

Penn Biden Center Had UPenn Interns Running Around 13,800-Square-Foot D.C. Offices

by Bradley Vasoli

Jan 17, 2023



President Joe Biden’s former private office in Washington, D.C., where roughly a dozen classified documents were discovered earlier last November, was recently a site for high-profile University of Pennsylvania internships.

Administrators of the Philadelphia-based Ivy League school brought the former vice president aboard as a professor in the winter of 2017 to coincide with the “soft opening” of the 13,800-square-foot Penn Biden Center for Diplomacy and Global Engagement. Just under a year later, the think tank officially commenced operations with a stated aim of engaging “our fellow citizens in shaping this world, while ensuring the gains of global engagement are widely shared.”

A 2018 report in the *Daily Pennsylvanian* student newspaper described the center as a forum for promotion of foreign policy to advance democracy abroad. The piece also noted Biden used the Constitution Avenue site as his main office while working in Washington. How much scholastic value Penn got for the institute and its figurehead’s presence at the school — the latter costing \$900,000 in salary between 2017 and 2019 — is not entirely clear.

Since becoming president in winter 2021, the longtime federal official made much of his stint at the university, averring that “for four years, I was a full professor at the University of Pennsylvania.” But shortly after coming to Penn, Biden’s spokesperson Kate Bedingfield stated her boss would not teach courses. Even the left-leaning watchdog site *PolitiFact* concluded, “Biden’s duties did not include the same degree of teaching, research and administrative responsibilities that some may associate with the term ‘full professor.’”

While students did not get regular instruction time with Biden, some undergraduates worked as interns at the center that bore his name, participating in foreign-policy-research and social-

media projects. At least initially, the internships went only to Penn students.

Reports that the office at which those students worked housed classified federal materials came out earlier this month. Last weekend, Special Counsel Richard Sauber announced he had become aware that even more classified documents from the Obama-Biden administration were kept at Biden's Wilmington, DE home.

Use of the Penn Biden Center to keep records allegedly not authorized for release has compounded controversy that already surrounded the think tank, most notably its receipt of more than \$67 million from sources based in communist China.

The revelations have also put the president and his political allies on defense insofar as they excoriated former President Donald Trump for his own handling of federal records. At the direction of Attorney General Merrick Garland, the Federal Bureau of Investigation searched Trump's Florida resort home last August to recover classified materials. In the wake of the raid at Mar-a-Lago, Biden exclaimed, "How that could possibly happen? How anyone could be that irresponsible. And it just — totally irresponsible."

According to the Presidential Records Act, White House documents must be left in the care of the National Archives. Speculation that Trump's alleged retention of such records could result in prosecution has been tempered with the news that Biden also kept such materials. Last week, Garland tasked John Lausch, U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois, with investigating how and why the records came to be located in Biden's office and home.

Many media figures, some of them normally friendly toward Biden, have acknowledged this turn of events could spell some trouble for the president. "I think the trouble primarily is political trouble," *The Hill* associate editor Niall Stanage said in an appearance on D.C. News Now. "This is something that threatens to bog down the president and the Democratic Party in negative headlines for quite some time. I'm sure Republicans in Congress will clearly try to keep the focus on this issue." Conservative journalist Eli Lake, in an appearance on the *Commentary Magazine Podcast*, likewise opined that seeming hypocrisy on document handling will hurt Biden and politicians who align with him.

"This is the petard to which the Democrats have hoisted themselves yet again," he said. Lake added however that Congress might now want to think about forming an ad hoc panel to consider how to deescalate what he calls "the weaponization" of the federal government's investigatory powers which ensnare members of both parties. "There is so much overclassification that I am not taking anyone's word" on the severity of either Trump's alleged misdeeds or Biden's, he said.

Bradley Vasoli is managing editor of The Pennsylvania Daily Star. Follow Brad on Twitter at @BVasoli. Email tips to bradvasoliwriter@gmail.com. Photo "Joe Biden" by Penn Biden Center.