

Biden pardons son Hunter in final weeks of US presidency

AFP- US President Joe Biden on Sunday issued an official pardon for his son Hunter, who was facing sentencing for two criminal cases, despite assurances that he would not intervene in his legal troubles.

"No reasonable person who looks at the facts of Hunter's cases can reach any other conclusion than Hunter was singled out only because he is my son – and that is wrong," the president said in a statement.

The move is sure to bring about fresh scrutiny over the independence of the US judicial system – especially at a time when incoming president Donald Trump has moved to appoint loyalists to the FBI and Justice Department himself.

The younger Biden was convicted earlier this year of lying about his drug use when he bought a gun – a felony – and has also pleaded guilty in a separate tax evasion trial, but had not faced sentencing.

Joe Biden, who is in the final weeks of his presidency before Trump takes office on January 20, had repeatedly said he wouldn't pardon his son.

"I said I would not interfere with the Justice Department's decision-making, and I kept my word even as I have watched my son being selectively, and unfairly, prosecuted," President Biden said in Sunday's statement.

"The charges in his cases came about only after several of my political opponents in Congress instigated them to attack me and oppose my election," he added.

"I believe in the justice system, but as I have wrestled with this, I also believe raw politics has infected this process and it led to a miscarriage of justice."

The pardon comes as criminal cases against President-elect Trump have stalled after a sweeping ruling on presidential immunity by the Supreme Court – all but ensuring Biden's Republican rival will likely never see a jail cell, even after his landmark conviction for falsifying business records in May.

– Plea deal gone awry –

US presidents have previously used pardons to help family members and other political allies.

Bill Clinton pardoned his half-brother for old cocaine charges and Trump pardoned the father of his son-in-law for tax evasion, though in both cases those men had already served their prison terms.

Trump has vowed to pardon supporters who stormed the US Capitol in a deadly riot on January 6, 2021, in a bid to reverse his 2020 election loss.

He referenced them in a social media post late Sunday, writing, "Does the Pardon given by Joe to Hunter include the J-6 Hostages, who have now been imprisoned for years? Such an abuse and miscarriage of Justice!"

Hunter Biden pleaded guilty in a tax evasion trial in September, facing up to 17 years in prison. For the separate gun charge, he was facing 25 years in prison.

His lawyers have said he was only being brought before the court because he is the son of the president.

Hunter has paid the back taxes, as well as penalties levied by authorities, and previously reached a plea deal that would have kept him out of jail – but that agreement fell apart at the last minute.

His case has long been a thorn in the Biden family's side, particularly during this election year when Republicans have

charged that Hunter was being treated too leniently.

President Biden's withdrawal from the presidential race in favor of Vice President Kamala Harris took much of the zeal out of the Republican drive to make an example out of his son.

Still, prosecutors appeared unwilling to cut him any slack, rejecting a so-called "Alford plea," whereby Hunter Biden would admit guilt because of the high probability of conviction, but would maintain his innocence.

In a statement to US media, Hunter Biden, who has grappled with drug addiction, said he would "devote the life I have rebuilt to helping those who are still sick and suffering."

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