

Remarks at the Capitol Child Development Center in Hartford, Connecticut
October 15, 2021

The President. Thank you. Thank you, Barbara. As my colleagues have heard me say in a different venue, my mother would always say, "You're doing God's work." And you really are.

You know, I know that a lot of people are in desperate need of a facility like this in childcare. I didn't fully appreciate it as a young member of the county council when I was 27 years old. But when I got elected to the United States Senate when I was 29—it wasn't old enough to be sworn in yet—in the mean—between the time I got elected and the time I actually ultimately went to the Congress, I turned the eligible age of 30.

But also, in the meantime, I—there was an automobile accident that—my wife was Christmas shopping—and my daughter was killed, my wife was killed, and my two young boys, Beau and Hunter, were very badly injured and hospitalized for a long time. And so I didn't—I thought, "Well, I'll get some help." And I was making a decent salary as a U.S. Senator—\$42,000 a year. That was a decent salary. And I could not afford the childcare.

Everybody wonders why I commuted every day, 265 miles a day, to be back and forth with my children. I could afford the train; it was cheaper to be able to take every day so I could kiss my boys. I mean, it wasn't "Ozzie and Harriet," but we'd have breakfast in the morning and, when they got a little older, get them off to school. And I'd get on the train and come home in time to—if I got home in time to have dinner—they'd—it was seldom I'd get home in time to have my dinner, and they'd save their dessert, and I got to see them and kiss them goodnight and get in bed with them.

And so I—it made me realize how difficult it is for the vast majority of people who need help. I was lucky; I had a mother who was nearby, a sister who's my best friend who quit her job temporarily and moved in with her husband to help me raise my kids. And—but most people don't have that option. So I've been conscious of the concern and the lack of access and the lack of financial ability to have childcare for a long time.

And I want to thank the team here at the Capitol Development Center for welcoming us today. And I want to thank the excellent Connecticut leaders you have here. Ned, you're one of the best Governors in the United States of America. *[Applause]* No, you really are. You really are, because you stand up for what you believe in and you don't back down.

And Mr. Mayor—Luke—is an Afghan war veteran. We were talking about all the work he's done with the former Governor of Delaware, Jack Markell, now, who's placing Afghan refugees coming out of Afghanistan. And we're continuing to get people out. Thank you for what you do. I really mean it.

And Richard Blumenthal, who was, back in those days, the attorney general when my son Beau was still alive and he was attorney general. And not a joke, but he looked to Richard for help, and he gave it. And thanks for the way you took him under your wing. I really mean it, Richard. You were—it made a difference. You know what he thought of you.

And Chris Murphy, who has been not only a real soldier, but he has stood up and stuck up for me. And, Chris, you know, it matters. It matters when things are tight and you stand up and make the case, and I do appreciate it.

And John and I—John Larson and I go back a long way. *[Laughter]* And, Joe, you can't deny me. There's no way out. *[Laughter]* And Rosa DeLauro, who is—I don't have time; I don't want

to keep you. But the first time I came up this way, I was—my son was going to Yale Law School, and her mother was a committeeman. Was it committeeman?

Representative Rosa L. DeLauro. Alderwoman.

The President. Alderwoman. And I was up on a ladder helping him paint the place he had just rented, and I—this knock on the door, and this lovely woman came and said: "Where's Biden? Where's Joe Biden?" [Laughter] And I was up on a ladder, and I had paint all over me, and I was a sitting U.S. Senator, and I said, "I'm here." She said, "No, where's Biden?" [Laughter] "Where's Biden?"

And she brought the chief of police over to let him know that everything was going to be taken care of, and I'm going to—but your mother was something else. But you—that old expression, "The apple doesn't fall far from the tree." Rosie, you've been an incredible leader in all things having to do with the health and well-being of children and women. And we would not have had the legislation we're now trying to continue were it not for you.

And, Jim, you're the real deal. As well as, you know, Jahana. My—the comment I got from Jahana I get from everybody: "Where's Jill?" [Laughter] "Where's Jill?" I am Jill Biden's husband. [Laughter] She is now in—I think she's either in New Jersey or Virginia, I'm not sure, after teaching 15 credits this week at the community college. And she is out there making the case.

I'm here today to talk about what's fundamentally at stake right now, in my view, for the families not only of Connecticut—because you're ahead of the curve in some of what you've done on your own—but for our country.

