

A Post review of the complete 258-page Hur transcript, which is expected to be provided to Congress on Tuesday morning, paints a more nuanced portrait of the exchanges between Biden and the special counsel. Biden doesn't come across as absent-minded as Hur has made him out to be — and Hur doesn't appear as crass as Biden has made him out to be.

“Just allow me to say for a moment, I am so terribly, terribly sorry for your loss,” Hur said after Biden first raised the death of his son.

The full transcript provides a more complete window into the back and forth between the two men, in which Biden frequently joked with prosecutors in a setting that seemed more chummy than antagonistic. (“I just warn you all: Never make one great eulogy because you get asked to do everybody's eulogy,” Biden said at one point.) But the president also frequently digressed, with stories about trips to Mongolia, about the time he helped represent a client who lost one testicle and part of his penis, and later twice mimicking the sounds of a car.

He spoke of working “in my pajamas” while at the Naval Observatory, made light of his poor spelling (“If it's spelled right, it's probably not”), and laughed off a photo of him with a onetime ally. (“You can tell it's old. I have my arm around Lindsey Graham.”) He joked about how much time the FBI spent inside his home during the documents probe — “The FBI know my house better than I do” — and about what they may have discovered.

“I just hope you didn't find any risqué pictures of my wife in a bathing suit,” the president told federal prosecutors. “Which you probably did. She's beautiful.”

During the interview, Biden repeatedly professed that he had almost no involvement in packing or moving documents.

“I wish I could say I was more organized,” he said.

“She wanted nothing to do with my filing system,” he said of his wife, Jill.

Jill Biden has often asked him to keep more writings and to keep them organized, he said. She has implored him to be more like Franklin D. Roosevelt or Ronald Reagan, who would keep daily diaries.

Instead, Biden's practice was to take contemporaneous notes and often store them away. He would forget what was there, and if anything he had was classified, he didn't know it. If he found anything with classified markings, he said, he would give it back.

Asked about what might have been stored in the haphazard boxes inside his garage, he responded, “I have no godd-- idea. I didn’t even bother to go through them.”

Pressed further, he said, “I don’t remember how a beat-up box got in the garage.”

“Somebody must’ve packed this up, just picked up all the stuff, and put it in a box, because I didn’t,” he added.

But he was “very involved” in the moving of furniture. He wanted to make sure that his home in Wilmington looked as good as possible, particularly ahead of a covid shutdown when, like many Americans, he would need a good Zoom background. “We were campaigning out of our basement,” he noted.

In his report, Hur said there were instances in which Biden could not recall exactly when his vice-presidential tenure began or ended, which was among the reasons he cited as evidence that Biden’s memory was “significantly limited.” The transcript provides more detail on those exchanges, with questioning jumping around the timeline in some instances.

In one case, for example, Biden was asked about documents that dated to 2009 but that were being moved in 2021.

“My problem was I never knew where any of the documents of boxes were specifically coming from or who packed them,” he said. “Just did I get them delivered to me. And so this is — I’m, at this stage, in 2009, am I still vice president?”

The transcript indicates that there is indiscernible whispering taking place.

“Yeah, okay,” Biden said.

“So it looks like you’re flipping ahead, which is great because I’m —” said Hur’s deputy, Marc Krickbaum, a former U.S. attorney for the Southern District of Iowa.

“I’m sorry, I thought that you wanted,” Biden began.

“No, no, you’re fine Mr. President,” Kirkbaum continued. “If you flip to tab B7. I’m actually going to go through all of these with you today.”

During another exchange, Hur pointed to an image of a notebook related to Afghanistan.

“The date is 4-20-09,” Biden says aloud. “Was I still vice president? I was, wasn’t I? Yeah.”

Others in the room reaffirm him.

At another point, he was asked whether he had any idea where some of that material would have been stored before it got moved into the garage. Biden again ruminated aloud about the years when he was vice president: “Well, if it was 2013 — when did I stop being vice president?”

Rachel Cotton, from the White House Counsel’s Office, reminded him that it was 2017.

Much of the interview focused on Biden’s routines, in how he read over sensitive documents and what he did when he was finished with them. Hur asked numerous questions about where Biden purchased a particular file cabinet, how certain boxes were packed and when and where they were moved — including, at one point, with top aide Steve Ricchetti showing up with a minivan to transport boxes from the vice president’s residence.

Biden opened the start of the second day of questioning by rebutting some of the strongest charges that Hur seemed to be pursuing.

“I want to make clear that I didn’t keep anything that wasn’t — I thought was classified,” Biden said.

One of the areas Hur explored was a handwritten memo that Biden sent over Thanksgiving in 2009 to President Barack Obama. (“If I tried to type it, it would take five times as long,” he noted.)

“It has nothing to do with the investigation, you’ll understand why this is sensitive,” Biden said. “The president thought that I knew a lot more about Afghanistan than he did, and other members of the administration.”

