

President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. was sworn into office on January 20. He enters office facing a cluster of crises but enjoying Democratic control of both houses of Congress. Negotiations on another round of COVID relief and fiscal stimulus continue, but Democrats may have to go it alone to pass a large relief package. The scars of the January 6 events at the Capitol linger, the impeachment trial of former President Donald Trump for his role in the insurrection begins and the Republican Party is in a state of civil war. The pandemic continues to rage in the United States, variant cases are accelerating across the country. Biden is assembling a historically diverse cabinet.

President Biden's First Days

President Biden enters office with unified government in Washington as the House, Senate, and White House are in the hands of Democrats. However, unified party control only goes so far, as Biden faces a number of complex, interconnected crises related to the pandemic, the economy, equity and climate change. He has issued [dozens of executive orders](#) in the opening days of his presidency.

To combat the pandemic, President Biden issued [executive orders mandating the use of masks](#) on federal property and created a White House office for COVID. The United States rejoined the World Health Organization, reversing the Trump administration's withdrawal from the international body. Biden also committed to administering one hundred million vaccine doses in his first 100 days. The White House established a COVID-19 Racial and Ethnic Disparities Task Force to provide recommendations and oversight on disparities in the public health and economic response. Biden also signed executive orders invoking the Defense Production Act and mandating mask-wearing on some modes of public transportation.

The United States is also facing an economic crisis. While Congress is currently drafting a large COVID relief package (see next section), Biden took executive action to provide emergency economic relief. The moves increase access to nutritious food for millions of children missing meals due to school closures and allow larger emergency Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program allotments for the lowest-income households. The legislation currently being drafted will include an additional round of direct payments to Americans—in anticipation of those disbursements, the administration directed the Department of Treasury to take a series of actions to expand and improve delivery of those payments and established a coordination system across federal agencies to help people better navigate what relief benefits they qualify for. In an effort to revive domestic manufacturing, Biden also signed a [“Buy American”](#) executive order directing regulators to tighten the definition of American-made products and creating a position in the Office of Management and Budget to oversee stepped-up purchases of domestic goods. This has led some U.S. businesses to fear that Biden is inviting foreign retaliation that will close them out of contracts abroad.

Protests and calls for racial justice have been building for years. With the growth of the “Black Lives Matter” movement, a reckoning has been long coming, and the pandemic has laid bare racial inequities within America. The economic burden of the pandemic has fallen more heavily on communities of color, and studies have found that the coronavirus mortality rate for Black Americans is at least double that of white Americans. In his first days in office, Biden signed [executive orders](#) to address racial equity and Susan Rice, chair of the Domestic Policy Council, who is leading President Biden's racial

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equity initiative, said that Biden has made [“racial justice and equity the centerpiece of his presidency.”](#)

President Biden also signed [sweeping executive orders](#) to address the climate crisis. The actions range from pausing new federal oil leases and increasing renewable energy production to electrifying the government’s vast fleet of vehicles and establishing that climate change will be a core part of all foreign policy and national security decisions. The administration will review Trump administration reversals of environmental protections and strengthen rules on air quality and carbon emissions. Under Biden, the United States seeks to reassert itself as a global leader on climate—he re-joined the Paris Climate Accord, committed to host a Leaders’ Climate Summit in advance of the United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties in Edinburgh, and appointed former Secretary of State John Kerry as Special Presidential Envoy for Climate to elevate the issue.

Fiscal Stimulus and Reconciliation

There has been enormous pressure on Washington to provide more stimulus as major economic players, from the U.S. Federal Reserve to the International Monetary Fund, continue to insist that the recovery needs more fiscal help. President Biden has committed to seeking bipartisan solutions—those looking for signs that such compromise may be viable were encouraged by his [meeting with 10 Republican Senators](#) on February 1. While they reported a productive discussion, there does not appear to be any narrowing of the gap between the [\\$1.9 trillion](#) proposed by the President and their [\\$600 billion package](#). The two proposals do share some elements—boosting unemployment benefits, direct payments to individuals, additional funding for schools, and more resources for vaccines and testing. However, it is hard to reconcile two packages with such different price tags and political pressure is building against concessions.

In the event compromise is out of reach, which appears increasingly likely, Democrats have established a path to pass a stimulus package without Republican support by using the [budget reconciliation process](#). When the House and Senate pass their budget resolutions, which put forward new spending priorities, they can include instructions for the reconciliation process whereby Congress can pass legislation with a simple 51-vote majority in the Senate. Reconciliation has become a popular tool to get big partisan bills passed when one party has full control of Washington. It was utilized by Democrats with the Affordable Care Act in 2010 and by Republicans with the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act in 2017. While talks continue, House Democrats unveiled draft legislation for key parts of the relief package, which committees are expected to advance later this week, aiming to bring it to the House floor during the week of February 22.

The Capitol Insurrection & Impeachment 2.0

The events of January 6 are still a fresh wound for the country and the Congress. Capitol Hill, a traditionally open campus, now looks like a city under siege with 7-foot tall non-scalable fences topped with razor wire surrounding the grounds. Thousands of National Guard troops now protect the Capitol—[the threat of violence lingers](#), and Washington and other state capitols remain on

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high alert. Hundreds of individuals have been charged with a variety of crimes related to the January 6 attack, which experts say [fits the definition of a terrorist act](#).

