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A sexual assault allegation against Joe Biden has ignited a firestorm of controversy

A woman says Biden assaulted her in 1993 and has filed a criminal complaint.

By Anna North | Updated Apr 29, 2020, 1:19pm EDT



Joe Biden delivers remarks about the coronavirus outbreak on March 12, 2020, in Wilmington, Delaware. | Drew Angerer/Getty Images

A woman who worked in Joe Biden's Senate office filed a criminal complaint with the Washington, DC, police on April 9, accusing the former vice president of sexually assaulting her in 1993.

Tara Reade, the former Biden staffer, described the allegation in **an interview** with podcast host Katie Halper on March 25. Reade said Biden pushed her against a wall and

penetrated her with his fingers. When she pulled away, she says, he said he thought she “liked” him.

Reade told **Business Insider** that she filed the report because she had been harassed in the past and “wanted to make it clear that I would be willing to go under oath or cooperate with any law enforcement regarding it, because it did happen. Even if it was 26 years ago.”

She also acknowledged in a **tweet** on April 10 that the statute of limitations had run out on her complaint. On April 24, new details emerged in the case: **The Intercept reported** that Reade’s mother had called CNN’s *Larry King Live* in 1993, saying that her daughter had experienced “problems” with a prominent senator. Then, on April 27, **Business Insider reported** that a former neighbor said Reade had told her about the alleged assault in 1995 and 1996. The additional details have reignited controversy around Reade’s allegation, with **prominent Democrats coming to Biden’s defense** and others arguing that **Biden should step aside** as the presumptive nominee.

When asked to comment on the criminal complaint against Biden, a campaign spokesperson referred Business Insider to deputy campaign manager Kate Bedingfield’s previous statement, provided March 27 after the controversy heated up from Halper’s podcast: “Women have a right to tell their story, and reporters have an obligation to rigorously vet those claims. We encourage them to do so, because these accusations are false.”

Last year, Reade was one of several women who came forward publicly to say **Biden had kissed or touched them** in ways that made them uncomfortable. At the time, Reade **said** Biden used to “put his hand on my shoulder and run his finger up my neck” when she worked in his Senate office, but she did not accuse Biden of sexual assault.

Reade says she did not speak publicly about her more serious allegation last year, in part, because no one else witnessed the incident, while she says others saw Biden harassing her.

She also says she faced online harassment after coming forward last year. As **Ryan Grim reported at the Intercept** on March 24, journalists and others **questioned her credibility**, pointing out favorable comments she had made about Vladimir Putin in a 2018 Medium post, perhaps implying that she was a Russian plant.



In March, Reade's allegation initially received little coverage outside of left-wing media (and some media outlets **on the right**). But the hashtags #IBelieveTara and #TimesUpBiden started to pick up steam on Twitter after Halper's podcast, as many wondered why it was not getting more attention.



The allegation also inflamed tensions between supporters of Biden and Sen. Bernie Sanders, who, at the time, was losing to Biden in the primaries. Reade told Vox on March 26 that she initially supported Sen. Elizabeth Warren for president (and also supported Marianne Williamson) but now supported Sanders. (Sanders has since dropped out of the presidential race.) And her report led to allegations by some that she or her supporters were simply trying to throw the election to Sanders — or even to President Donald Trump.

Reade **acknowledged the concern** that her allegation could benefit Trump in the general election. Trump himself has been accused of sexual harassment, assault, or other misconduct by **more than 20 women**, and is being **sued for defamation** by **two** of them.

“I don’t want Trump to be president,” Reade told Vox. But, she said, she won’t be voting for Biden. “If he’s my president, I just can’t fathom it.”

Multiple women have said Biden touched them in ways that made them uncomfortable

Reports of **“creepy” behavior by Biden**, like standing too close to women for photo opportunities, have circulated for years, treated by some as little more than a joke. But those reports received more serious attention after Lucy Flores, a former candidate for lieutenant governor of Nevada, wrote in **a March 2019 essay at The Cut** that Biden had kissed her on the back of the head at a campaign event in 2014.

“I couldn’t move and I couldn’t say anything,” Flores wrote. “I wanted nothing more than to get Biden away from me.”

After that, other women spoke out to report similar experiences. Amy Lappos, for example, said that at a 2009 fundraiser, Biden touched her face and rubbed noses with her. And in April, Reade **told the Union**, a California newspaper, that Biden touched her several times in ways that made her feel uncomfortable, and that her duties in his Senate office were reduced after she refused to serve drinks at an event. She said he wanted her there because he liked her legs.

