

Biden's Rough September: Auto Strike, Son's Indictment, Inflation, Impeachment Inquiry

As he runs for re-election, president copes with his son's legal woes, turbulence on Capitol Hill and questions about his economic leadership

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Wall Street Journal

WASHINGTON—September keeps getting worse for President Biden.

Hours after his son [was indicted last week](#), auto workers went on strike, [walking out of plants](#) owned by three major car companies. A [possible government shutdown looms](#) at the end of the month, and House Republicans have [launched an impeachment inquiry](#). [Gas prices are rising](#), and Biden's [poll numbers](#) remain underwater as he campaigns for a second term.

Biden has responded by portraying Republicans as more focused on theatrics than legislation. The White House pointed to Biden's actions in September as evidence of his leadership, citing investments in fighting cancer, the [rollout of new Covid-19 boosters](#) and dispatching top officials to Detroit to help support the United Auto Workers. "The president is focused on one thing: delivering for the American people," White House spokeswoman Olivia Dalton said.

Here is a closer look at the biggest problems on Biden's plate:

UAW strike

The walkout by UAW workers at three plants comes after the union failed [to clinch new labor deals](#) with [General Motors](#), [Ford Motor](#) and Jeep-maker [Stellantis](#) for about 146,000 U.S. factory workers.

The strike comes as Biden—who polls show is tied in hypothetical 2024 rematches with former President [Donald Trump](#)—tries to convince voters that the economy is on the upswing.

"It's not been a super news week for the president," said Adrian Hemond, a Democratic strategist in Michigan. Hemond said the political impact of the strike on the president will depend on how long it lasts and how that makes voters feel about the economy. "If the vibes aren't great, he will take some damage."

A recent Wall Street Journal poll showed that although voters have a slightly rosier view of the economy, few give Biden credit for it, with roughly three in five voters polled by the Journal disapproving of Biden's handling of the economy.

"No one wants a strike. But I respect the workers' right to use their options under the collective bargaining system. And I understand the workers' frustration," Biden, who describes himself as the most pro-union president, said Friday.

The UAW, which has backed Democratic presidential candidates in the past, has so far withheld an endorsement of Biden.

Hunter Biden's indictment

Thursday's indictment of Hunter Biden on federal gun charges was the latest development in a legal saga that has trailed the president's son and been a focal point for Republicans in Congress. The indictment sets up a high-profile prosecution of a sitting president's son as his father campaigns for a second term.

President Biden has so far remained silent on the indictment, which followed the [collapse of a plea deal in late July](#) that Hunter Biden and his team hoped would resolve a five-year [investigation into his business dealings](#) and taxes. Instead, President Biden will now have to face continued questions about his son's actions.

The White House has emphasized that it hasn't gotten involved in any of Hunter Biden's legal matters and that President Biden has never discussed them with the Justice Department. The president defended his son in an interview in May, telling MSNBC, "First of all, my son has done nothing wrong. I trust him. I have faith in him."

A Wall Street Journal poll released this month found that 66% of Americans said they were aware of Hunter Biden's legal issues, although a majority of voters surveyed said they had no impact on whether they would vote for President Biden.

Impeachment inquiry

Republicans are aiming to put Hunter Biden's broader business dealings squarely at the center of the 2024 election. Announcing the impeachment inquiry Tuesday, Speaker Kevin McCarthy said that House Republicans "have uncovered serious and credible allegations into President Biden's conduct" related to his son's activities.

No evidence has emerged to show that the president benefited from Hunter Biden's endeavors or that he wielded government authority to favor them. But McCarthy has faced pressure from his right flank to launch an impeachment inquiry. The

recent Journal poll found 52% of voters opposed impeaching Biden, with 41% in favor, suggesting the GOP push might not play well in the swing districts that will decide who controls the House after 2024.

Democrats say Republicans are trying to muddy the waters in an election that will likely see a rematch between Biden and Trump, who [faces four criminal indictments](#) and is the front-runner for the GOP nomination. The White House, which has spent months preparing for the likelihood of an impeachment inquiry under House Republican control, decried the move as an “evidence-free goose chase.”

Even as some Democrats suggest an impeachment inquiry could backfire against Republicans, the proceedings will give House committees more power to investigate the president and dig into his finances. The inquiry is also poised to draw resources from a White House eager to focus on domestic priorities and could distract from the economic message at the center of Biden’s re-election campaign.

Government funding

The threat of a government shutdown looms if Congress and the White House can’t agree on a way to continue funding after Sept. 30. “I am expecting a shutdown,” said Rep. Nancy Mace, a Republican from a swing district in South Carolina, Sunday on ABC News’s “This Week with George Stephanopoulos.”

House conservatives are seeking deeper reductions in spending, calling for more border security and resisting [more aid for Ukraine](#), which the White House wants attached to any short-term spending bill. Some have renewed calls to oust McCarthy from his post if he fails to meet their demands.

The government has endured several partial shutdowns in recent decades, which typically result in many federal workers being furloughed and the [closure of facilities such as national parks](#) and museums until the standoffs are resolved.

Republicans say the administration should be more willing to negotiate on crucial issues like [border security](#). White House aides suggest Republicans would bear the blame should the government shut down, while Biden has taken aim at GOP lawmakers for distracting from more pressing policy issues.

In past shutdown fights, Republicans have usually suffered more politically than Democrats, though it is unclear how one would reverberate this time, given low poll ratings for Biden’s leadership and economic stewardship.

Gas prices and inflation

Biden has spent months touting a [buoyant labor market](#) and decline in inflation from a peak of 9.1% in June 2022 to 3% a year later. But rising gas prices could undercut part of the president's message.

Consumer prices rose by 0.6% in August, the largest increase in more than a year, according to the Labor Department. More than half of the increase was due to higher gasoline prices. The average [price of a gallon of regular gasoline](#) was \$3.84 in August compared with \$3.60 in July, according to OPIS, an energy data and analytics provider.

Even as the rate of inflation has slowed over the past year, many Americans continued to rank inflation as a priority going into the next election. And they aren't sold on Biden's efforts to promote the overall strength of the economy under his watch.

"I'm going to get those gas prices down again, I promise you," Biden said during an economic speech in Largo, Md., on Thursday. He also said the GOP's plan, "MAGAnomics, is more extreme than anything America has ever seen before."

Republican National Committee Chairwoman Ronna McDaniel responded by saying, "Inflation is back on the rise, real earnings are down, gas prices are still up and bills are mounting, yet Biden continues to insult hardworking Americans by touting 'Bidenomics.'"