

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2022

Remarks on United States Democracy in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
September 1, 2022

My fellow Americans, please, if you have a seat, take it.

I speak to you tonight from sacred ground in America: Independence Hall in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. This is where America made its Declaration of Independence to the world more than two centuries ago with an idea, unique among nations, that in America, we're all created equal. This is where the United States Constitution was written and debated. This is where we set in motion the most extraordinary experiment of self-government the world has ever known with three simple words: "We the People." We the people.

These two documents and the ideas they embody—equality and democracy—are the rock upon which this Nation is built. They are how we became the greatest nation on Earth. They are why, for more than two centuries, America has been a beacon to the world.

But, as I stand here tonight, equality and democracy are under assault. We do ourselves no favor to pretend otherwise. So tonight I have come this place where it all began to speak as plainly as I can to the Nation about the threats we face, about the power we have in our own hands to meet these threats, and about the incredible future that lies in front of us if only we choose it.

We must never forget: We, the people, are the true heirs of the American experiment that began more than two centuries ago. We, the people, have burning inside each of us the flame of liberty that was lit here at Independence Hall, a flame that lit our way through abolition, the Civil War, suffrage, the Great Depression, world wars, civil rights.

That sacred flame still burns now in our time as we build an America that is more prosperous, free, and just. That is the work of my Presidency, a mission I believe in with my whole soul.

But first, we must be honest with each other and with ourselves. Too much of what's happening in our country today is not normal. Donald Trump and the MAGA Republicans represent an extremism that threatens the very foundations of our republic.

Now, I want to be very clear—[*applause*]*—*very clear up front: Not every Republican, not even the majority of Republicans, are MAGA Republicans. Not every Republican embraces their extreme ideology. I know because I've been able to work with these mainstream Republicans.

But there's no question that the Republican Party today is dominated, driven, and intimidated by Donald Trump and the MAGA Republicans, and that is a threat to this country.

These are hard things. But I'm an American President, not a President of red America or blue America, but of all America. And I believe it's my duty—my duty—to level with you, to tell the truth no matter how difficult, no matter how painful.

And here, in my view, is what is true: MAGA Republicans do not respect the Constitution. They do not believe in the rule of law. They do not recognize the will of the people.

They refuse to accept the results of a free election. And they're working right now, as I speak, in State after State to give power to decide elections in America to partisans and cronies, empowering election deniers to undermine democracy itself.

MAGA forces are determined to take this country backwards, backwards to an America where there is no right to choose, no right to privacy, no right to contraception, no right to marry who you love.

They promote authoritarian leaders, and they fan the flames of political violence that are a threat to our personal rights, to the pursuit of justice, to the rule of law, to the very soul of this country.

They look at the mob that stormed the United States Capitol on January 6—brutally attacking law enforcement—not as insurrectionists who placed a dagger to the throat of our democracy, but they look at them as patriots.

And they see their MAGA failure to stop a peaceful transfer of power after the 2020 election as preparation for the 2022 and 2024 elections. They tried everything last time to nullify the votes of 81 million people. This time, they're determined to succeed in thwarting the will of the people.

That's why respected conservatives, like Federal Circuit Court Judge Michael Luttig, has called Trump and the extreme MAGA Republicans, quote, a "clear and present danger" to our democracy.

But while the threat to American democracy is real, I want to say as clearly as we can: We are not powerless in the face of these threats. We are not bystanders in this ongoing attack on democracy.

There are far more Americans—far more Americans—from every background and belief who reject the extreme MAGA ideology than those that accept it. And, folks, it is within our power, it's in our hands—yours and mine—to stop the assault on American democracy.

I believe America is at an inflection point, one of those moments that determine the shape of everything that's to come after. And now America must choose: to move forward or to move backwards? To build the future or obsess about the past? To be a nation of hope and unity and optimism, or a nation of fear, division, and of darkness?

MAGA Republicans have made their choice. They embrace anger. They thrive on chaos. They live not in the light of truth, but in the shadow of lies.

But together—together—we can choose a different path. We can choose a better path: forward, to the future; a future of possibility; a future to build and dream and hope. And we're on that path, moving ahead.

I know this Nation. I know you, the American people. I know your courage. I know your hearts. And I know our history. This is a nation that honors our Constitution. We do not reject it. This is a nation that believes in the rule of law. We do not repudiate it. This is a nation that respects free and fair elections. We honor the will of the people. We do not deny it. And this is a nation that rejects violence as a political tool. We do not encourage violence.

We are still an America that believes in honesty and decency and respect for others, patriotism, liberty, justice for all, hope, possibilities. We are still, at our core, a democracy.

And yet history tells us that blind loyalty to a single leader and a willingness to engage in political violence is fatal to democracy.

For a long time, we've told ourselves that American democracy is guaranteed, but it's not. We have to defend it, protect it, stand up for it, each and every one of us.

