

Robert F. Kennedy Jr. Shifts to Independent Presidential Bid, a Potential Spoiler in 2024

RFK Jr.'s conspiracy-laden views could draw voters from across partisan lines

By Catherine Lucey
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Robert F. Kennedy Jr. ended his [long-shot Democratic presidential bid](#) Monday, announcing plans to run as an independent, which could make him a spoiler in the likely general election face-off between President Biden and former President [Donald Trump](#). Still unclear: who he could pull support from.

A recent Wall Street Journal Poll found that Kennedy, the scion of the most-storied family in Democratic politics, is favored more by Republicans than Democrats, with 48% of Republicans giving him favorable reviews compared with 21% of Democrats.

The 69-year-old environmental lawyer made the announcement in Philadelphia, declaring: “We declare independence from the two political parties and the corrupt interests that dominate them and the entire rigged system.” He said it was painful to separate from the party, but said he was now “free of partisan allegiance.”

Kennedy is one of several potential third-party challenges to Biden and Trump, who remains the dominant candidate in the Republican primaries. Academic and activist Cornel West said last week he [would run as an independent](#). No Labels, a centrist group that has ties to West Virginia Sen. Joe Manchin, is considering launching a moderate presidential ticket.

Kennedy must now work to get on the ballot around the country. Independent presidential candidates must request to be placed on the ballot in all 50 states and the District of Columbia, and many states require an extensive signature-gathering operation to qualify.

Biden’s advisers have been dismissive of the potential impact of a third-party challenge, such as from Kennedy, West or an eventual No Labels ticket, saying most voters will make a binary choice between Biden and Trump. But the advisers are mindful that any shift in votes in a small set of battleground states, such as Pennsylvania, Wisconsin and Michigan, could affect the outcome of the election.

Republican National Committee Spokeswoman Ronna McDaniel issued a statement saying that a “Democrat in Independent’s clothing is still a Democrat.”

Trump campaign spokesman Steven Cheung said in a statement: “Voters should not be deceived by anyone who pretends to have conservative values.”

Some political experts saw Kennedy’s entrance as dangerous for Trump. “If he hurts anyone it will be Trump and people on the right,” said Democratic strategist Mary Anne Marsh. But she added: “Does he get on the ballot in the states that matter that are going to decide the election?”

But others said it could impact Biden. “Our take on it is that anything that divides the anti-Trump coalition is bad, and we are deeply skeptical that he is going to hurt Trump because nothing hurts Trump,” said Matt Bennett, of the center-left group Third Way, which has sounded alarms about the impact third-party candidates could have on Biden. “I do think he matters as a potential spoiler.”

Kennedy addressed the suggestion he could play a spoiler for Biden or Trump, saying: “My intention is to spoil it for both of them.”

The Biden campaign didn’t comment on the announcement.

During his campaign, Kennedy has sought to emphasize his family legacy, but also has [peddled conspiracy theories](#) and has been [accused of antisemitism and racism](#). He has aired a variety of claims that have been [debunked by public-health experts](#), such as linking child vaccines to autism and casting doubt on the safety of Covid-19 vaccines. On other topics, he has questioned whether Wi-Fi exposure leads to cancer.

In a recent interview, Kennedy told The Wall Street Journal his views on vaccines have been misconstrued and said he isn’t antivaccine. He said he has all the required childhood vaccines but isn’t vaccinated against the coronavirus and believes that vaccines should undergo more rigorous scrutiny.

Kennedy thanked some family members at his event on Monday, but other relatives have distanced themselves from his bid.

Four of Kennedy’s siblings said in a statement Monday that his independent run was “dangerous to our country.” It went on: “Today’s announcement is deeply saddening for us. We denounce his candidacy and believe it to be perilous for our country.” The statement was signed by Kerry Kennedy, Rory Kennedy, Joseph P. Kennedy and Kathleen Kennedy Townsend.

Ken Thomas contributed to this article.