

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2021

Remarks Prior to a Meeting With Prime Minister Boris Johnson of the United Kingdom and an Exchange With Reporters

September 21, 2021

President Biden. Well, it's a pleasure to welcome to the White House, the Oval Office, Prime Minister Johnson. I'm honored to have a chance to have him here, he—return a small amount of hospitality compared to all the hospitality he provided for the G-7 and our families and—in Cornwall. And since then, our countries have worked in close cooperation on a whole range of things, and our fellow democracies.

We continue to work on—we're going to talk about today—the ambitions we laid out at the G-7. And we're turning to our revitalized Atlantic Charter. We're going to make it something—we're going to turn it into real action so it makes a major—plays a major role in the challenges we face.

Earlier today I addressed the United Nations General Assembly, and I made clear that climate has to be the core area of action for all of us and—as we look ahead to the U.K.-hosted COP26, which I'm really anxious to attend in Glasgow in November, Mr. Prime Minister.

Prime Minister Johnson. Good. Fantastic.

President Biden. And we're promoting our——

Prime Minister Johnson. We need you there. Yes.

President Biden. Oh, we're going to be there.

Prime Minister Johnson. Fantastic.

President Biden. With bells on, as they say.

And we're going to also—our economies have to work together, including through our Build Back Better World initiative that we launched in Carbis—at Carbis Bay. And today we're going to discuss the next steps in all—on all of this, and as well as how the U.S. and U.K. can continue our cooperation in Afghanistan, in the Indo-Pacific, and around the world.

And I want to thank you again, Boris, for making the effort to be here. And I understand, Boris—I just want you to know, Boris—you came down on Amtrak, is that right?

Prime Minister Johnson. I did. And you're a living deity——

President Biden. I am.

Prime Minister Johnson. ——on Amtrak, I can tell you.

President Biden. I've traveled millions of miles. You think I'm joking.

Prime Minister Johnson. They love you.

President Biden. Well, they should. [*Laughter*] I traveled more on Amtrak than, I think—if I were a conductor, I'd be number one in seniority. [*Laughter*]

I've got to tell you a quick story that has nothing to do with anything. When I was Vice President, the Secret Service didn't like me traveling on Amtrak because there were too many options for people to cause trouble along the way. But I insisted I do it.

And one day, they put in the newspaper: "Biden travels one-million"—and I think—don't hold me to the exact number—I think it was—"three-hundred-and-fifty-thousand miles on Air Force Two."

And so I was walking up to the—up to—getting the train on that Friday. And a guy, who was the number-three guy from New Jersey in seniority as a conductor, walked up and grabbed me, and he goes like this: "Joey, baby!"—grabs my cheek. I thought the Secret Service was going to shoot him. *[Laughter]* And I said: "No, no. He's a friend."

He said, "Joey, big deal. 1,300,000 miles on Amtrak"—I mean, on Air Force Two. "Do you know how many miles you traveled on Amtrak?" And I said, No." He said, "Well, at the retirement dinner, we worked it out." He said, "Thirty-six years in the Senate; x number of years as"—at that point—"as Vice President; average 131 days a year, 257 miles a day. Joey, you traveled over 2 million miles. Big deal." *[Laughter]*

I thought they should name the railroad after me or something. But at any rate——

Prime Minister Johnson. They named the station after you. They told me that.

President Biden. Yes, they did do that.

Prime Minister Johnson. Yes, yes, yes—it's big news there.

President Biden. Anyway.

Prime Minister Johnson. Joe, I want to thank you. And I share your belief in transport infrastructure, particularly trains.

I want to thank you very much for the warm welcome today. And it's great to be with you in the White House. And this is a very important trip for us in the U.K., and we've seen some great progress just in the last period.

And it's great that the ban has been lifted on British beef and the people of the United States of America can eat British beef.

President Biden. And we're going to be working on lamb too, so——

Prime Minister Johnson. And the lamb. We're working on the lamb.

But what you did with the travel so that people can travel to the U.S. with two jabs is also fantastic and very welcome. We've been working on that for a long time.

But I think the most important thing today has been your speech, Joe, to UNGA, where you made a commitment on supporting the world to adapt to climate change, doubling the American commitment. That's very important for us.

