

Writers Festival: Biden's sister Valerie Biden Owens says polls just a 'snapshot in time'

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Published: 12:36 p.m. PT Jan. 31, 2024 | Updated: 12:41 p.m. PT Jan. 31, 2024



Valerie Biden Owens, left, and Lesley Stahl speak Wednesday during the Rancho Mirage Writers Festival, where Biden Owens was discussing her book "Growing Up Biden." *Jay Calderon/The Desert Sun*

Nobody knows President Joe Biden better than his younger sister and former longtime campaign manager, Valerie Biden Owens.

Biden Owens appeared on Wednesday at the Rancho Mirage Writers Festival to discuss her memoir "Growing Up Biden" with CBS News and "60 Minutes" journalist Lesley Stahl. She also discussed being the first woman to run a U.S. Senate campaign in 1972 for her brother, the car accident that killed her sister-in-law Neilia Hunter Biden and niece Naomi, helping to raise nephews Beau and Hunter Biden and family stories shared in the memoir.

Stahl asked Biden Owens why the president is struggling with young voters and she said, "I do not speak for the administration or President Joe Biden" before expressing her view that the campaign is only beginning to get its message to voters, including about Biden's accomplishments in passing the Inflation Recovery Act, and what he's done for energy and infrastructure.

"I think people are just beginning to focus," Biden Owens said. "Polls are just a snapshot in time. I would say in the last week that I've seen movement and things change in the polls. Every western leader, their poll numbers are going down and it's real tough to be a leader right now. But Joe always had his eye on the ball and he's a public servant. That doesn't make him noble or heroic; it makes him who he is. He doesn't take victory laps."



Valerie Biden Owens speaks Wednesday during the Rancho Mirage Writers Festival, where she was discussing her book "Growing Up Biden." *Jay Calderon/The Desert Sun*

The ‘campaign against Taylor Swift’

This weekend's Super Bowl game featuring the Kansas City Chiefs and San Francisco 49ers was a topic of discussion. Biden Owens shared her opinion on what Stahl referred to as the "incredible campaign against Taylor Swift" connected to the singer's past support for Biden, the Super Bowl and romantic relationship with Kansas City Chiefs tight end Travis Kelce.

"This is just a sad commentary," Biden Owens said. "I was with Barbara Boxer last night and she (discussed) these far-right (supporters) campaigning against Taylor Swift because she likes Joe Biden, are supporting the San Francisco 49ers and (San Francisco) is the most blue city in the entire country."

"Is she going to endorse Joe Biden at the Super Bowl?" Stahl asked.

"If I knew, I wouldn't even tell you," Biden Owens joked in reply.

‘He’s a regular guy and can be a jerk’

When the Bidens were growing up, she said her mother reminded all four children, "Remember, you're Bidens." The siblings had each other's back and Joe Biden always looked out for his young sister.

"He's a regular guy and can be a jerk. He could hurt my feelings, but you know what? There's family and there's family," Biden Owens said. "But he is a wonderful brother. When you're a good brother, you're going to be a good father, husband, and I would say extraordinary president."

She shared stories about how "Joey" took her everywhere during childhood and accompanied her to a friend's birthday party where she felt uncomfortable and didn't fall in with the other girls.

"He was kind, he made it OK and he's still kind. He doesn't make everything OK and has screwed some things up," Biden Owens said.

Biden’s first campaign in 1972 focused on three issues

In 1972, Biden ran for the U.S. Senate against incumbent J. Caleb Boggs, which was the same year Republican president Richard Nixon won in a landslide victory against Democratic candidate George McGovern. Stahl pointed out Biden Owens must have thought of that first campaign as a "practice run" and Biden would need to replace his sister with a serious Washington, D.C. political consultant.

"We had three things — we were against the war in Vietnam, we were for civil rights and we were one of the first campaigns to ever to talk about planet Earth and the environment. It was also the first year that 18-year-olds could vote," Biden Owens said.

At the time, Biden Owens was a teacher at Wilmington Friends School, a Quaker private school in Wilmington, Delaware, which she called a "bastion of Republican parents and teachers who were more Democratic." Many of her students helped in getting the word out about Biden.

"These parents saw their kids who didn't get out of bed until noon every Saturday or Sunday morning get up at 5:30 a.m. to hand deliver 160,000 pieces of literature throughout the state — and these were parents who wouldn't have voted for a Democrat if you were Christ almighty — but their children voted and (their parents) said 'God, if they're going to get out of bed before noon for this guy Biden, I better check him out,'" Biden Owens said.