

# VARIETY

## Joe Biden's DNC Videos Were Shot by An Oscar-Winning Documentarian

By [Jazz Tangcay](#)



Director [Davis Guggenheim](#) is no stranger to shooting films for the Democratic National Convention, the “An Inconvenient Truth” helmer and Co-founder of Concordia Studio has worked on campaign biofilms as far back as 2008 with then-candidate Barack Obama.

He has since filmed segments for the 2012 and 2016 campaigns, but in 2020 things were different. There was a global pandemic and the Democratic National Convention was going virtual. Despite the remote complications that quarantine production schedule entailed, Guggenheim leapt at the chance. The director knew these short films were of the utmost importance.

In an exclusive conversation with *Variety*, Guggenheim discusses how imperative it was to show the authentic Joe Biden to American voters.

### **How early were you approached to come on board and make the short films?**

I got an email from Stephanie Cutter who oversaw the production of the convention about ten weeks ago asking if I wanted to help out. I had been in quarantine for three or four months and I said, 'Yes.' I felt I needed something to feel good about and feel like I was contributing something to the world. I was also super worried about the election and wanted to do my part.

### **The first short was titled, "Never Just a Job," and shared the story of how Joe Biden took the train to work every day and his relationship with the Amtrak workers, what made that the ideal opener?**

My father is a documentary filmmaker who had made a film about Robert Kennedy from the 1968 convention. Kennedy had been assassinated months earlier and they asked him to make a film that played there, and I had a childhood memory of that.

I did the biofilm for Barack Obama in 2008 and that played in an open stadium with 50,000 people and on national TV. [But] this was different because there was no venue.

When you make a movie, you think how is this going to play, where is it going to play? I pitched this idea of instead of doing one traditional biofilm, 'What if we did a short film that did a deep dive that explored different facets of Joe Biden?'

You can't cover that much ground with the biofilms, so I just pulled together this wonderful team to help break down story ideas. The Amtrak one seemed wonderful. The interview with the conductor felt heartfelt and real because that's who Joe is, he understands the life of someone who works hard every day to make a living.

## **How did you walk the line of introducing Biden as a person to people who don't know him without exploiting the tragedy in his life?**

It's easier to tell a story about someone you've never met. It's a little harder to tell a story of someone you think you know. Everyone knows Joe Biden a little bit, right?

Each of these films was seen as a reset to do a deep dive into this one moment and this one characteristic of him. That was the core and tonal objective – how do you be authentic and real? Let's have other people speak to specific experiences of their time with Joe. So, whether it was Cindy McCain or the train conductor.

This was an opportunity to get to know him for real.

## **The final video, "Joe Biden" aired right before he accepts the nomination. What went into putting that together, especially under quarantine, and what did you want that specific video to say?**

This was the challenge – to tell the life story of, hopefully, our future president in ten minutes. How do you condense it? How do you find those key moments? Jay Cassidy, who edited "American Hustle" was one person I called. I asked him, 'Can you do this?' and he said, yes. It wasn't how or when, it was just a straightforward yes. We called the composer Danny Elfman and there was all this talent (Octavia Spencer contributed to the voiceover) and all these people who wanted to be a part of something. It was such a team spirit.

## **What was it like seeing the finished products play within the nightly events and seeing the reaction on social media?**

If you look at conventions over time, it's a ritual that happened before TV even existed. The pandemic changed the convention. I think it's extraordinary what the Biden campaign and the [DNC](#) pulled off. The technical challenges were so hard. They were getting content from all around the world, and there were all those live moments. Thousands of people were working on it and no one was in the same room. But there was something truly powerful about it. There was an urgency to the moment. It had a profound effect and came right into my living room. AS opposed to me watching an event and I'm not there. I thought it had a very visceral and powerful effect, just that it was so different. COVID-19 made it a much more intimate event.