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## U.S. Leadership - What Biden has Done So Far... A Report Card

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## *U.S. Leadership - What Biden has Done So Far....*

### *A Report Card*

— Elizabeth Gingerich, Valparaiso, Indiana USA

*With yet another election season before the American voters, it is important to look back at what has been accomplished during the most current presidential term.*

**Climate Change:** Shortly after taking office in 2021, President Biden rejoined the Paris Climate Accords and committed to cutting U.S. emissions to half of 2005 levels by 2030. Additionally, in August, 2022, Biden signed the *Inflation Reduction Act* of 2022 (IRA) to take aggressive action to combat the existential crisis of climate change. The Act provides historic clean energy investments designed to help families save hundreds of dollars every year on their energy bills, supports the installation of renewable energy arrays, and offers tax credit incentives for the purchase of electric vehicles — all while strengthening the country's energy security and promoting the creation of jobs in this sector.

**Healthcare:** The IRA lowers health care costs for millions of US families and allows Medicare to negotiate drug prices for the first time. Additionally, it caps seniors' out-of-pocket spending for prescription drugs at \$2,000 per year and ensures that no senior on Medicare will pay over \$35 per month for insulin. Additionally, 13 million Americans covered under the *Affordable Care Act* (ACA) will see their health insurance premiums reduced by \$800 per year. The ACA has been strengthened by expanding eligibility and extending the open enrollment period. And, as a result of tax credits offered through the *American Rescue Plan Act of 2021* (ARPA), a record 14.5 million Americans have signed up for coverage, including 5.8 million new customers. Biden has also taken corrective action to end the practice of surprise medical billing by strengthening consumer protection rules and expanding price transparency.

**Veterans:** At Biden's urging in his first State of the Union address, the President called on Congress to pass legislation to ensure that veterans impacted by toxic exposures and their families receive the comprehensive care and benefits. In August of 2022, he signed the *Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act* (PACT Act) – the largest single bill in American history to address this country's service members' exposure to burn pits and other toxins.

**Manufacturing and Science Promotion:**

Biden signed the *CHIPS and Science Act* that will accelerate semiconductor manufacturing in the U.S. and is calculated to help lower the cost of consumer goods, strengthen American manufacturing and innovation, create good-paying jobs, and bolster the country's national security. This was particularly necessary when the country recently faced a major shortage in semi-conductor chips. This Act gives the U.S. the competitive edge to compete with China by restoring manufacturing plants in America and makes historic investments in research and development to advance U.S. technological leadership.

**COVID-19:** Biden passed the *American Rescue Plan Act* (ARPA) – a \$1.9 trillion package that helped combat the national impact of COVID-19, guiding an unprecedented economic recovery. ARPA helped to deliver over 500 million shots in arms while dramatically increasing testing capabilities. Currently, over two-thirds of Americans are vaccinated against COVID-19 under this law. ARPA also distributed over 160 million checks to Americans, expanded food and rental assistance, and provided greatly needed aid to thousands of small businesses. The expanded Child Tax Credit led to the largest ever, one-year decrease in childhood poverty in American history. Also, the Biden Administration successfully mobilized the largest free vaccination program ever, dramatically increasing the national supply of tests and expediting the development of life-saving COVID-19 treatments. Prior to this, there had been no comprehensive plan to get Americans vaccinated. ARPA funding helped vaccinate over 200 million Americans.

**National Security and International Alliances:** Under the Trump administration, confidence in U.S. leadership around the world had plummeted to historic lows. America’s word in mutual support and international agreements had been greatly compromised (e.g., Paris Climate Change Accord). Since taking office, Biden has worked to revitalize U.S. alliances, restoring America’s position of leadership globally. When Russia invaded Ukraine, Biden rallied the country’s allies to ensure that Vladimir Putin would be subject to steep economic sanctions for this brutal and unjustified war of aggression. It is the leadership of the President which has helped to repair international confidence.

**The Judiciary:** Delivering on his promise to nominate the first Black woman to the Supreme Court, Biden was instrumental in placing Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson to the Supreme Court. His commitment to greater diversity on federal courts is exemplified by his track record: in 2021, of all the judges confirmed, 80% were women and 53% were people of color. Additionally, more than 50 of Biden’s federal circuit and district court nominees have been confirmed by the Senate, which far outpaces previous administrations. In fact, in 2021, 40 of Biden’s federal court system nominees were confirmed by the Senate – the most in any President’s first year since Ronald Reagan.

