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## Biden hugs union leader, quips 'I had permission'

By Thomas Beaumont and Nicholas Riccardi  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) - In his first public appearance since several women said he had behaved physically inappropriately, former Vice President Joe Biden quipped about his tendency to be affectionate.

After he embraced Lonnie Stephenson, the male president of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Biden told his audience: "I just want you to know, I had permission to hug Lonnie."

The quip on April 5 was met with cheers from the largely male audience that represented the sort of blue-collar white workers Biden's supporters hope he can win back from President Donald Trump. Biden focused his speech on the need to respect manual labor and told the union leaders their work is what allows high-paid Wall Street traders and others to function.

"All you're looking for is to be treated fairly, with respect, with some dignity," Biden said. "Because you matter."

Biden's publicly affectionate persona, however, has gotten him in trouble as he gears up for a presidential run. Last month, Nevada politician Lucy Flores, said she was uncomfortable when Biden kissed her on the back of the head backstage at a 2014 campaign event. Her account was countered by scores of women - from prominent lawmakers to former Biden staffers - who praised him as a warm, affectionate person and a supportive boss. But several other women have also come forward to recount their own awkward interactions with Biden.

The 76-year-old said in a cellphone video released April 3 that he understood "social norms have begun to change" and "the boundaries of protecting personal space have been reset."

Biden allies insist the eruption has done little to slow down planning for a 2020 campaign. Barring the unforeseen, he is expected to announce his candidacy, perhaps online, after Easter and immediately embark on a trip to early voting caucus and primary states. Those stops would be followed by a ceremonial kickoff.

Advisers say they are working to build out a robust campaign staff, including operatives in Iowa and South Carolina, states that are seen as key to his path to the nomination. Women are being considered for key roles, including senior strategist and deputy campaign manager, according to advisers, who insisted on anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the planning publicly.

Biden's sister, Valerie Biden Owens, has long been one of his most trusted political confidantes. His daughter, 37-year-old Ashley Biden, who has largely kept a low profile during his political career, may also take on a more prominent role. She has quit her job as a social worker, fueling speculation.

But the past few weeks have laid bare the challenges Biden would face. Some women's groups have balked at his attempts to apologize for his role overseeing the Senate hearings in which Anita Hill accused Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas of sexual harassment.

President Donald Trump has joined the criticism, despite his own history with more than a dozen women accusing him of improper sexual acts. Trump has denied those allegations, and on April 4 he posted a doctored version of Biden's video. In Trump's version, a Biden avatar approaches Biden from behind and appears to grab his shoulders.

"Yeah, I think I'm a very good messenger and people got a kick out of it," Trump told reporters April 5.

Reacting in a glimpse of what may lie ahead in the 2020 campaign, Biden tweeted back at Trump, "I see that you are on the job and presidential, as always."

Biden has also been criticized this spring following reports that he was considering asking 2018 Georgia gubernatorial candidate Stacey Abrams, a 45-year-old African American woman, to be his running mate during the Democratic primaries. Abrams herself brushed back the speculation by saying she thought a woman or a minority would be the Democratic Party nominee in 2020.

Speaking to MSNBC on April 4, Abrams offered support for Biden and said Democrats shouldn't "have perfection as a litmus test." But in a sign of the volatility that could be ahead for the Democratic field, Abrams said she doesn't expect to decide whether to launch a presidential bid of her own until the fall, just months before primary voting begins.