And we've made a £11.6 billion commitment I made when I first became Prime Minister. But it's fantastic to see the United States really stepping up and showing a lead—a real, real lead.

And then, of course, there's the progress that we're making in the defense technology partnership that you've led and—with our Australian friends that I think has great potential to benefit the whole of the world and the security of the whole of the world.

So, Joe, thank you for having us. And I think, you know, we're boosting our shared agenda. We want to build back the world together with you. And I think we want to renew and strengthen our transatlantic bond. And it feels to me like it's going very, very well.

But I think—would it be okay if we just have a couple of questions? Just a couple of questions for the——

President Biden. Good luck.

Prime Minister Johnson. And I think we're going to be ruthless. [Laughter] We're going to be ruthless. I'm going to go to Harry Cole from The Sun.

Q. Mr. President——

President Biden. Hey, he—ask him the question, not me. [Laughter] No, I'm joking.

Prime Minister Johnson. I'll take it.

Q. Mr. President, is Britain still at the back of the queue for a trade deal—a free trade deal, as your predecessor, President Obama, promised?

Prime Minister Johnson. Well, I think he's asking a nice question.

British Teenager Killed in an Automobile Accident Involving a U.S. Citizen

Q. And may I just ask, what possible justification is there for Anne Sacoolas not to be extradited to the United Kingdom to face justice over the death of Harry Dunn?

President Biden. Two things: One, that latter case is being worked on. I was under the impression—but I don't know this, I want to be clear—I was under the impression there had been a civil settlement reached, but I don't know that.

Prime Minister Johnson. That's correct. That's correct.

President Biden. And based on what I've been told, it was not an intentional act. It was someone who was new to driving on the "wrong side of the road," quote, unquote.

And—but we're following—I'll follow up on that. I expressed my sympathies when it occurred, but I don't know the status of that case right now.

The other question was?

U.K.-U.S. Trade Relations

Q. A Brexit free trade deal with Britain. Is it——

President Biden. A Brexit free trade—well, we're going to talk about trade a little bit today, and we're going to have to work that through.

Prime Minister Johnson. Let me just say, on that, Harry, I mean, don't forget, folks, that we've settled the Boeing Airbus thing, which was a massive problem between us. So we're making a lot of progress, and to say nothing of the beef and the whiskey, which I already mentioned.

And just to kind of say on——

President Biden. He smiled when you said "the whiskey." [Laughter]

Prime Minister Johnson. Well, he's a grade-A ambassador for them.

On the Harry Dunn case, which is a very, very sad—very sad case, and everybody's sympathies are with the family of Harry Dunn, I know that the President has been personally trying to move things along, and I'm grateful for that.

We're going to take one more question.

Q. Prime Minister——

Prime Minister Johnson. I'm going to go to Beth [Beth Rigby, Sky News]

U.K.-U.S. Trade Relations/Northern Ireland Peace Agreement

Q. Thank you. President Biden, President Trump said that the U.K. was in front of the queue when it came to a trade deal. You seem to have a different approach. Is that because of your heritage, your concern about the Irish Protocol? Is that what's holding it back when it comes to doing this deal with the U.K.?

President Biden. I—they're two separate issues. On the deal with the U.K., that's continuing to be discussed. But on the protocols, I feel very strongly about those.

We spent an enormous amount of time and effort in the United States. It was a major bipartisan effort made. And I would not at all like to see—nor, I might add, would many of my Republican colleagues like to see—a change in the Irish courts that—the end result having a closed border again.

Prime Minister Johnson. That is absolutely right. And I—on that point, Joe, you know, we are completely at one. And I think nobody wants to see anything that interrupts or unbalances the Belfast Good Friday Accord—that's the Belfast Good Friday Agreement. That's the—I think——

Haitian Migrants at the U.S. Southern Border in Del Rio, Texas

Q. What's your response to the situation on the border, Mr. President?

President Biden. [Inaudible] Violence is not justified.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:05 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Anne Sacoolas, a U.S. citizen who was involved in a wrong-way traffic collision near the Royal Air Force Croughton station, a U.S. Air Force facility in Northamptonshire, England, on August 27, 2019, in which British teenager Harry Dunn was killed.

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