On January 13, the House of Representatives, [by a vote of 232-197](#), impeached then-President Trump for his role in inciting the events of January 6. Ten Republicans broke party ranks to vote in favor of impeachment, including Congresswoman Liz Cheney of Wyoming, who chairs the House Republican Conference—this was the most bipartisan impeachment vote in American history. Trump’s trial in the United States Senate began on February 8. [Video of Trump](#) declaring to an angry crowd he had called to Washington “if you don’t fight like hell, we are not going to have a country anymore,” followed by clips of rioters shouting “fight for Trump” as they smashed their way into the Capitol will play prominently as the Impeachment Managers present their case. A [majority of Senate Republicans](#) have indicated that they do not want to consider the question of Trump’s behavior but will present a questionable constitutional argument that a President who was impeached while in office for seditious behavior cannot be tried one he is out of office. Conviction seems unlikely, but the process is also playing out in the midst of a battle for the soul of the Republican Party.

Uncivil War in the GOP

The Republican Party is having an identity crisis. While Trump is gone; Trumpism reigns in some corners of the party. This divide was on stark display when House Republicans met to decide the fates of two Republicans—[Liz Cheney and Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Green of Georgia](#)—who are on opposite sides of the fight over the direction of the post-Trump party. Cheney came under scrutiny for supporting Trump’s impeachment and Green for her support of the QAnon conspiracy, advocating violence against Democratic leaders and questioning the validity of school shootings—these are the polls of the GOP, the traditionalists versus the far-right flank. Republican Leader Kevin McCarthy made a pilgrimage to Florida to ask the former President’s assistance in the 2022 mid-terms, showing how the party is still beholden to him. Conversely, Republican Congressman Adam Kinzinger of Illinois has launched a new [political action committee](#) that is designed to become a financial engine to challenge the Trump’s wing of the GOP caucus and stand up against a leadership team still aligned with him—he has also called upon his colleagues in the Senate to convict Trump, writing that it is necessary to [“save America from going further down a sad, dangerous road.”](#) Republicans are deeply split, Democrats are exploiting this division and [painting the GOP as the party of extremists and Q](#).

Pandemic Update – Cases Drop But Variants Spread

There has been a steady decrease in reported coronavirus cases and hospitalizations in the United States. However, there is growing concern that variants of the virus are circulating quickly and could lead to new surges of cases. Public health experts likened the situation to a race between vaccination and the virus’s new variants. Over 27 million Americans have contracted COVID, with nearly 500,000 deaths. Doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines are continuing to be rolled out—more than 27 million Americans have received a first dose, and more than six million have been fully vaccinated. Johnson & Johnson [submitted an application](#) to the Food and Drug

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Administration (FDA) for emergency authorization of its one-dose vaccine—the FDA will meet later this month and is expected to issue an emergency authorization on February 26.

A Cabinet of Firsts

President Biden is assembling a [historically diverse cabinet](#). Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, III is the first African-American defense chief. Secretary Janet Yellen is the first female to lead the Department of the Treasury. Avril Haines is the first woman to lead the Intelligence Community as Director of National Intelligence. Alejandro Mayorkas is the first immigrant and first Latino to lead the Department of Homeland Security. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg is the first openly gay secretary and Deb Haaland, the nominee to lead the Department of the Interior, would be the first Native American in a president's Cabinet if confirmed.

Personnel Updates

Department of Commerce – **Mike Harney** is chief of staff. **Christopher Hoff** is deputy assistant secretary for services in the International Trade Administration.

Department of Energy – Within the Secretary's office, **Tarak Shah** is chief of staff, **Christopher Davis** is a senior advisor. **Ali Nouri** is principal deputy assistant secretary for energy efficiency and renewable energy. **Jennifer Wilcox** is principal deputy assistant secretary for fossil energy.

Department of Health and Human Services – **Andrea Palm** is the nominee for deputy secretary. **Janet Woodcock** is acting director of the Food and Drug Administration.

Department of State – **Brian McKeon** is the nominee for deputy secretary for management and resources. **Bonnie Jenkins** is the nominee for undersecretary for arms control and international security. **Uzra Zeya** is the nominee for undersecretary for civilian security, democracy and human rights. **Robert Malley** is special envoy for Iran. **Molly Montgomery** is a deputy assistant secretary handling Western Europe and the European Union.

Department of the Treasury – In the office of the Secretary, **Didem Nisanci** is chief of staff, **Alfred Johnson** and **Brinn Siegel** are deputy chiefs of staff, and **Jacob Leibenluft** is counselor.

National Security Council – **Elizabeth Sherwood Randall** is deputy national security advisor and homeland security advisor, her deputy is **Russ Travers**. **Kurt Campbell** is coordinator for Indo-Pacific affairs. **Anne Neuberger** is deputy national security advisor for cyber and emerging technology. **Peter Harrell** is senior director for international economics and competitiveness. **Juan Gonzalez** is senior director for the Western Hemisphere, senior director for China is **Laura Rosenberger**, and **Andrea Kendall-Taylor** is senior director for Russia and Central Asia.

Office of the Vice President – **Philip Gordon** is deputy national security advisor.

United States Trade Representative – Chief of staff is **Nora Todd** and **Brad Setser** is counselor.

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White House – **David Kessler** will oversee the Biden Administration’s vaccine development and distribution efforts on the COVID-19 task force. **David Hayes** is special assistant to the president for climate policy. **Ali Zaidi** is deputy national climate advisor.