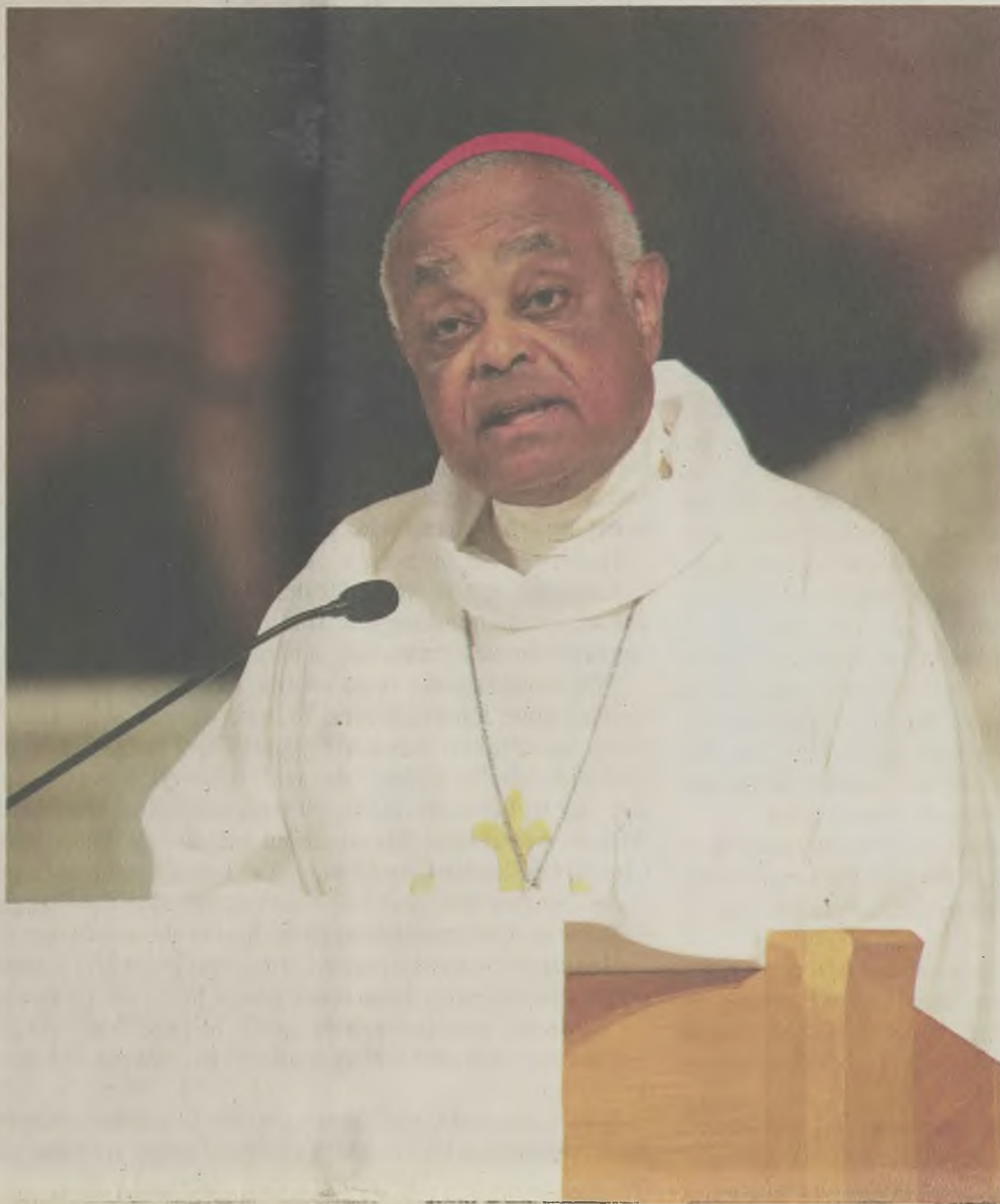
The rush of attention on Biden's behavior with women has raised questions about whether his hugs and shoulder squeezes are simply out of a different era or a new front in the MeToo movement that has put a spotlight on the actions of powerful men.

"It feels so much like some of the other MeToo stuff that's been floating around, that I'm afraid he might get tarred with that brush whether or not it's really warranted," said Mike Waggoner, a 70-year-old Democrat from Waterloo, Iowa. "This is such a sensitive area and an important area, I'm afraid it could just take him out."

As the scrutiny has intensified, Biden has kept the counsel of a small group of advisers who have been with him for years. The team appeared to respond slowly to Flores' assertions, first releasing a brief statement from a spokesman, then a longer statement from Biden himself about 36 hours later. Four more days passed before the former vice president's video response was released.

"It is a really difficult period before you announce when you are nonetheless a target," said David Axelrod, a longtime political adviser to President Barack Obama. "You're not wholly in a position to respond and yet you have to, and so that may account for the halting way in which this unfolded."

Riccardi reported from Denver. AP writer Alexandra Jaffe in Waterloo, Iowa, contributed to this report.



In this June 14, 2017 file photo, Archbishop Wilton D. Gregory speaks during a Mass to repent clergy sexual abuse and to pray for molestation victims, in Indianapolis. Pope Francis has named Atlanta Archbishop Wilton Gregory as the new archbishop of Washington D.C., choosing a moderate, and the first African-American, to lead the archdiocese that has become the epicenter of the clergy sex abuse crisis in the U.S. The 71-year-old Gregory replaces Cardinal Donald Wuerl, who resigned last year after being implicated in covering up abuse by a Pennsylvania grand jury report. (AP Photo/Darron Cummings, file)

## Pope names moderate Gregory as Washington, DC, archbishop

By Nicole Winfield and Jessica Gresko

WASHINGTON (AP) - Archbishop Wilton Gregory promised Catholics he would "rebuild your trust" after Pope Francis on

April 4 named him the new archbishop of Washington, D.C., the archdiocese that has become the epicenter of the clergy sex abuse crisis in the U.S.

Gregory, 71, the archbishop of Atlanta, is a moderate and the first African American to lead the Washington archdiocese. He replaces Cardinal Donald Wuerl, who resigned last year after a Pennsylvania grand jury accused him of covering up the abuse.

