Much is at stake for a nation when it is governed by ageing leaders with worsening physical and mental health.

When age and infirmity matter in politics

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Come 2024, United States President Joe Biden, who is now 79 years old, will be seeking a second term. As things stand, it's likely that he will be another face to join former president Donald Trump on the list of recent US presidents who have ridden out 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue on a wave of controversy. It's not just a matter of the policies he proposes, but more of what goes on behind the closed doors of the Oval Office. If recent history is any guide, the potential for interpersonal, political and personal crises is a real threat to national security.

The US Senate has made it a point to take on the largest challenges of the day, often at a time when the health of its most powerful members is at stake. It has been a tradition of American politics to delay or postpone votes until a member's health allows them to vote. In 2006, Senator Ted Kennedy was diagnosed with lung cancer, and he missed several votes while he underwent treatment. In 2009, Senator Arlen Specter was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, and he missed several votes while he underwent treatment.

All in all, nearly half of all US presidents have suffered serious illnesses or injuries during their terms, eight died in office. (One study estimated that nearly a third of the nation's first 37 presidents suffered some form of mental illness while in office.) And in almost all instances, these debilitating illnesses were not just shrouded in secrecy. Even John F. Kennedy's biographer surmised that "dealing with the Kennedy medical history is some ways like trying to uncover aspects of national vital statistics systems," but also covered with layers of deception.

President Abraham Lincoln fell into deep depression after losing his first son, and for the rest of his life, he continued to struggle with it. The 28th US President, John F. Kennedy, had Addison's disease, a rare but serious condition that can cause weight loss, muscle weakness, and skin problems. His wife, Jacqueline Kennedy, publicly acknowledged his illness, but she was also a fierce protector of her husband's image.

While many US presidents have dealt with mental health issues, few have been as open about their struggles as Barack Obama and Donald Trump. Obama has acknowledged his struggles with depression and anxiety, while Trump has been open about his use of psychoactive medications.

In recent years, the public has seen a growing awareness of mental health issues in politics. The President's mental health has been the subject of much speculation and concern, with many wondering how his health may affect his ability to lead.

Doctors predict that the proliferation of mental health issues in politics is likely to continue, as leaders face increasing pressure to perform at the highest level. It is important to remember that mental health is just as important as physical health, and that leaders should be supported in their efforts to take care of their well-being.

However, there is a growing recognition that mental health issues in politics are not just a matter of personal health, but also of national security. It is crucial that leaders are able to perform at their best, and that they are not hindered by their own health issues. It is important that we continue to push for greater awareness and support for mental health issues in politics, and that we work to create a culture that values the well-being of all leaders.