A few days after women began coming forward with reports of inappropriate touching by him, the former vice president **issued a statement** saying that “social norms have begun to change” around people’s personal space and that he would be more mindful of boundaries in the future.

Biden did not specifically respond to Reade’s allegation, but in a **video statement** in early April, he said, “I shake hands, I hug people, I grab men and women by the shoulders and say, ‘You can do this.’” However, he also said that “the boundaries of protecting personal space have been reset” and pledged to change his behavior.

Since then, the allegations by women have not come up much on the debate stage or campaign trail, and Biden is the presumptive Democratic nominee for president this year.

Reade's allegation came back to the fore when Grim reported on its general outline in the Intercept. Then Halper **released her interview** on her podcast, *The Katie Halper Show*. In it, Reade says that in 1993, when she was in her 20s and working for Biden, another staffer asked her to bring him a gym bag at the US Capitol.

When she did, she says, he pushed her up against a wall in a secluded area, began kissing her, and reached under her skirt to penetrate her with his fingers. After she pulled away, she says he responded with something along the lines of, "Come on, man, I heard you liked me." Reade said Biden also said something that sticks with her today: "You're nothing to me."

Those words affected her "almost more than the assault," she said, because she had respected him so much before.

"It was like an earthquake," Reade told Vox in March. "I was so excited about this job. I thought this was my future, and so when that happened I felt, it's like someone pulling the rug out."

In addition to Bedingfield's statement, the Biden campaign also released a statement in March from Marianne Baker, an executive assistant to Biden from 1982 to 2000. "In all my years working for Senator Biden, I never once witnessed, or heard of, or received, any reports of inappropriate conduct, period — not from Ms. Reade, not from anyone," Baker said. "These clearly false allegations are in complete contradiction to both the inner workings of our Senate office and to the man I know and worked so closely with for almost two decades."

Reade, for her part, said she did not include the assault accusation when she spoke out last year because the harassment was easier to talk about, in part because others had witnessed it.

"I wanted to share the whole thing, but at the same time I was too scared," she said. "I just wasn't quite ready."

Grim at the Intercept contacted Reade's friend and brother, both of whom say she told them about the alleged sexual assault by Biden in 1993.

"Woefully, I did not encourage her to follow up," her brother told the Intercept. "I wasn't one of her better advocates. I said let it go, move on, guys are idiots."

But earlier this year, Reade decided that she wanted to speak publicly about the assault allegation. She reached out to Time's Up, an anti-harassment organization launched as the Me Too movement rose to prominence, to see if she could get legal representation. However, **Grim reported**, the organization said it could not support her because Biden is a candidate for federal office and doing so could jeopardize its nonprofit status.

The Time's Up Legal Defense Fund, which is administered by the National Women's Law Center, countered that it did offer some help to Reade. Uma Iyer, the center's vice president of communications, said in a statement to Vox that "we helped Ms. Reade as much as we could, within the guardrails that necessarily shape our work." The organization "provided her with the information to connect to attorneys and other resources" as it has done for many others, Iyer said; however, "We informed Ms. Reade of our inability to fund legal and PR fees for her due to our 501(c)(3) status."

"The TIME'S UP Legal Defense Fund is the first-of-its-kind entity, and above all else, we prioritize survivors and their quest to seek justice – but we cannot do that if our nonprofit status is in any way threatened," Iyer said.

Unable to get legal help, Reade told Vox, she decided to write about her experience **on Medium in January**. She did not state an allegation of sexual assault then, but said that "I have not told the whole story of what occurred between Joe Biden and myself." That led to interest from some smaller media outlets and the interview with Halper, she said. "I kind of feel like a weight was lifted off when I did that interview," Reade said. "Now I'm ready to walk away, and now everyone wants to talk to me."

After the Intercept, Halper, and others covered Reade's story, new details began to emerge. Reade had told the Intercept that she talked about her experience with Biden with her mother, who died in 2016. Reade said her mother had even called *Larry King Live* to ask for advice after her daughter left her job with Biden. On April 24, **Grim reported** that a listener had tracked down a call, presumably made by Reade's mother, to the show on August 11, 1993.