For a long time, America set the pace across the globe. For most of the 21st century, we literally led the world by a significant margin in the investments we invested in our own people—in our people. Not only our roads, our highways, our bridges, but on our people and on our families.

And we didn't just build the Interstate Highway System and invest to win the space race. We also were among the first to provide access to free education beginning back at the turn of the 20th century. It was a distinction and a direct—a decision to invest in our children and our families, and it's a major reason why we were able to lead the world in the 21st century. We're one of the few nations in the world that had universal education for everyone, beginning in first—what was then first grade.

But somehow along the way, we sort of stopped investing in our people. Our infrastructure has fallen from the best in the world. According to the World Economic Forum, our infrastructure ranks 13th in the world: roads, bridges, highways, a whole range of things. But just as important is the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development now ranks America 35 out of 37 major countries when it comes to investing in early childhood education and care. Say it another way: The world is catching up and beginning to pass us.

Jill has—my community college Dr. Biden has an expression she's used for real: Any country that outeducates us will outcompete us. Any country that outeducates us will outcompete us.

We cannot be competitive in the 21st century in this global economy if we fail to invest. That's why I proposed two critical pieces of legislation being debated in Washington right now. They're both bills—they're not about left versus right; they're not about, you know, moderate versus progressive or anything else that pits one American against another. These bills, in my view, are literally about competitiveness versus complacency, about opportunity versus decay, and about leading the world or continuing to let the world move by us.

Folks—a lot of folks know what's at stake in the infrastructure bill. It's about rebuilding the arteries of our economy, putting people to work in good-paying jobs. The estimates from Wall Street: It would create up to 16 million new jobs over time, good-paying jobs, union jobs. Not 5 bucks an hour, 7, 15, but \$40, \$50 an hour. You know, prevailing wage you can raise a family on, you can live with some dignity and pride.

Bringing our roads and bridges up to speed. Replacing lead water pipes. There's over 40,000 schools across America where you've got to be worried when you go to the water fountain whether there's lead in the water and the children are being poisoned. You can turn on the faucet so that every place in America you ensure the water is clean and able to be drunk.

Laying transmission lines for a modern and resilient energy grid. Making high-speed internet affordable and available everywhere in America, from urban, suburban, rural. There's parts of the country that are just being left behind. And there are parts of the country in States that are economically prosperous that are being left behind.

Meeting the moment on the climate crisis and, in the process, creating millions of good-paying jobs. You know, I've had a couple conferences already held; I'm going to COP26 in Scotland shortly. And what I had—I guess I had 71 heads of state on the first one I did in the White House. And I said—and people are starting to talk about it now, not about me, about the idea: When I think climate, I think jobs, good-paying jobs, union jobs.

This is an opportunity. We're the only country in the world that has consistently turned difficulty into opportunity. We have a chance to not only make this world more livable, but to actually create greater opportunity for people: making landmark investments in public transit and rail and increasing efficiency, reducing emissions.

You know, there's millions of kids getting on school—diesel school buses and inhaling air, getting asthma. We could—they should be electric buses—electric buses. That's going to happen.

So, look, I'm going to—I have a tendency to say more than I need to say, because you all understand it, but the bottom line is: I wanted to come here today because too many folks in Washington still don't realize it isn't enough just to invest in our physical infrastructure, we also have to invest in our people.

And that's what my second bill does, the Build Back Better bill—initiative. Seeing children and educators here at this center is a perfect reminder of what our families need for—and our economy needs so badly to be able to thrive.

You know, you all know the statistics, particularly the teachers here: A child coming out of a single-parent house where there's real difficulty will hear, literally, a million fewer words spoken—not different words—spoken—than the child coming out of a middle class household. And so, no matter what you say, you start them at the same age—at age 6 or 7, 5 or 6—in school, they're already behind the curve. Already behind the curve.

How can we compete in a world if millions of America's parents, especially moms, can't be part of the workforce because they can't afford the cost of childcare—or eldercare, I might add? Eldercare—they're the sandwich generation getting crushed.

Here in Connecticut, the average annual cost to bring your toddler to a quality childcare center is about \$16,000 a year. That's what it is around the country—some places more, some places a little less. A lot of money. That's \$16,000 after taxes—after you pay your taxes. So the average two-parent family with two young kids spends 26 percent of their income on childcare every year.

