

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2023

Remarks on Signing an Executive Order on Increasing Access to High-Quality Care and Supporting Caregivers

April 18, 2023

The President. Well, thank you, Kezia, and thank you for that introduction.

And former Speaker Pelosi, Members of the Congress, members of union labor that are here today that make a lot of this possible—so many of you—thank you for being here.

The Vice President is in Nevada today fighting for reproductive rights for women, but I know she wanted to be here as well because this is an issue she's worked on her whole career.

And I want to thank Members of the Congress who have spent decades in the trenches fighting for this issue. And I want to thank the advocates and the proud union members who are here. Without you, none of this progress, in my view, would be possible.

And by the way, that's why every worker needs to be free to make the choice to join a union.

And thanks to you, the care workers and family caregivers who are doing God's work taking care of our children, our parents, and those we love so dearly. You care for the people we value the most in the whole world. And I want you to know how much we value you. And I mean that.

We're here today to take action on an issue that's fundamental to who we are as a nation, who we are as a country: How we do—how do we treat the people we care so much about, who needs the most help—our children, the people we love, people with disabilities, including veterans? And how do we value those caring for them—childcare workers, nurses, homecare workers, family caregivers?

The Executive order I'm about to sign is the most comprehensive set of actions any administration has taken to date to increase access to high-quality childcare and long-term care and support for the caregivers.

You know, under this order, almost every Federal agency will collectively take over 50 actions to provide more peace of mind for families and dignity for care workers and—who deserve jobs with good pay and good benefits.

The Executive order doesn't require any new spending. It's about making sure taxpayers will get the best value for the investments they've already made. For example, we'll use last year's increase in Head Start funding to take steps to recruit and retain workers by increasing wages so that families who need affordable care can get it.

Like I called for in my State of the Union Address, we're going to improve long-term care by strengthening staffing standards at nursing homes. And I've also—and I also instructed the Department of Health and Human Services to figure out how homecare workers can get the pay they deserve with the money already allocated.

I'm directing the VA—the Veterans Administration—to cut redtape and give veterans who need assistance at home more flexibility to pick their own caregivers. And we've heard directly from the veterans that this is one of the top priorities for them—one of their top priorities. To ensure we have enough care workers, we're expanding partnerships with community colleges, registered apprenticeship programs, and the America Corps [AmeriCorps; White House correction].

You know, more than one in every five adults is a family caregiver. This order recognizes the labor of love and makes sure family caregivers are involved and informed when a hospital discharges the one they love, that the caregivers know about the Medicare benefits their loved one qualifies for, that caregivers of veterans have access to mental health support.

Folks, there's a lot we can do. We're doing all of this. Why? Because right now the cost of care is too high for seniors in nursing homes, for working families with young children.

Pay for care workers is too low. And that's why so many are leaving the whole endeavor. In fact, half the long-term care workforce and nearly 20 percent of childcare workforce leave their jobs each year, making it even harder—harder—for families to find the help they need. And family members are too often forced to leave their own good jobs behind to stay home to be with mom and dad.

The United States of America—we should have no one—there should—no one should have to choose between caring for the parents who raise them, the children who depend on them, or the paycheck they rely on to take care of both.

You know, too many folks lie awake at night wondering: "If mom can't take care of herself at home, what are we going to do? She'll have to move into a nursing home. Are we going to be able to afford it? Can I still afford to get the kids through college and save for retirement? How do I do it all? If I take that better job with the better pay, longer hours, will I be able to take care of my kids, or will it cost me more than I get the raise in the paycheck I'm about—the new job I'm about to have?"

If you live in a major American city, you can pay more than \$17,000 a year, as all of you know, per child for childcare in order to be able to go to work. And for a lot of families, that's more than you pay for your rent, your mortgage, or a college education for your children.

It can—all—you can all imagine that young couple expecting their first child, thinking they should be excited really excited, but instead they're a little bit scared; they've already need two paychecks to make ends meet now. Are they going to be able to do it? Are they going to be able to do it—keep the job, and are they going to be able to afford childcare when the baby comes?

Meanwhile, long-term care costs for the elderly or people with disabilities are up 40 percent. Costs are up 40 percent over the past decade. Some of you have had to spend your own retirement savings to care for your parents.