"I'm wondering what a staffer would do besides go to the press in Washington," the caller says. "My daughter has just left there, after working for a prominent senator, and could not get through with her problems at all, and the only thing she could have done was go to the press, and she chose not to do it out of respect for him."

The caller doesn't specifically mention harassment or assault, but as Grim noted, Reade said the transcript "gelled with her memory" of the call, which also tracks with her assertion that she told her mother about an experience she had with Biden that would damage his reputation if made public.

Then, on April 27, **Business Insider reported** on accounts by two more people who said Reade told them about her experiences with Biden in the 1990s. Former co-worker Lorraine Sanchez told Business Insider that she recalled Reade saying, in the mid-90s, that her former boss in Washington had sexually harassed her.

Meanwhile, Lynda LaCasse, Reade's former neighbor, told Business Insider that in 1995 or 1996, Reade confided that she had been sexually assaulted by Joe Biden. "This happened, and I know it did because I remember talking about it," LaCasse said.

The new details have inspired renewed attention to Reade's story. Many in the Democratic Party, including Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand and former Georgia gubernatorial candidate Stacey Abrams, have pledged their support for Biden. Others, meanwhile, have stepped up their criticism of the presumptive nominee, sharing their disapproval with the hashtag **#DropOutBiden**.



Shahid Buttar for Congress 
@ShahidForChange



The GOP is already weaponizing Biden's unanswered rape allegations, and evidence of his decline.

Many partisan Democrats have chosen to ignore those issues.

That might have worked in partisan primaries, but ensures a Trump victory in November.

We can't risk that. [#DropOutBiden](#)



Ryan Knight  @ProudSocialist

Just because Trump has more sexual assault allegations doesn't mean we should ignore @JoeBiden's allegation.

Right-wing media won't ignore it & the story isn't going away.

@ReadeAlexandra's mom called into Larry King in 1993 & this corroborates her story.



Mainstream media initially did not cover Reade's assault allegation

Part of the reason Reade sought legal help, she told Vox, was that she faced harassment when she initially came forward last year. She also faced scrutiny into her background. In particular, critics pointed to that **now-deleted 2018 Medium post** in which Reade called Putin “a compassionate, caring, visionary leader” and said, “To President Putin, I say keep your eyes to the beautiful future and maybe, just maybe America will come to see Russia as I do, with eyes of love.”

In the same post, she wrote that she left government work in her 20s in part because “I love Russia with all my heart” and “I could not stand to watch the deception and xenophobia that came from my own American government.”

Reade told Vox that when she wrote the praise of Putin, she had “watched a bunch of Noam Chomsky” and was working on a novel set in Russia. She says she no longer feels the same way about Putin since learning more about **domestic violence in Russia**.

But “this conversation isn’t about Russia,” she told Vox. “Joe Biden wasn’t asking me about my feelings about Russia when he had his hands where they weren’t supposed to be.”

Some have dismissed Reade’s sexual assault accusation because Reade was a Sanders supporter and because it was **first publicized by left-wing outlets**. Halper was also a vocal **Sanders supporter**, and most mainstream news organizations did not initially cover

the story, although some had **conducted reporting in 2019 on Reade's harassment claims**. The **New York Times** and the Washington Post published articles on April 12, 2020, about the allegation.

“Of course, if it’s a choice between Bernie Sanders and Joe Biden, from my perspective, I’m going to pick Bernie Sanders,” Reade told Vox March 26, and added that Sanders supporters were kind to her when she was harassed online after coming forward last year.

Social media conversation helped bring attention to Reade’s story, with #IBelieveTara and #TimesUpBiden trending by the end of the week in which she appeared on Harper’s show. Overall, the social media reactions could have been broken down into two camps: those who cited her praise of Russia and implied that she or her supporters were **working on behalf of Sanders, Trump, or Putin**; and those who cited the need to believe people who come forward to report sexual misconduct.



Reade’s report came at a time when Sanders was trailing behind Biden in the primaries and Biden was likely to face Trump in the general election. Before Trump was elected, numerous women had accused him of sexual assault and harassment, and he was caught on tape bragging about his ability to **grab women “by the pussy.”** He was elected anyway.

While Reade is no fan of Trump, she said she is disturbed by the fact that Biden is “running on a platform of character.”

“The Uncle Joe thing, I never saw that,” she said. “He was very strong, he was very powerful, and he knew it, and he used his power to get what he wanted.”