

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2021

Remarks Prior to a Virtual Meeting With Prime Minister Justin P.J. Trudeau of Canada

February 23, 2021

President Biden. Mr. Prime Minister, it's good to see you. And I wish I could reciprocate the hospitality you gave me when I visited Ottawa as Vice President in 2016. The sooner we get this pandemic under control, the better. And I look forward to seeing you in person in the future.

As you know, to state the obvious—we had a private talk about this a little while ago—the United States has no closer friend—no closer friend—than Canada. That's why you were my first call as President, my first bilateral meeting. And of course, my Vice President spent some time living up in Montreal for high school. And so our channel of communication is—are wide open.

As you know, we have a robust agenda today. And we're all best served when the United States and Canada work together and lead together in close coordination on a full range of issues we're going to discuss: COVID-19, economic recovery, climate change, refugees and migration, fighting for our democratic values on a global stage, and strengthening our own democracies at home.

We spoke about this at the G-7, but it's worth saying again: I believe the leaders of the major democracies, we have—as leaders of the major democracies, we have a responsibility to prove that democracy can still deliver for our people. There are a lot of leaders around the world who are trying to make the argument autocracy works better.

Empowering the full participation of our people, expanding opportunity and equity for everybody, ensuring the benefits of growth are shared broadly: that's how we're going to win the battle for the future.

So thank you again, Mr. Prime Minister, for your partnership and your enduring commitment to the U.S.-China relationship—U.S.-Canadian relationship. We're going to talk about China. And I'm looking forward to a very productive discussion.

The floor is yours, Mr. Prime Minister.

[At this point, Prime Minister Trudeau spoke via videoconference from Ottawa, Canada.]

Prime Minister Trudeau. Thank you very much, Mr. President. It's so good to see you, Joe. And it's such a great opportunity for us to sit down and talk not just about this extraordinary friendship between our two countries, but all the work we have to do together to get through COVID, but also to keep making sure we're pulling our weight around the world and making the world a better and safer place for everyone, not just with this pandemic, but with everything else as well.

It's a real pleasure to be able to see you today alongside Vice President Harris. I'm glad to be joined here by our Deputy Prime Minister, Chrystia Freeland, and our Foreign Minister, Marc Garneau, whose birthday it is today. So it's a special celebration for him.

Lots of things to talk about. Obviously, COVID and how we're going to keep our citizens safe is top of mind. But we're also going to dig into the recovery; how we move forward on creating good jobs for Canadians and Americans; strengthening the middle class; helping those working hard to join it. As we move forward, there's a lot to rebuild.

We're also going to talk about climate change. And thank you again for stepping up in such a big way on tackling climate change. U.S. leadership has been sorely missed over the past years.

And I have to say, as we're preparing the joint rollout and communiqué from this one, it's nice when the Americans are not pulling out all references to climate change and, instead, adding them in.

So we're really excited to be working with you on that. Lots more to do.

[Prime Minister Trudeau spoke in French, and no translation was provided. He then continued in English as follows.]

I'm really looking forward to engaging with you all on these issues over the coming hours, but especially looking forward to getting to know your whole team as well.

Vice President Harris, it's great to see you here. I'll turn it over to you now.

Vice President Kamala D. Harris. Thank you, Mr. Prime Minister. It is good to see you. It was good to speak to you on the 1st of February.

And as the President said, I spent many of my teenage years living in Montreal when my mother was teaching at McGill University and doing her research at the Jewish General Hospital there. So I have fond memories of my time in Montreal, and it certainly left me with a lasting impression about how much our two countries have in common in terms of shared values and priorities.

And as the President has said, we have a lot to do, each of us. And together we can do a lot of it in addressing COVID; in addressing the impact of the pandemic on our countries; looking at where we have possibilities to work together, not only in terms of the public health and economic struggles of our country, but also what we have in terms of shared values around addressing the challenges of climate change.

We look forward to working with you on that and many others. We are neighbors. We are friends, as a country. And the challenges that we face not only are, as we have said, about COVID and climate change; also, as the President will talk about and has mentioned, our challenges in terms of China and Russia and what we can do in terms of working together on that and working together in terms of strengthening and modernizing the U.N. and WTO.

So we look forward to working with you. It is good to speak with you. And I'll now turn it over to Deputy Prime Minister Freeland. And I look forward to hearing from you. Thank you.

[Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland spoke via videoconference from Ottawa, Canada.]

Deputy Prime Minister Freeland. Well, Madam Vice President, it gives me such pleasure to address that term directly to you. And I have to tell you, your election has been such an inspiration for women and girls across Canada, especially for Black women and girls and for South Asian women and girls. So many of them have told me that directly.

I am so looking forward to working with you and your administration on conquering COVID, on working together to be sure our economies can come roaring back.

I couldn't agree more with what the President says, that we have a real responsibility now—all of us—to show that democracy can deliver for our people: for Canadians, for Americans, and for the whole world. And with the friendship of everyone in this room, in that virtual room, I am pretty confident we're going to do it.

[Deputy Prime Minister Freeland spoke in French, and her remarks were translated by an interpreter as follows.]

Madam Vice President, we are very proud of you, and all the women and girls in Canada are very proud of you, of course. And I do hope that once COVID is over, we will be able to meet in

person. And indeed, French—I am, myself, an English speaker, and French is a difficult language to learn, but I do believe that is well worth it.

Vice President Harris. Moi aussi. Merci beaucoup. [Laughter]

President Biden. Well, before we go on, I want to make sure you know Antony Blinken, our Secretary of State, sitting here on the right. And the fellow down here on the right hand side is a guy named Jake Sullivan, and he's the National Security Adviser. And the National Security Council Senior Director for Western Hemisphere, Juan Gonzalez, who usually speaks Spanish to me, which I have trouble with as well.

I told you, Mr. Prime Minister, I took 5 years of French in school and college as well. And when I—every time I tried to speak it, I'd make such a fool of myself, I stopped trying. At least when I try Spanish and I make a fool of myself, they laugh with me. At any rate, thank you very much.

And the press is about to leave the room here, and we can get to business.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:16 p.m. from the Roosevelt Room at the White House.

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