

# Trump teases 2024 run in CPAC remarks, as he looks to keep his grip on GOP

The former president renewed old grievances in his first formal speech since leaving the White House.

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Donald Trump still has grievances to air — and a Republican Party eager to bask in his indignation.

In his first major address since leaving office, Trump on Sunday laced into his Democratic successor, Joe Biden, chided “establishment political hacks” from his own party and pressed his false claim that he won the November election, which he lost decisively.

And to an explosion of applause, he suggested he may run again in 2024.

“Who knows?” Trump said at the Conservative Political Action Conference in Orlando, Fla. “I may even decide to beat them for a third time.”

The speech served as formal notice of his continued dominance over the Republican Party — and a return to campaign form for the former president. The rapturous reception Trump received at the country’s most prominent annual conservative gathering signaled the totality of the Republican base’s embrace, as well as the peril facing less Trumpian elements of the party.

In the annual CPAC presidential straw poll released shortly before Trump spoke, 95 percent of conference attendees said the GOP should continue to embrace Trump’s issues and policy ideas, and 68 percent of attendees said Trump should run again in 2024.

In a crowded field of potential presidential primary contenders, Trump ran miles ahead with 55 percent support, followed by Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, at 21 percent. Every other GOP politician polled registered in single digits.

Still, for all the current energy surrounding Trump, CPAC is also a reminder of how quickly fortunes can change. In 2016, it was Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Texas) [who won the CPAC straw poll](#), followed by Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) — both of them ultimately vanquished by Trump. In 2013, the year after the last presidential election won by a Democrat, [Sen. Rand Paul \(R-Ky.\) was the toast of CPAC](#), before seeing his own presidential ambitions fade.

For the former president, irrelevancy would be the ultimate defeat. So on Sunday, he brushed aside yet another American political tradition — that of former presidents avoiding partisan politics for a period of months immediately after leaving office — and took direct aim at his opponents, past and present.

Defeated in November and twice impeached, Trump's list of targets was long. For roughly 90 minutes, the former president chastised "top establishment Republicans," "RINO's" and other Republicans who have criticized him.

Banned from Twitter, he said Big Tech companies "should be punished with major sanctions whenever they silence conservative voices." And in a wide-ranging critique of Biden's first month in office, he lit into the Democratic president for his handling of everything from the coronavirus vaccine distribution to immigration, education and protections for people who are transgender.

"None of us even imagined just how bad they would be and how far left they would go," Trump said, calling the Biden administration "anti-jobs, anti-family, anti-borders, anti-energy, anti-women and anti-science."

"In just one short month, we have gone from 'America First' to 'America Last,'" he said.

His own accomplishments, Trump said, were superior both in terms of government and politics. Trump credited himself with his party's down-ballot successes in November, despite many down-ballot Republicans over-performing him in their districts.

He predicted the Democratic Party would suffer "withering losses" in the midterm elections and that in four years, "A Republican president will make a triumphant return to the White House."

He added, "And I wonder who that will be?"

If Trump is teasing another run in 2024, however, he is far from over his last defeat. In an extended riff on the November election, he perpetuated the false claim — rejected by elections experts and administrators and by [courts across the country](#) — that the election was stolen.

When he said, "This election was rigged," the crowd chanted, "You won!"

Trump's comparison of his own presidency to Biden's belied his successor's relatively high public approval ratings — and Trump's poor ones. But CPAC is an accommodating crowd.

"We love you! We love you!" the audience chanted at one point during his speech.

Even before Sunday, Trump loomed over the 2022 midterm elections and — whether he runs again or not — the presidential primary in 2024. He is preparing to stand up a super PAC. On Friday, [he endorsed Max Miller](#), a former White House aide, in his campaign to unseat Rep. Anthony Gonzalez of Ohio, one of 10 House Republicans who voted for Trump's impeachment.

Trump's aides had [urged him before speaking](#) Sunday to focus his ire on Biden and the Democratic Party, while limiting mentions of his disputes with Republican lawmakers who have criticized him. Instead, he blistered by name the Republicans who supported his second impeachment, including "grandstanders" like Sens. Mitt Romney and "Little Ben Sasse" and the "warmonger" Rep. Liz Cheney of Wyoming.

"Get rid of them all," Trump said.

Still, Trump described the dispute within the Republican Party as a limited one: “The only division is between a handful of Washington, D.C. establishment political hacks and everybody else all over the country,” he said, adding, “I think we have tremendous unity.”

Trump also ruled out starting a third party, calling “fake news” an idea he had [once floated himself](#).

But his rhetoric about the election — and about his Republican critics — appears likely to further the civil war between traditionalist Republicans and the more populist base. While establishment-minded Republicans recoiled at Trump's sustained claims about voter fraud, CPAC devoted seven panels to “election integrity.” Asked in the straw poll to name the most important issue facing the country, 62 percent of CPAC attendees named election integrity, by far their highest-ranking concern.

“Donald Trump remains the leader of the populist wing of the party, which he grew into a dominant force in Republican primaries, although never a majority force in the country,” said Whit Ayres, the longtime Republican pollster. “But because Trump dominates the populist wing, the folks who are members of that wing are going to continue to promote whatever he wants to promote at the time. That means they’re still hanging on to this myth that the election was stolen.”

Banned from Twitter and relegated from the White House, the former president reveled in the praise lavished on him at CPAC.

Taking the stage at CPAC, he said, “Do you miss me yet?”

The audience erupted, at times chanting, “USA! USA!.”

It was a fitting finale to an event that included a [gilded statue of Trump](#) and a roster of Republicans all promoting him. Cruz, himself a potential 2024 presidential contender, said during the conference that “Donald J. Trump ain’t going anywhere.” And Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis vowed, “We cannot, we will not, go back to the days of the failed Republican establishment of yesteryear.”

The straw poll was in line with the sentiment of the broader Republican electorate, a [majority of whom](#) say they would pick Trump over any other Republican if the 2024 primary were held today. On Sunday, Rep. Jim Jordan said he hopes Trump runs again in 2024 and, “If he does, he will win.”

It's unclear if Trump will launch a comeback bid. But either way, there's utility in suggesting that he might.

“If he wants to be relevant from a policy perspective ongoing, it was smart to tease that he may be around and may run for president again,” said Sean Walsh, a Republican strategist who worked in the Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush White Houses.

In addition, Walsh said, “having that mystery there ... allows him to raise money” more effectively for his political causes than if he was a former president with no prospect of making a return.