My Build Back Better plan is going to change that. It's going to cut the cost of childcare for most Connecticut families literally in half. No middle class family will pay more than 7 percent of their income on childcare. None. Period.

And that's going to help parents get back into the workforce and make ends meet or maybe care for that—we have to do the same—I'm not going to talk about it today, but the other piece of it, you all know, it deals with eldercare. You've got 80,000 people waiting to qualify under Medicaid, and there's no spaces. We can afford to do this.

But at any rate, we also have to provide businesses with tax credits to build onsite care facilities. Look, you, in the legislature, were way ahead of the curve. You decided that for people working in the legislature, there should be a place for their children.

Well, you know, what we want to do is make sure that we encourage businesses to do the same, to get a significant tax cut to be able, if they have an onsite facility, to take of their workers' children when they show up. So you go to work with your child, and you have a serious facility onsite.

Well, studies show that when you have onsite care for—a children's center, businesses—businesses, the business itself—have less employee turnover, less absenteeism, and higher productivity. We can show you all those studies. It's real. We can't afford to lag behind other countries when they're investing in.

When America made 12 years of public education universal more than a century ago, it gave the best educated, best prepared workforce in the world to the rest of the world. But if we were designing public education today, we—all of a sudden, we had none, we said: "Okay, what are we going to do? We need free public education." Does anybody think we'd think 12 years was enough, in the second quarter of the 21st century?

The fact is, today, only about half of 3- and 4-year-olds in America are enrolled in early education childhood—childhood education, like you're doing here. In Germany, France, and the U.K., even Latvia, the number of children in those countries enrolled is 90 percent—90 percent.

My plan gets us back on track. It provides 2 years of high-quality preschool for every child in America. It also makes investments in higher education by increasing Pell grants. I don't know that I can get it done, but I also had proposed free community college, like you've done here in the State of Connecticut, to help students from lower income families attend community colleges and 4-year schools. It invests in Historically Black Colleges and Universities to make sure young people from every neighborhood have a shot at good-paying jobs in the future. We also extend this lady's child tax credit—[laughter]—which is finally a tax cut for the middle class.

Now, look, my friends on the other side never had any problem for adding \$2 trillion in tax cuts for the very wealthy. Look, I don't think you shouldn't be able to make a million or a billion dollars. I'm a capitalist. But guess what? I'm also listed for 36 years as the poorest man in the Congress. [Laughter] But I make big money now; I'm a President. [Laughter] But all kidding aside, I don't think we should punish anybody. But just pay your fair share. Just pay your fair share.

You know, the issue that has been championed by Rosa for years—in the past, if you paid taxes and had an income high enough that you were able to take the \$2,000-per-child deduction, you could actually write it off your taxes.

But how many families do you know of cops and firefighters and schoolteachers and the like that don't have—pay that much in tax because—they pay a tax, but there's nothing—you say you're going to get \$4,000 back for your kids. Well, you know, it's not refundable. It either comes off your tax bill, or you don't get it at all.

The American Rescue Plan, which these folks voted for as well, and I'm very proud of—it's sort of a real game changer and started our economy moving again—recognizes that people with lower incomes don't get the benefit of that tax rate because they don't have that much to deduct, so we make it refundable. We make it permanently refundable.

So you'd get that back over the years. You get—if you didn't have—if you only had \$1,000 in taxes and you had three kids, you'd end up in a situation where you'd get \$5,000 refundable to you. They would pay you; the Government would pay you. And we increased that amount in the near term to \$3,600 for every child under the age of 6; to \$3,000 for dependents between the ages of 6 and 17.

The money is already a game changer for working families. It's projected to cut child poverty in Connecticut—one of the wealthier States, like Delaware—in Connecticut, by 40 percent.

If we don't pass the Build—[*applause*]
—I mean, for real. It's a life changer. The Build Back Better Act says that you get the first half of it paid to you, and then the second half you get paid on a monthly basis. People are getting—hard-working families are getting a check in the mail on the 15th—today's the 15th, isn't it?—or their bank account, just like you get your Social Security check, but it's for your children. It's for being able to raise your kids.

That monthly tax cut for parents is going to end in just a couple of months. And it's going to impact families of 61 million kids right at the holidays when the winter heating costs are going up, when we need to keep the taxes for families going down.