“He was looking for me to make my case as strong as I could, without him having to ask for it or being associated with it, because his concern in this period was he didn’t have overwhelming foreign policy experience,” Biden added.

The document was later found in his garage, sitting in a damaged cardboard box near a dog crate, a broken, duct-taped lamp and synthetic firewood. Biden had a copy of the memo, he said, because he viewed it as a key piece of evidence showing that he was right to argue within the Obama administration for a drawdown of troops in Afghanistan, a recommendation Obama nonetheless rejected.

Prosecutors also probed how Biden apparently located the memo in February 2017 while working with a ghostwriter on his book, “Promise Me, Dad.”

Biden was asked during the interview about other events on his schedule that day, which included a workout, a meeting with Ricchetti, and a lunch at the Four Seasons in Georgetown. Several business associates of Hunter Biden have testified that around that time frame, Joe Biden dropped by a meeting they were having with Chinese executives at the same hotel. That would help lead to a lucrative deal for Hunter Biden and James Biden, the president’s brother. It is unclear whether that meeting is the one that appeared on his schedule that day.

“I ate there all the time,” Biden said. “What’d I do there at the Four Seasons? Who’d I have lunch with?”

“Actually I’m not sure,” Kirkbaum said. “Still have to figure that out.”

“I don’t remember,” Biden concluded.

During the interview, Biden repeatedly bragged about his home. At one point, he remarked to prosecutors that there were seven individual types of molding in one area. He also noted that he picked a walnut tree to be cut down and provide wood for one of the rooms, which he said cost “one-third of ... my entire home. Swear to God.”

“I’m a frustrated architect,” he remarked, noting that the FBI may have uncovered a number of designs he had drawn up. “In order to try to convince me not to run for Senate for the 19th time, my wife said, ‘Look, you don’t run, I’ll pay for architectural school for you.’”

He also digressed with a story about visiting Mongolia and using a bow and arrow to strike a bale of hay (“Pure luck, I hit the godd--- target,” he said, before handing the bow to the prime minister. “The poor son of a b---- couldn’t pull it back. I was, I was like Oh God.”)

At one point, he began touting his accomplishments as president, recounting a submarines deal in Australia, talking about curbing Chinese influence in Africa and discussing the improvement of solar facilities in Angola.

“Mr. President, I am so sorry to interrupt you,” Hur said. “I just want to make sure — I have a fair amount of material.”

In the interview, Biden also indicated that he had started thinking about where to locate his presidential library.

His wife, after speaking at the Truman Library, brought it up to him, and he said, “I have no idea. I don’t think I’m supposed to while I’m president think about the library.”

“My recollection is there’s people competing,” he added. “Syracuse University would like it, University of Delaware would like it. They want to do it down here in Washington.”

At times during the interview, according to the transcript, the president made noises like a car.

Once, it was while lamenting that he could drive his vintage Chevrolet Corvette only the length of his driveway. The other time was during a lengthy exchange over the torque of electric vehicles.

“By the way, you know how it works?” Biden asks Hur. “It’s really cool.”

Hur remarks, “Sir, I’d love — I would love, love to hear much more about this, but I do have a few more questions to get through.”

“You step your foot on the accelerator all the way down until it gets about six, seven grand,” Biden continues. “Then all the sudden it will say ‘launch.’ All you do is take your foot off the brake.”

The transcript then indicates “(Makes car sound)” as well as “(Laughter).”

“It’s on my bucket list,” Hur responded, before turning to questions regarding classified documents that had been discovered at the Penn Biden Center.

There are some redactions in the transcript, often for names of staffers. In several cases, Biden gets into minute detail about the design of his home in Wilmington, which the Secret Service asked to be redacted for security reasons.

The interview took place on the first floor of the White House, where workers converted space into a setting where classified information could be discussed. Long tables were brought into the Map Room, which takes its name from Roosevelt’s use of the space to consult maps and track the progress of World War II. It is also the room where, in 1998, President Bill Clinton testified to independent counsel Kenneth W. Starr about his role in the Monica Lewinsky scandal.

At the start of the testimony — which took place just after the deadly Oct. 7 attacks in Israel in which Hamas took hundreds of hostages — Hur thanked Biden.

“I know there’s a lot of other things in the world going on that demand your attention,” he said.

“We may be interrupted by one,” Biden said, noting that he had just gotten off the phone with Israeli President Benjamin Netanyahu. “I hope not.”

Hur also thanked Biden for his cooperation and urged him to “put forward your best efforts and really try to get your best recollection” because some of the events took place years earlier.

“I’m a young man,” Biden joked, “so it’s not a problem.”

Biden didn’t know it at the time. But months later, Hur would cast him as a “well-meaning, elderly man with a poor memory.” And it would, indeed, become a problem.