

International

Son of President-elect under investigation for tax affairs

Longshot Texas election lawsuit keeps Trump hopes alive

WILMINGTON: Hunter Biden, the son of US President-elect Joe Biden and a frequent target of Republican attacks, said Wednesday he was under federal investigation about his taxes. The revelation about the probe included no details, but it promises to rekindle Republican rage about the Biden family, including Hunter Biden's business dealings and the elder Biden's anti-corruption push in Ukraine when he was US vice president. It also presents a series of thorny issues during the president-elect's transition into the White House in just over one month's time, including the possibility his son will still be under investigation by the US Department of Justice.

"I learned yesterday for the first time that the US Attorney's Office in Delaware advised my legal counsel, also yesterday, that they are investigating my tax affairs," Hunter Biden said in a statement released by his father's presidential transition team. "I take this matter very seriously but I am confident that a professional and objective review of these matters will demonstrate that I handled my affairs legally and appropriately, including with the benefit of professional tax advisors."

Hunter Biden, 50, is a lawyer who has founded consulting and investment firms, worked in private equity, and served on the board of various organizations including national railroad corporation Amtrak. Biden's sec-

ond son Hunter was born in Wilmington, Delaware, where his father lives and the presidential transition operation is based. His brother Beau Biden, the former Delaware attorney general, died of cancer in 2015.

Trump attacks on Biden

The transition team said in the statement that included Hunter's remarks that "President-elect Biden is deeply proud of his son, who has fought through difficult challenges, including the vicious personal attacks of recent months, only to emerge stronger."

The investigation was disclosed just five days before the Electoral College is expected to formally select Joe Biden as the next president, following the November 3 election in which he defeated President Donald Trump. The New York Times, citing unnamed sources familiar with the inquiry, said the probe was opened in late 2018 and has included inquiries into "potential criminal violations" of tax laws.

During his reelection campaign Trump launched repeated accusations that the Bidens were a "corrupt" family and a "criminal enterprise." From 2014 to 2019, while his father was vice president, Hunter Biden, a lawyer and lobbyist, served on the board of Burisma, a Ukrainian gas company. Trump has accused Joe Biden, when he was president Barack Obama's deputy,



WILMINGTON: In this file photo, US President-elect Joe Biden (right) embraces his son Hunter Biden on the stage after delivering remarks in Wilmington, Delaware. —AFP

of seeking the removal of Ukraine's top prosecutor to protect Burisma-and his son-from a corruption investigation.

Joe Biden has acknowledged publicly that he did indeed push for the dismissal of the prosecutor but the European Union and IMF had also sought his removal-not because of a Burisma probe but because he was seen as not

being aggressive enough in pursuing corruption. Since 2019 Trump and his Republican allies have assailed Hunter for his dealings with Ukraine and China, and there were unconfirmed reports that a Hunter Biden laptop was dropped off at a Delaware repair shop and contained incriminating data. No evidence of wrongdoing emerged. —Agencies

Biden defends Pentagon pick

WILMINGTON: US President-elect Joe Biden defended his barrier-breaking pick for defense secretary Wednesday before what could be a tough confirmation process, arguing that retired general Lloyd Austin will combine military experience and civilian oversight at the Pentagon. At a press event in Wilmington, Delaware, Biden described Austin as "the definition of duty, honor, country" as he called on the Senate to make an exception to the law requiring any officer who heads the department be out of military service at least seven years.

Austin, a 67-year-old four-star general, was US commander in Iraq and then head of the US Central Command covering all of the Middle East from 2010 to 2016. "I believe in the importance of civilian control of the military. So does the secretary designate," said Biden, who worked with Austin in Iraq when he visited the country as vice president. "I would not be asking for this exception if I did not believe this moment in our history didn't call for it. It does call for it," he added. "So just as they did for secretary Jim Mattis, I ask the Congress to grant a waiver for Secretary-designate Austin." The law has been waived only twice before, including in 2017, when President Donald Trump nominated Mattis as defense secretary. Overcoming that barrier will require a waiver from Congress, but a handful of Democrats including senators Richard Blumenthal, Tammy Duckworth and Jon Tester have already said they would vote against the waiver. —AFP

Trump Tower? No, think Biden municipal swimming pool now

WILMINGTON: Donald Trump has high-rise towers named after him around the world. And Joe Biden? A municipal swimming pool in Delaware. A visit to the president-elect's modest - some would say dull - hometown of Wilmington illustrates the intense shift in atmosphere coming to the White House with the change of power this January. After four years of Trump, a fan of gold faucets and self-declared "greatest" at just about everything, in comes a man whom local resident Shelly Baker calls "great" mainly because he's a lot like other people in down-to-earth Wilmington. "Everyone here just calls him Joe. 'Regular Joe,'" Baker, 63, said admiringly as she waited for a glimpse of the president-elect following one of his daily transition team events downtown. Trump has emblazoned his name in huge capital letters - often in gold for good measure - on buildings and swanky properties all the way from Las Vegas to Scotland. In New York City alone there's Trump Tower, Trump World Tower, Trump Plaza, The Trump Building, Trump Parc, Trump Park Avenue and Trump International Hotel and Tower. Then there are the Trump books, like "Trump: How to Get Rich," the Trump golf courses, Trump casinos and more. So enamored is the Republican with his own name that he has a habit of referring during speeches to "Trump" in the third person, as if standing back to admire himself.

So what about Biden?

He's been a US senator for nearly four decades and vice president under Barack Obama, so he's hardly unknown. But in the self-promotion stakes, the

vibe couldn't be more different. Take the three most prominent Biden landmarks found in Delaware: Joseph R Biden Jr Aquatic Center (the Wilmington swimming pool where he worked as a lifeguard in his youth). - Joseph R Biden Jr Railroad Station (Wilmington's Amtrak stop, which the soon-to-be 46th president used every day while in the Senate to get back to his family at night). - And last but not least, the Biden Welcome Center, a stopoff with toilets and fast food for motorists on the Interstate-95 motorway.

Town resembles president-elect

Wilmington, population less than 71,000, mirrors the man promising to deliver Americans a soothing rest after four years of Trump turbulence. The town isn't famous for much - most people just drive by on their way along I-95 between Washington and New York. Its principal economic role as a tax-friendly destination for companies to incorporate doesn't exactly translate into excitement. Efforts are underway to revitalize the depressed downtown, but much of the area remains gloomy and dangerous. Pawn shops, bail bond agents and boarded-up windows are a common sight around The Queen Theater, which Biden's transition team has made the center of its operations. The wealthier side of town features a seemingly endless succession of churches, traffic lights and car dealerships, before merging into neighborhoods of leafy, winding lanes where Biden's residence is located. "It's not like Miami or like New York," said downtown clothing store manager Toya Darcey. But, the 32-year-old added: "It feels good that he's from here."

Grounded

To say that Biden is grounded in Wilmington is no exaggeration. His son Beau, who died of brain cancer in 2015, is buried at Saint Joseph on the Brandywine Catholic church. So are Biden's first wife Neilia and their infant daughter, Naomi, killed in a 1972 car crash. Over the years, the cemetery and church, where Biden regularly attends Mass, have become as much part of the incoming president's identity as glitzy Manhattan and Florida are to Trump. —AFP