The bottom line is this: When you give working families a break, we don't—we're not just raising their quality of life; we're positioning our country to compete in the future.

You know, when I talked to all your folks out in the playground, and as I joked, everybody knows I like kids better than people—fortunately, they like me. That's why, maybe, I like them. [*Laughter*] But all kidding aside, you all talked about it. You talked about what it means to the families of these children. And granted, you had to cut way back, and because of a lot of things happening, things aren't the same as they were.

But these bills are about strengthening the economy for decades to come. Both of these bills spend out over 10 years. Take the infrastructure bill: All those investments in roads, bridges, highways, high-speed internet, water—clean water—everything would represent less than one-half of 1 percent of our economy each year if you add it all up over those years. And the cost of the Build Back Better bill, in terms of adding to the deficit, is zero.

So, when I hear people say it costs \$3.5 trillion—and to be honest with you, we're probably not going to get \$3.5 trillion this year; we're going to get something less than that. But I'm going to negotiate. I'm going to get it done "with the grace of God and the good will of the neighbors and the creek not rising," as my grandpop would say. [*Laughter*] But all kidding aside, we're going to keep coming and—because the more we demonstrate it works, the more we can do.

It's paid for because big corporations and the very wealthy ought to start paying their fair share. Let me be clear: Nobody—and I—since I got elected, and when I was campaigning—nobody who makes under \$400,000 a year, which is a lot of money, will see their taxes go up one single penny. Nobody. Not one. That's why, in the highway bill, I didn't add gas tax, so I could keep that commitment. In fact, this plan cuts taxes for working people.

There is no reason why, as I said, billionaires should pay a lower tax rate—literally a lower tax rate—than a schoolteacher and a firefighter, a couple. So—and that's what's happening now.

It isn't right that 55 of our Fortune 400 [500]* companies—the largest companies in America—last year, 55 of the five—Fortune 500 paid zero in taxes, and they made \$40 billion in profit. I'm glad they made a profit. Keep people employed. I mean that sincerely, but pay your fair share. Just pay a decent portion of what we lay out in these—this piece of legislation.

And by the way, I've had a number of Fortune 500 companies come to me and say: "You're right. We can pay a higher tax than we're paying now." Because they understand the impact if we don't invest like we have to on their long-term health and well-being.

This needs to change. Working folks understand it. That's why, despite the attacks and misinformation, my plan still has the overwhelming support of the American people when they're told what's in it. They understand that when families have a little more breathing room, America has a lot better shot.

My dad used to say—for real—my dad was a well-read, well-bred man who was—regretted his whole life he never got a chance to go to college. And he worked like heck. He'd always come home for dinner and then go back to work.

And I remember, we lived in a four-bedroom, split-level home with four kids and a grandpop. And you know, my bed was against the wall where my parents' bed was against the adjacent wall. I remember, one night, I could tell my dad was just so restless. I was in high school. The next morning, I asked my mom, I said, "What's the matter with Dad, Mom?" She said, "Well, honey, he—his company just told him they're going to do away with health insurance—no health insurance."

Well, you know what? My dad's not—we weren't poor. We were—my dad made, probably, on average, in those days, \$20-, \$22-, \$25,000 dollars a year, which is a decent salary. But he used to say: "Everybody is entitled to just a little bit of breathing room. Just a little bit." A little bit of breathing room. You know, they know this is about dignity and respect. It's about building this economy from the bottom up and the middle out.

I've never seen a time—and some of you may have—beyond my colleagues in the Congress and in the press—may have your Master's or Doctor degrees in economics. Name me a single time in American history when the middle class was doing well that the wealthy didn't do very, very well. Name me a time. One single time in American history. So we're not hurting anybody; we're just making sure everybody gets a shot.

Let me close with this, and this is not hyperbole: The world is watching. Autocrats believe that the world is moving so rapidly that democracies cannot generate consensus quickly enough to get things done. Not a joke. I've had these—I've had hours and hours and hours of meetings and personal conversations with Xi Jinping.

I spent more time with him, I believe, than any other world leader has, when I was Vice President and now, on the phone. Every time he calls or we talk to one another, it's an hour—it's a conversation between an hour and a half and 2½ hours. Not a joke. My word. But he doesn't think democracies can compete, because they can't react quickly enough. In my summit with Putin in Switzerland, they're betting democracies can't compete, we can't move quickly enough.

