

## Biden's Next Move: Train to Delaware and Burgers With Family



Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr. in the Old Senate Chamber on Capitol Hill on Jan. 3. Credit...Al Drago/The New York Times

By [Gardiner Harris](#) Jan. 19, 2017

WILMINGTON, Del. — After 44 years as a senator and a vice president, Joseph R. Biden Jr. on Friday will take the train here from Washington for what his office has trumpeted as a “welcome home event.”

The only problem with such a celebration is that Mr. Biden never really left home.

As a senator, he tried to return to Delaware every night. For the past eight years, he and his wife, Jill Biden, were in Washington or traveling during the week and at their lakeside house in Greenville, a Wilmington suburb, on weekends.

“And the only reason they didn’t just continue the commute is because of one thing, because the girls were down here,” said Hunter Biden, Mr. Biden’s son, who lives in Washington with his wife and three daughters.

Except for the longer time it will take going back and forth between Washington and Wilmington with no motorcade or rides on Air Force Two, that schedule won’t change.

The Bidens will vacate the vice-presidential residence at the Naval Observatory to head to Wilmington on Friday, but the couple intend to find a small house in Washington near their friends Barack and Michelle Obama so that Dr. Biden can continue teaching English at a community college in Northern Virginia.



Image St. Joseph on the Brandywine Roman Catholic Church in Greenville, Del., where the Bidens have attended Mass for decades. Credit...Mark Makela for The New York Times

Then they will again be splitting their time between two places, returning to Delaware on weekends, maintaining the same close connection that Mr. Biden resolved to never give up after his first wife and infant daughter were killed in a car accident in 1972, and he made a point of getting home from the Senate every night to be with his family.

The [death from cancer in 2015](#) of his older son, Beau, reinforced Mr. Biden's intention to remain a part of the community here and near his other grandchildren — Beau's two children, Natalie and Hunter — as they struggled to make sense of a world without their father.

So the quiet life that the Bidens lived away from their official duties in Washington, and the weekend rituals that were a large part of it, will continue. On Saturday that means taking Natalie and Hunter to the Charcoal Pit restaurant, where Mr. Biden will almost certainly order his usual meal of hamburger, French fries and milk shake that he has been gobbling down for decades, according to Juan Avilez, a cook at the Charcoal Pit who has been making that meal for Mr. Biden for 26 years.

“His all-time favorite is the black-and-white,” a vanilla milkshake mixed with chocolate syrup, Mr. Avilez said.

On Sundays, the Bidens will still be in the pews of St. Joseph on the Brandywine Roman Catholic Church just as they have been for decades. After the service, their habit is to stop by

Janssen's Market, where Xavier Vega, the weekend cook there, will fix up Mr. Biden's usual breakfast: eggs over easy with a side of dry wheat toast.

Their beloved house will continue to serve as a refuge for the entire Biden clan. The only real change will be that Mr. Biden will need a new car, since the 1967 Corvette that he got from his father and still cherishes is just for special occasions.

But how Mr. Biden will spend the rest of his week is still a bit uncertain. There will be Biden centers at the University of Pennsylvania and the University of Delaware and a Biden cancer initiative, but whether Mr. Biden intends to spend most of his time at his home office or someplace else has yet to be worked out.

"The problem we have is not figuring out what he is going to do, but figuring out what he's *not* going to do," said Ted Kaufman, a longtime Biden aide and confidant who was appointed to Mr. Biden's Senate seat after he became vice president. "There's just no way he's going to be able to do not just all the things that he wants to do but all the things that he *really* wants to do."

Some of Mr. Biden's closest confidants have quietly urged him to cash in on his popularity. He has long been one of the least wealthy members of Washington's elite, and in 2015, he and Dr. Biden briefly considered selling their home in Greenville, by far their most valuable asset, to pay for Beau Biden's cancer care.

A speaking tour or consulting arrangement could earn him millions, ensuring that he would never have to consider selling his house again and could buy a beach house for the clan, a longtime wish. But he has so far expressed little interest in either.



Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr. and Jill Biden in his ceremonial office at the Eisenhower Executive Office Building this month. The couple intend to find a small house in Washington near their friends the Obamas. Credit...Al Drago/The New York Times

"The only thing that scares me is that he's not interested in making money," Hunter Biden said. "He doesn't understand that you can actually make money and do good things with it. But that's not going to be on his list."

Others want Mr. Biden, 74, who flew more than a million miles as vice president, to finally slow down. His schedule during his last week as vice president — a quick trip to Ukraine followed by a visit to the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, with a return on Wednesday — suggested that wasn't going to happen soon.

In Kiev, Mr. Biden met with the Ukrainian president, Petro O. Poroshenko, with whom he has spent dozens of hours on the phone. Asked whether Ukraine would continue to receive American support despite President-elect Donald J. Trump's extraordinary expressions of admiration for President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia, Mr. Biden said, "Hope springs eternal."

In Switzerland, Mr. Biden offered a passionate defense of the postwar "liberal international order" and identified Mr. Putin as its greatest threat. At Joint Base Andrews on Wednesday, Mr. Biden's plane was greeted by fire trucks, which bathed Air Force Two with their hoses as a final tribute to his service.

When asked about retirement, Mr. Biden likes to quote Dylan Thomas, one of his favorite poets, who wrote: "Do not go gentle into that good night, old age should burn and rave at close of day."





A photo of Mr. Biden with the owners of Janssen's Market in Greenville, where the Bidens often stop for breakfast on Sundays. The usual for Mr. Biden is eggs over easy with a side of dry wheat toast. Credit...Mark Makela for The New York Times

"I want him to slow down," Mr. Kaufman said, "and Hunter wants him to make money, and he's not really listening to either of us."

Dr. Biden, popular in her own right, has her own suite of enticing possibilities, making coordination between the two a "game of three-dimensional chess," Mr. Kaufman said. The Bidens will not be appearing on Washington's cocktail party circuit, which neither enjoys.

One thing Mr. Biden hasn't ruled out is a run for the presidency in 2020. He has told interviewers that he intends to keep his options open.

"If it was my decision alone, just my decision alone, which it isn't, we'd be running for president starting tomorrow," Hunter Biden said. "I'm not kidding."

But even if he is not running for president, Mr. Biden intends to be one of the Democratic Party's top surrogates, and he has sounded almost gleeful about taking on Republicans as they try to reverse some of the Obama administration's accomplishments like the Affordable Care Act.

Mr. Kaufman said the most welcome change for Mr. Biden is that he no longer has to worry about whether his comments conflict with larger White House priorities, and in a slew of interviews in recent weeks Mr. Biden has been noticeably more freewheeling.

“He’s now back to being his own boss again,” Mr. Kaufman said. “He’s going to stay in public service, and he’s going to do it big time and in a big way. Because that’s Joe.”