**Civil Rights:** To counter what Justice Clarence Thomas has threatened with respect to rights of the LGBTQIA+ communities, Biden signed the *Respect for Marriage Act* – a bipartisan effort. Additionally, in 1994, then-Senator Biden authored the *Violence Against Women Act* (VAWA) which provided legal protection against domestic violence and sexual assault for 28 years until it was allowed to expire under the Trump administration. As President, Biden ended two years of obstruction by signing legislation in 2022 to reauthorize and even strengthen VAWA. The fortified Act is now reauthorized through 2027 and includes new provisions which expand legal services for survivors as well as supports underserved communities. Along this topic, Biden has also signed historic legislation ending forced arbitration of sexual assault/sexual harassment, making it safer to report harassment in the workplace and in 2023, established the first-ever U.S. National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism, so critical as episodes of violence and hate against Jewish Americans continue to rise.

**Debt Ceiling Crisis:** The bipartisan bill – a compromise package negotiated between Biden and the House Speaker, Kevin McCarthy in early June, 2023 – was crafted to solve the US debt ceiling crisis just days before a catastrophic and unprecedented default was forecasted to occur. Biden acknowledged that it left neither Republicans nor Democrats fully pleased

with the outcome, but after weeks of torturous negotiations, shelved the volatile debt ceiling issue until 2025 – after the next presidential election.

**Employment and GDP:** Through the *American Rescue Plan*, Biden has made significant inroads. In 2021, the U.S. economy added over 6.5 million jobs – an historical achievement as the greatest year of job growth under any President. Concomitantly, the U.S. experienced the largest annual decline in unemployment ever recorded and the strongest year of GDP growth since 1984. Additionally, unemployment has dropped below 4%, indicating an economy that has recovered faster than other major global economies.

**Gun Control:** President Biden launched a holistic approach to help spotlight community safety by issuing more executive orders to reduce gun violence in his first year than any other President at the same point in their administration. He led a bipartisan effort which culminated in the passage of the *Bipartisan Safer Communities Act*, ending 30 years of federal inaction on gun violence legislation. The new law requires individuals under 21 to undergo enhanced background checks, closes the “boyfriend loophole,” and provides funding to address youth mental health. Additionally, the Biden administration acted to ban the manufacture of ghost gun kits and make it illegal to sell ghost guns without a background check.

**Infrastructure:** Biden’s *Bipartisan Infrastructure Law* provides billions in funding to repair bridges and roads, begin replacing lead piping networks, upgrade ports and airports, expand broadband access, and invest in public transit including Amtrak. In 2022, repairs had begun on 65,000 miles of roads and 1,500 bridges. As part of the Bipartisan Infrastructure law, the Biden-Harris Administration is making the largest investment in clean energy transmission ever. In addition, the law allocated billions to clean up abandoned mines and oil wells, fund research of next-generation clean energy technologies, build zero-emission public transit, and create a national network of EV charging stations. The infrastructure law also invests billions to protect Americans from droughts, hurricanes, tornadoes, fires, and floods while moving the country closer to national climate objectives.

**Great Lakes Restoration Initiative:** On February 17, 2022 Biden and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Michael S. Regan announced that as a direct result of the *Bipartisan Infrastructure Law*, the EPA would target the clean-up and restoration of the Great Lakes as per a \$1 billion allocation, allowing for a major acceleration of progress designed to deliver significant environmental, economic, health, and recreational benefits for Great Lakes regional communities.

**Protection of Natural Resources:** In 2023, the Biden Administration approved a 20-year ban on new mining activity across more than 225,000 acres of federal land in Minnesota’s Superior National Forest, in and around the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness.

*Ostensibly, no one is immune from critique. But, in the shadow of another campaign season, we need to be educated with respect to the accomplishments of the current administration, subjecting our criticism to a more relativistic comparison. Amidst attacks on this country’s democratic system and to counteract a campaign of disinformation and hate speech that divides this country today – it is important to remember what true leadership is.*

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