

Biden says only ‘the Lord almighty’ could make him drop out in pivotal TV interview

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Online Desk :

In a potentially pivotal TV interview, Joe Biden asserted that only “the Lord almighty” could convince him to withdraw from the US presidential election in an effort to quell a growing Democratic party mutiny.

In a question from ABC News’ George Stephanopoulos, Biden was asked how he would feel if he were to stay the nominee and lose to Donald Trump. The interaction was devoid of any significant gaffes but was unlikely to placate his detractors. The president answered, “I’ll feel as long as I gave it my all and I did the best job I know I can do. That’s what this is about.”

The 81-year-old is trying desperately to save his beleaguered reelection campaign following his dismal debate performance last month, and the interview on Friday comes at a crucial time. In addition to Mark Warner, the chairman of the Senate intelligence committee, reportedly trying to get a group of Democratic senators to urge President Biden to withdraw his reelection attempt, four members of Congress have called on Biden to resign.

Speaking to Stephanopoulos in Madison, Wisconsin on Friday following an intense campaign event, the beleaguered president maintained his combative demeanor. “Observe. After the rally, he spoke in a strained voice, “I mean, if the Lord Almighty came down and said, ‘Joe, get outta the race,’ I’d get outta the race.” The Almighty Lord is not coming.

Biden insisted that after meeting with Democratic leaders such as Chuck Schumer, Hakeem Jeffries, Nancy Pelosi and state governors, they continue to back him.

Stephanopoulos, a former senior adviser to President Bill Clinton, pressed Biden on what he would do if told that his friends and supporters were concerned that his candidacy would cost Democrats the House of Representatives and Senate.

The president replied: “I’m not going to answer that question. It’s not going to happen.”

Stephanopoulos had begun the primetime interview by citing Pelosi, who this week questioned whether Biden’s feeble performance represented an episode or a condition.

“It was a bad episode,” Biden insisted. “No indication of any serious condition. I was exhausted. I didn’t listen to my instincts in terms of preparing and – I had a bad night.”

Stephanopoulos noted that Biden had returned from Europe 12 days before the debate and that he had spent six days at the presidential retreat Camp David. “Why wasn’t that enough rest time, enough recovery time?” he asked.

The president replied: “Because I was sick. I was feeling terrible. Matter of fact, the doc’s with me. I asked if they did a Covid test because they’re trying to figure out what was wrong. They did a test to see whether or not I had some infection, you know, a virus. I didn’t. I just had a really bad cold.”

Stephanopoulos asked whether Biden had watched the debate afterwards. Instead of giving a firm yes or no, he hedged: “I don’t think I did, no.”

The interviewer went on to ask what Biden had been experiencing during the debate and whether he had known how badly it was going. Just as he did on that night, the president zigzagged in his answer from one point to another. He said: “Yeah, look. The whole way I prepared, nobody’s fault, mine. Nobody’s fault but mine.

“I – I prepared what I usually would do sittin’ down as I did come back with foreign leaders or National Security Council for explicit detail. And I realised – partway through that, you know, all – I get quoted the New York Times had me down, 10 points before the debate, nine now, or whatever the hell it is.

“The fact of the matter is, what I looked at is that he also lied 28 times. I couldn’t – I mean, the way the debate ran, not – my fault, nobody else’s fault, no one else’s fault.”

Stephanopoulos challenged Biden that concerns about his fitness for office followed a pattern, citing a recent New York Times article that reported his lapses were becoming more frequent, pronounced and worrisome.

Biden said: “Can I run a 110 flat? No. But I’m still in good shape.”

Asked whether he would be willing to have an independent cognitive evaluation and release the results to the American people, Biden said: “Look, I have a cognitive test every single day. Every day I’ve had tests. Everything I do. You know, not only am I campaigning, I’m running the world. And that sounds like hyperbole but we are the essential nation in the world.”

The interviewer asked: “Are you sure you’re being honest with yourself when you’re saying you have the mental and physical capacity to serve another four years?”

Biden shot back: “Yes, I am because, George, the last thing I want to do is not be able to meet that. I think as some of the senior economist and senior foreign policy specialists say, if I stopped now I’d go down in history as a pretty successful president. No one thought I could get done what we got done.”

The 22-minute interview was shown to a national audience on ABC. It was part of a major campaign offensive over the weekend to assuage doubts over Biden’s fitness for office and ability to beat Trump.

The Biden campaign’s response to the crisis over the past few days has frustrated many Democrats. Some financial backers are holding off or canceling upcoming fundraisers.

And at least four House Democrats have called for him to step down as the nominee: Seth Moulton of Massachusetts, Lloyd Doggett of Texas and Raúl Grijalva of Arizona and Mike Quigley of Illinois are pushing for an alternative. Massachusetts governor Maura Healey said in a carefully worded statement on Friday that Biden now has a decision to make on “the best way forward”.

In the interview, Biden dismissed those calls, as well as opinion polls that show he has a low approval rating and claimed that he remains better placed than other candidates to beat Trump. “I don’t think anybody is more qualified to be president or win this race than me,” he said, bristling.

Stephanopoulos followed up: “The heart of your case against Donald Trump is that he’s only out for himself, putting his personal interests ahead of the national interest. How do you respond to critics who say that by staying in the race you’re doing the same thing?”

Biden responded impatiently: “Oh, come on. I don’t think those critics know what you’re talking about. It’s wrong. Look, Trump is a pathological liar. You ever seen anything Trump did that benefited somebody else and not him?”

The president may have just days to make a persuasive case that he is capable of beating Trump. Early reactions to his rallies and interviews have been mixed.

John Fetterman, the Democratic senator for Pennsylvania, wrote on the social media platform X: “Democrats need to get a spine or grow a set — one or the other. Joe Biden is our guy.”

But David Axelrod, a former strategist for Barack Obama, posted: “The president is rightfully proud of his record. But he is dangerously out-of-touch with the concerns people have about his capacities moving forward and his standing in this race. Four years ago at this time, he was 10 points ahead of Trump. Today, he is six points behind.”