

Cushman: Don't Be Lenient on Biden

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Salt lake resident shows their support for Biden-Harris presidency on Thursday, October 29th, 2020.

(Photo by Maya Fraser | The Daily Utah Chronicle)

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As the stress of November's election came and went and President Joe Biden was inaugurated, I found myself breathing a sigh of relief. Finally, *finally*, for many on the left, it felt like we could take a step back from politics. The relative [lack of headlines](#) from Biden's White House in comparison with the constant stream of shocking news and ridiculous tweets from Donald Trump's administration has made it feel safe to take a breather from the political battleground. However, after the Biden administration's first two months in office, it's clear that we need to keep pushing the White House for the policies we want to see. Even though we have a more "standard" president sitting in the Oval Office, now is not the time to be lenient on our president.

One issue President Biden made a lot of promises about was the pandemic and stimulus checks. He made it sound like \$2,000 checks would be [immediately going out the door](#) and into the hands of Americans. However, when Biden entered office, we did not receive \$2,000 checks immediately or even within a few weeks, but instead waited [months](#) for a stimulus package that gave us only \$1,400, with the explanation that it was bringing the \$600 stimulus many Americans received in December to \$2,000. Americans are struggling, and instead of receiving the aid we've been asking for, we received broken promises. To add insult to injury, these \$1,400 stimulus checks have [narrower eligibility](#) than previous stimulus packages, leaving many Americans with no aid during a [financially difficult](#) time. Add to that the fact that many moratoriums on rent and utility shut-offs are set to [expire soon](#) and it becomes clear that the American people need more aid, not less.

Biden has also failed to follow through on establishing a \$15 federal minimum wage. When Biden voiced his support for increasing the minimum wage, it indicated to many liberals that Biden would work to unite not only Republicans and Democrats, but also to unite factions within the parties. [Two thirds of Americans](#) support a \$15 minimum wage. It is a popular policy among liberals, but also among Americans more broadly. That made it all the more frustrating when the proposal for a \$15 minimum wage was cut so quickly from the most recent stimulus package with little fight from the Biden administration. It was ultimately removed from the stimulus package because of a decision by the Senate parliamentarian, an unelected official who advises the Senate on how its rules should be applied. While there is [precedent](#) for ignoring the advice of a Senate parliamentarian (the Republicans did it in 2001), the Biden administration seems reluctant to do so.

With a Republican party that has ignored the Senate parliamentarian and shown a willingness to [bend the rules](#) for political gain, it is hard to watch a Democratic president stand idly by as progressive agendas are shot down. All of this is especially worrying to those already concerned about Biden's ability to make things happen because of his history with the Obama administration, which notoriously [struggled](#) to push its policy agenda. Knowing this, we need to push the Biden administration to make real change. Having a president do better than Trump is a low bar. I want to set high bars for my president.

Furthermore, while I think it's important to acknowledge presidents' failures, it is also important to understand that change doesn't happen in the first days, weeks or even months of a new presidency. The Biden administration has been subject to a lot of criticism regarding children at the border. The president said he would handle immigration much differently and more humanely than his predecessor, so news about the reopening of a facility in Texas to house migrant teens led to a lot of condemnation.

However, further investigation yields the [information](#) that the teens being held in Texas are not children separated from their families as we saw under the Trump administration, but unaccompanied children being held in the best available facility given our current resources. It is unfair to expect President Biden to completely radicalize an immigration system that has been subject to [neglect](#) for decades.

I understand feeling politically fatigued after four years of an atypical, headline-grabbing president and a summer of protests that seemed to yield no major reform. In an interview with University of Utah Political Science Professor Matthew Burbank, we discussed a trend he saw among people in his life who typically stayed involved and watched the news but had to stop last year, saying they “just [couldn’t] do that anymore.” Nonetheless, readjusting to post-Trump politics means readjusting to staying up to date with the news and continuing to advocate for important policy positions. Burbank recommended following news sources like Politico or the Hill which tend to condense many headlines into bigger think pieces. Former Salt Lake County Council Member Shireen Ghorbani recommended focusing on, saying, “We can’t all do everything and I would encourage people to find a cause or an organization” to zero in on. Utah has many great places to get involved, from our local Black Lives Matter chapter to the ACLU of Utah to Planned Parenthood.

Returning back to “standard” politics after four years of exhausting division can make it easy to become complacent. However, having a democratic president in office and a democratic congress provides the opportunity to have real change. It is important that we don’t let our political fatigue make us lenient on the leaders we elected to make a change.

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