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The Real Reason Joe Biden Won't Release His Papers

By DAVID HARSANYI | May 4, 2020 5:36 PM



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Joe Biden responds to a question during a forum held by the Giffords group and March For Our Lives in Las Vegas, Nev., October 2, 2019. (Steve Marcus/Reuters)

Release of these papers would likely force Biden to explain why he's made a 180 on virtually all notable policy stances.

WHAT is Joe Biden's case for the presidency?

The most obvious answer, of course, is that he's not Donald Trump. That's a perfectly legitimate argument to make, and it might be enough to get the job done. Biden has already hinted that he views himself as a placeholder for the next generation of Democratic Party leaders.

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If, however, Biden's case for the presidency is predicated on his nearly 50 years of "public service," he is a failure without many peers. This is not my position; this is Joe Biden's position.

There are numerous reasons that Biden might resist opening his Senate papers from 1973 to 2009 (and his vice-presidential papers from 2009 to 2016) that have little to do with the accusations of sexual assault

made by Tara Reade. None of them are very persuasive.

His papers do not cover personal business dealings in the private sector; they cover his time working for the people of the United States. The University of Delaware had initially promised that Biden's records were to be made public two years after he retired from public office. That was in 2017.

On top of that, the **justification** Biden himself offers for holding back the release of his papers is astoundingly weak: "They are documents that existed and that for example when I go, when I met with Putin or when I met with whomever," he said in his recent video interview on MSNBC. "And all of that to be fodder in a campaign at this time."

Dear Lord, weren't we just subjected to four years of panic-stricken news cycles warning us that Russia and the president had schemed to crush American democracy? Yet here is Biden arguing that he won't share documents amassed while he was forging foreign policy because they include conversations *with Vladimir Putin*, our most dastardly geopolitical foe ever.

Looking back at the Obama administration's history of placating the Russian strongman,

a habit we **can reasonably suspect** was far more pronounced in private than public, we should probably assume the papers would explode the already-tenuous myth that Biden has a history of being tough on Russia.

The predicament of releasing his papers isn't that they might be taken out of context, as Biden alleges, but that they will give far too much context.

Even beyond Putin, Biden's papers are sure to include the candidate's thoughts on the most consequential political debates of the past half century: war, abortion, segregation, China, criminal justice, and the culture war.

Perhaps his papers would shed light on why Biden voted for welfare reform and the Defense of Marriage Act and an "**immoral**" border wall? Maybe it will give voters some context as to why he voted to repeal Glass-Steagall, the supposed root of the 2007 great recession? Or why he advocated **against** green-lighting the raid that killed Osama bin Laden?

These days, Biden likes to pretend he was a fierce opponent of the invasion of Iraq, when in reality he turned critical only after the democracy-building went south. Biden stood

in front of Congress in 2002, as chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and **argued** for war.

The historic **record** already shows that Biden was far more than just “civil” with segregationists early in his career: He engaged in obsequious efforts to gain their trust for committee seats and worked with them on issues such as busing.

While in the Senate, Biden supported virtually every expansion of the drug war and mass incarceration, co-**authoring** the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act. Biden gave passionate speeches on the Senate floor arguing that one could be a “progressive” *and* “**lock the SOB**s up.” Now Biden claims to regret 1990s crime bill, calling it a “big mistake.”

Maybe Biden’s papers can provide some ideological framework to his recent embrace of an extremist abortion position as well. In 1976, Biden voted for the Hyde Amendment, a somewhat toothless law banning federal funds to pay for abortion. (In 1993, **he voted to save the Hyde Amendment**.) Today, Biden supports overturning the Hyde Amendment and believes that taxpayers should fund the procedure on demand until crowning. There still exists a “Biden

amendment,” which was added to the Foreign Assistance Act in 1981 to ban American aid from being used in research related to abortions. In 1982, Biden proposed a law allowing states to *overturn Roe v. Wade*. In 1984, Biden supported the “Mexico City policy,” banning federal funding for organizations that provide abortion or expand abortion services. Both in 1995 and 1997, Biden voted for partial-birth abortion bans vetoed by Bill Clinton. There are probably some interesting correspondences in his papers dealing with 40 years of pro-life advocacy.

It’s this history, Biden argues, that makes him uniquely competent to be president. It’s also this history he ignores. Biden’s senatorial experience entails four decades of making decisions and supporting public policy he now claims to regret. Indeed, it’s difficult to recall a single issue on which Biden has kept a principled and consistent position over the years. His papers would likely put an exclamation point on that reality.

Of course, there’s nothing wrong with changing your mind. We all do it. Most of us, however, can expound on the evolution in our thinking; the events or facts that impelled us to rethink our perceptions.

Biden has never explained himself on most of these flip-flops.

It's unlikely that most Democratic Party voters (or any voters) are acutely concerned with a politician's malleable policy positions. They want Trump gone. Yet setting aside the hypocritical standards and coverage of sexual-abuse allegations, both **the media's** and **his own**, release of these papers would probably force Biden, who struggles to articulate much of anything these days, to explain why he's made a 180 on virtually all notable policy stances. As a recent *New York* magazine piece put it, Biden is at his best when he's neither speaking nor appearing in public. For Democrats, Biden is best because Biden is not Trump.

As his papers would likely prove, that's about it.



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