That's why tonight I'm asking our Nation to come together, unite behind the single purpose of defending our democracy regardless of your ideology. We're all called, by duty and conscience, to confront extremists who will put their own pursuit of power above all else.

Democrats, Independents, mainstream Republicans: We must be stronger, more determined, and more committed to saving American democracy than MAGA Republicans are to destroying American democracy.

We, the people, will not let anyone or anything tear us apart. Today, there are dangers around us we cannot allow to prevail. We hear—you've heard it—more and more talk about violence as an acceptable political tool in this country. It's not. It can never be an acceptable tool.

So I want to say this plain and simple: There is no place for political violence in America. Period. None. Ever.

We saw law enforcement brutally attacked on January the 6th. We've seen election officials, poll workers—many of them volunteers of both parties—subjected to intimidation and death threats. And—can you believe it?—FBI agents just doing their job as directed, facing threats to their own lives from their own fellow citizens.

On top of that, there are public figures—today, yesterday, and the day before—predicting and all but calling for mass violence and rioting in the streets. This is inflammatory. It's dangerous. It's against the rule of law. And we, the people, must say: This is not who we are.

Ladies and gentlemen, we can't be pro-insurrectionist and pro-American. They're incompatible. We can't allow violence to be normalized in this country. It's wrong. We each have to reject political violence with all the moral clarity and conviction this Nation can muster. Now. We can't let the integrity of our elections be undermined, for that is a path to chaos.

Look, I know politics can be fierce and mean and nasty in America. I get it. I believe in the give-and-take of politics, in disagreement and debate and dissent.

We're a big, complicated country. But democracy endures only if we, the people, respect the guardrails of the republic; only if we, the people, accept the results of free and fair elections; only if we, the people, see politics not as total war, but mediation of our differences.

Democracy cannot survive when one side believes there are only two outcomes to an election: either they win or they were cheated. And that's where MAGA Republicans are today. They don't understand what every patriotic American knows: You can't love your country only when you win. It's fundamental.

American democracy only works only if we choose to respect the rule of law and the institutions that were set up in this chamber behind me, only if we respect our legitimate political differences.

I will not stand by and watch—I will not—the will of the American people be overturned by wild conspiracy theories and baseless, evidence-free claims of fraud. I will not stand by and watch elections in this country stolen by people who simply refuse to accept that they lost. I will not stand by and watch the most fundamental freedom in this country—the freedom to vote and have your vote counted—and—be taken from you and the American people.

Look, as your President, I will defend our democracy with every fiber of my being, and I'm asking every American to join me.

[At this point, there was a disruption in the audience.]

Throughout our history, America has often made the greatest progress coming out of some of our darkest moments, like you're hearing from that bullhorn. I believe we can and we must do that again, and we are.

MAGA Republicans look at America and see carnage and darkness and despair. They spread fear and lies, lies told for profit and power. But I see a very different America, an America with

an unlimited future, an America that is about to take off. I hope you see it as well. Just look around.

I believed we could lift America from the depths of COVID, so we passed the largest economic recovery package since Franklin Delano Roosevelt. And today, America's economy is faster, stronger than any other advanced nation in the world. We have more to go.

I believed we could build a better America, so we passed the biggest infrastructure investment since President Dwight D. Eisenhower. And we've now embarked on a decade of rebuilding the Nation's roads, bridges, highways, ports, water systems, high-speed internet, railroads.

I believed we could make America safer, so we passed the most significant gun safety law since President Clinton.

I believed we could go from being the highest cost of prescriptions in the world to making prescription drugs and health care more affordable, so we passed the most significant health care reforms since President Obama signed the Affordable Care Act.

And I believed we could create a clean energy future and save the planet, so we passed the most important climate initiative ever, ever, ever.

The cynics and the critics tell us nothing can get done, but they're wrong. There is not a single thing America cannot do, not a single thing beyond our capacity if we do it together. It's never easy. But we're proving that in America, no matter how long the road, progress does come.

Look, I know the last year—few years have been tough. But today, COVID no longer controls our lives. More Americans are working than ever. Businesses are growing. Our schools are open. Millions of Americans have been lifted out of poverty. Millions of veterans once exposed to toxic burn pits will now get what they deserve for their families and the compensation.

American manufacturing has come alive across the Heartland, and the future will be made in America, no matter what the White supremacists and the extremists say.

I made a bet on you, the American people, and that bet is paying off. Proving that from darkness—the darkness of Charlottesville, of COVID, of gun violence, of insurrection—we can see the light. Light is now visible. Light that will guide us forward not only in words, but in actions: actions for you, for your children, for your grandchildren, for America.