I'm heading to the G-20, came back from the G-7. You know how they measure? They don't measure us based on the size of our military. They don't measure us on how much power we have that way. They measure—want to know can we get anything done. Not a joke. And you—many of you travel internationally. Can we get anything done? "Can you put anything together to get something done in America?"

* White House correction.

So, folks, they're betting that we won't respond to this inflection point in history. But I've always said, and I mean it—some of you guys who work with me know this. I've said it a thousand times: It's never a good bet to get—to bet against the American people. Never a good bet.

So it's time for us to invest in ourselves, show the world that American democracy works. We've always led the world not by the example of our physical power, but by the power of our example. That's why the world has followed. And given, as I said, half a chance, there's not a single, solitary thing that we can't achieve if we do it together.

So I'm hopeful. There's a lot of questions the press is going to want to ask me, I know, about how are the negotiations going and are we going to get this done and so on. Well, I told you before what my neurosurgeon years ago said when I had that aneurysm. He said, "Your problem"—and I was then a Senator—"Your problem, Senator, is you're a congenital optimist."

But I'm convinced we're going to get this done. I'm convinced we're going to get it done. We're not going to get \$3.5 trillion. We'll get less than that, but we're going to get it. And we're going to come back and get the rest.

So I want to thank you all. And God bless you. And I know you're asking me about President Clinton. I've been changing—exchanging calls. He seems to be, God willing——

[At this point, the President knocked on the podium.]

——doing well. And so, when I talk to him, I'll let you all know.

But in the meantime, thank you for taking the time to be here. And I've—I say this again, and the press heard me say it: For all you elected officials, it's like a busman's holiday for you. *[Laughter]* Coming to have to listen to another politician speak.

But I am really—and I mean this without exception—I'm so proud to be associated with each one of you. You're honorable, decent, smart women and men. And there's a lot we can get done. So thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:43 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to Barbara Jo Warner, codirector, Capitol Child Development Center, who introduced the President;; Gov. Edward M. "Ned" Lamont, Jr., of Connecticut; Mayor Luke Bronin of Hartford, CT; former Gov. Jack A. Markell of Delaware, in his capacity as White House Coordinator for Operation Allies Welcome; Sens. Richard Blumenthal and Christopher S. Murphy; Reps. John B. Larson, Joseph D. Courtney, James A. Himes, and Jahana F. Hayes; President Xi Jinping of China; and President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin of Russia. He also referred to his sister Valerie Biden Owens and her husband John T. Owens and his brothers James and Francis; and H.R. 3684.

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Locations: Hartford, CT.

Names: Biden, Francis W.; Biden, James B.; Biden, Jill T.; Biden, R. Hunter; Blumenthal, Richard; Bronin, Luke; Clinton, William J.; Courtney, Joseph D.; DeLauro, Rosa L.; Hayes, Jahana F.; Himes, James A.; Lamont, Edward M. "Ned," Jr.; Larson, John B.; Markell, Jack A.; Murphy, Christopher S.; Owens, John T.; Owens, Valerie Biden; Putin, Vladimir Vladimirovich; Warner, Barbara Jo; Xi Jinping.

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nations; Communications : Broadband and wireless technologies; Connecticut : Capitol Child Development Center in Hartford; Connecticut : Governor; Connecticut : President's visit; Economy, national : Household income and wages; Economy, national : Poverty; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Education : Early childhood education programs; Education : Global competitiveness; Education : Postsecondary education :: Historically Black Colleges and Universities; Education : Postsecondary education :: Pell grants; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth; Energy : Hybrid and alternative fuel vehicles :: Promotion efforts; Energy : Infrastructure and grid improvements; Environment : Carbon emissions, reduction efforts; Environment : Climate change; Environment : Lead service lines, replacement efforts; Environment : United Nations Climate Change Conference; Health and medical care : Medicare and Medicaid; Infrastructure, national improvement efforts; Labor issues : Unions :: Labor movement and organized labor; Legislation, proposed : Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act; Russia : President; Taxation : Child tax credit; Taxation : Corporate tax rates; Taxation : Tax Code, reform; Taxation : Tax relief; Transportation : Highway system, modernization efforts; Transportation : Mass transit and rail infrastructure, improvement efforts; United Nations : Framework Convention on Climate Change; White House Office : Operation Allies Welcome, White House Coordinator for.

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