Gregory headed the U.S. bishops conference when it adopted a "zero-tolerance" abuse policy in 2002 to respond to the first wave of the scandal. He has run the Atlanta archdiocese since 2005 and is seen as a pastor very much in line with Francis' progressive vision of the church.

"This is obviously a moment fraught with challenges throughout our entire Catholic Church, certainly, but nowhere more so than in this local faith community," Gregory said at a news conference in Washington, where he was introduced by Wuerl. "And as in any family, challenges can only be overcome by a firmly articulated resolve and commitment to do better, to know Christ better, to love Christ better, to serve Christ better. I would be naive not to acknowledge the unique task that awaits us."

Gregory's appointment was first reported by Catholic News Agency.

It is the third major move by Francis to reshape the U.S. hierarchy, which over the previous two papacies took on a conservative tilt. Francis began elevating more moderate pastors in 2014, when he named Cardinal Blase Cupich as Chicago archbishop and followed up two years later by moving Joseph Tobin to Newark, New Jersey, and making him a cardinal.

While relatively small, the Washington archdiocese has always punched above its weight given its location in the nation's capital. Its archbishops traditionally are made cardinals, meaning Gregory could become the first African American cardinal.

The archdiocese, though, has become embroiled in the abuse crisis since its previous two leaders - Wuerl and Theodore McCarrick - were implicated in the scandal.

Francis in February defrocked McCarrick after a Vatican-backed investigation concluded he sexually abused minors and adults over his long career. It was the first time a cardinal had been dismissed from the priesthood for abuse.

Francis reluctantly accepted Wuerl's resignation in October after he lost the trust of his priests and parishioners in the months following the release of the Pennsylvania grand jury report. The report accused Wuerl of helping to protect some child-molesting priests while he was bishop of Pittsburgh from 1988 to 2006. Simultaneously, Wuerl faced widespread skepticism over his insistence that he knew nothing about McCarrick's misconduct, which was an open secret in U.S. and Vatican circles.

Gregory has responded by expressing his own anger, shame and disillusionment at the failures of the hierarchy. In an August statement after McCarrick resigned as a cardinal, he acknowledged his own respect for McCarrick had been "clearly misplaced."

"We've certainly given our faithful a lot of reasons to leave the church. I want to provide a few reasons to stay. I want to assure the people that I will be honest with them, that I will govern with sensitivity, that I will be approachable, available. I'm an ordinary human being," Gregory said April 4. "I have to tell you the truth, and I will."

Gregory is credited for his leadership of the U.S. church during a moment of crisis, when as president of the U.S. bishops conference he persuaded church leaders to adopt toughened penalties for abusers in 2002.

That said, the reform Gregory shepherded through explicitly excluded bishops from the "zero-tolerance" policy - a loophole that became evident with the McCarrick scandal. U.S. bishops are expected to address the gap at their upcoming meeting, where all eyes will likely be on Gregory.

Gregory's appointment was greeted with praise by the Rev. James Martin, who was invited last year by Gregory to give a talk in Atlanta on how the church should better minister to the LGBT community. The initiative drew criticism from some conservatives who accused Gregory of not upholding church teaching on homosexuality.

## Dred Scott case descendants meet at reconciliation event

RICHMOND, Va. (AP) - Descendants of a black slave who sued for his freedom and the U.S. Supreme Court justice who denied that freedom shared their stories at an event sponsored by Virginians for Reconciliation.

The Richmond Times-Dispatch reports Dred Scott descendant Lynne Jackson and Charlie Taney, a descendant of Chief Justice Roger Taney, spoke last week at the Virginia Union University.

Scott sued in 1847 seeking freedom for himself, his wife and their daughters. The case reached the Supreme Court in 1857. Taney's majority opinion that said no black people could ever be U.S. citizens was effectively overturned by the 13th and 14th Amendment after the Civil War.

Former Gov. Bob McDonnell recently formed the Reconciliation group to support racial healing through conversation and policy changes.

## Confederate monument in N. Carolina cemetery defaced again

(AP) - A Confederate monument in a North Carolina cemetery has been vandalized.

The News & Observer reports cement or another hard substance was smeared on the monument in Durham's Maplewood Cemetery. Durham police say the vandalism was reported April 7.

This is at least the second time vandals have defaced the monument created in 2014 by the Sons of Confederate Veterans. In 2015, "Black Lives Matter" and "Tear It Down" were found painted on the monument.

Another Confederate statue was torn down in 2017 outside a historic Durham courthouse that now houses county offices. And last year, protesters tore down a Confederate monument named "Silent Sam" at UNC-Chapel Hill.

To the northwest, Winston-Salem recently moved a Confederate statue from the grounds of a historic courthouse that has been turned into apartments.