Even in this moment, with all the challenges we face, I give you my word as a Biden: I've never been more optimistic about America's future. Not because of me, but because of who you are. We're going to end cancer as we know it. Mark my words. We're going to create millions of new jobs in a clean energy economy. We're going to think big. We're going to make the 21st century another American century, because the world needs us to.

That's where we need to focus our energy, not in the past, not on divisive culture wars, not on the politics of grievance, but on a future we can build together.

The MAGA Republicans believe that for them to succeed, everyone else has to fail. They believe America—not like I believe about America. I believe America is big enough for all of us to succeed, and that is the Nation we're building: a nation where no one is left behind.

I ran for President because I believed we were in a battle for the soul of this Nation. I still believe that to be true. I believe the soul is the breath, the life, and the essence of who we are. The soul is what makes us "us."

The soul of America is defined by the sacred proposition that all are created equal in the image of God; that all are entitled to be treated with decency, dignity, and respect; that all deserve

justice and a shot at lives of prosperity and consequence; and that democracy—democracy—must be defended, for democracy makes all these things possible. Folks, and it's up to us.

Democracy begins and will be preserved in we, the people's, habits of heart, in our character: optimism that is tested yet endures, courage that digs deep when we need it, empathy that fuels democracy, the willingness to see each other not as enemies, but as fellow Americans.

Look, our democracy is imperfect. It always has been.

Notwithstanding those folks you hear on the other side there. They're entitled to be outrageous. This is a democracy. But history and common sense—[*applause*]—good manners is nothing they've ever suffered from.

But history and common sense tell us that opportunity, liberty, and justice for all are most likely to come to pass in a democracy. We have never fully realized the aspirations of our founding, but every generation has opened those doors a little bit wider to include more people who have been excluded before.

My fellow Americans, America is an idea, the most powerful idea in the history of the world. And it beats in the hearts of the people of this country. It beats in all our hearts. It unites America. It is the American creed.

The idea that America guarantees that everyone be treated with dignity. It gives hate no safe harbor. It installs in everyone the belief that no matter where you start in life, there's nothing you can't achieve.

That's who we are. That's what we stand for. That's what we believe. And that's precisely what we are doing: opening doors, creating new possibilities, focusing on the future. And we're only just beginning.

Our task is to make our Nation free and fair, just and strong, noble and whole. And this work is the work of democracy, the work of this generation. It is the work of our time, for all time.

We can't afford to have—leave anyone on the sidelines. We need everyone to do their part. So speak up. Speak out. Get engaged. Vote, vote, vote.

And if we all do our duty—if we do our duty in 2022 and beyond—then ages still to come will say we—all of us here—we kept the faith. We preserved democracy. We heeded our—we heeded not our worst instincts, but our better angels. And we proved that, for all its imperfections, America is still the beacon to the world, an ideal to be realized, a promise to be kept.

There's nothing more important, nothing more sacred, nothing more American. That's our soul. That's who we truly are. And that's who must—we must always be.

I have no doubt—none—that this is who we will be and that we'll come together as a nation; that we'll secure our democracy; that for the next 200 years, we'll have what we had the past 200 years: the greatest nation on the face of the Earth.

We just need to remember who we are. We are the United States of America. The United States of America.

And may God protect our Nation, and may God protect all those who stand watch over our democracy. God bless you all. Democracy. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:03 p.m. at Independence National Historical Park. In his remarks, he referred to former President Donald J. Trump; and J. Michael Luttig, former judge, U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : U.S. democracy, remarks in Philadelphia, PA.

Locations: Philadelphia, PA.

Names: Clinton, William J.; Luttig, J. Michael; Obama, Barack; Trump, Donald J.

Subjects: Armed Forces, U.S : Servicemembers :: Environmental exposures in war zones; Business and industry : Automobile industry :: Improvement; Civil rights : Privacy; Civil rights : Same-sex marriage; Diseases : Cancer research, prevention, and treatment; Diseases : Coronavirus, domestic prevention efforts; District of Columbia : 2021 civil unrest and violence at U.S. Capitol; Economy, national : Improvement; Elections : 2020 Presidential and congressional elections; Elections : 2022 congressional elections; Elections : Election system security, strengthening efforts; Elections : Voter participation; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth; Energy : Alternative and renewable sources and technologies :: U.S. production; Environment : Carbon emissions, reduction efforts; Health and medical care : Abortion; Health and medical care : Contraception and family planning; Health and medical care : Health insurance reforms; Health and medical care : Prescription drugs, affordability and costs; Infrastructure, national improvement efforts; Justice, Department of : Bureau of Investigation, Federal; Law enforcement and crime : Gun control; Law enforcement and crime : Gun violence, prevention efforts; Pennsylvania : President's visits; Presidency, U.S. : U.S. democracy, remarks in Philadelphia, PA; Veterans : Health and medical care; Virginia : 2017 civil unrest and violence in Charlottesville.

DCPD Number: DCPD202200752.