Imagine a dad living in a house his whole life, but he can't manage his own house anymore. He has trouble getting around. He needs just a little help to stay home, someone to just deliver the dinner, just to be able to shovel the sidewalk, et cetera, just to be able to stay where he was. Well, who's going to tell dad? You probably had that conversation, some of you. Who's going to tell dad he can't stay in the house, you can't stay home anymore, you've got to go to a nursing home?

Millions of Americans are stuck in the middle, in part of so-called "sandwich generation," caring for young children and elderly parents at the same time. And it's overwhelming.

I get it. I was a single parent for 5 years with two young children after my wife and daughter were killed in an accident. Thank God I had family to rely on.

And there's a reason why, by the way, a lot of people don't move beyond where their families are even though they have other opportunities: They can't afford to.

My sister, my brother, my brother-in-law, my mother, they all chipped in. My sister and her husband gave up their home and moved into where I lived just to be there to help me with my kids. Folks, you know, I couldn't have done it without their help. I couldn't have made it.

And I was making a good salary. I was making, I think, we—I got paid \$45,000 a year then. And that was a—that more money than I ever made in my life. But I couldn't possibly—and that's why I commuted every single day for 36 years so I could be home, because I couldn't sell my home and get reelected without having a home in Delaware. I couldn't move down here and afford it. But—and I had—but I had a big family. I had help.

I often ask myself what the—in God's name would I have done—not a joke—had I not had the family I had.

Over the years, Jill and I took care of both our parents—all four of our parents—well, not—they didn't have to take all four; one died suddenly. But my point is, we were with our parents to the very end. We could do it. We could afford to do it because of where we were, and we had housing to be able to bring them in. We understand.

And the pandemic, we made it even clearer just how hard it is for millions of working and middle class families to provide care for their families.

It's not just how important the care economy is to the entire economy. It's when people have to leave the labor force and can't to—or can't enter it in the first place because of caregiving responsibilities. They can't fully participate in the economy, and that drags down the whole Nation's productivity and growth, as it—overall.

Care work is demanding, as many of you in this audience know. It requires serious skill, but these workers are among the lowest paid workers in the country.

As soon as I got into office, I signed the American Rescue Plan to help millions of families afford childcare.

As a consequence, we were able to keep 200,000 childcare advisers—providers, many of them in small, women-owned businesses, keep their doors open during the pandemic. Taking care as many as 9.6 million children during the pandemic because of that act.

One-third of childcare providers said they would have to shut down for good without the help. Instead, the American Rescue Plan helped them stay afloat and, in many cases, increased pay for the childcare workers.

It doesn't help—it also helped States expand and strengthen Medicaid home care programs.

We also increased Childcare and Development Block Grants, helping more low-income families afford childcare.

You know, we issued the first-ever and much-needed National Strategy on Support Family Caregivers. And it—[applause]—that was—Nancy, thank you.

And to receive Federal dollars through the CHIPS and Science Act—which, I might point out, has already generated \$200 billion in investment in the United States—commitments. Those companies are going to have to provide high-quality affordable childcare for their workers if they want to participate in the programs.

We're using the power of the Federal Government to get companies to do what's good for their workers and, I might add, good for business as well. Good for business as well.

And, folks, care workers deserve to make a decent living, and that's a fight I'm willing to have. We need it.

Folks, we know there's more to do. And yet yesterday the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Kevin McCarthy, went to Wall Street. He did not tell the wealthy or the powerful on Wall Street that it was finally time to start paying their fair share of taxes. That didn't

come up. *[Laughter]* Other than to say they're going to renew the \$2 trillion tax cut. Anyway, I won't—*[laughter]*.

Instead, he proposed huge cuts to important programs that millions of Americans count on. Millions of middle class suburban, as well as inner-city folks. He threatened to become the first Speaker to default on our national debt, which took over 230 years to accumulate. He threatened to be the first one to default on the debt, which would throw us in a gigantic recession and beyond, unless he gets what he wants in the budget.

Folks, you've got to ask yourself: What are MAGA Republicans in Congress doing? Because this is not your father's Republican party. This is a different deal.

You know, the two Presidents that warned most directly against playing with the national debt were Ronald Reagan. He spoke very, very passionately about that, and he came forward. And, anyway, I won't—but you know, why are they doing this? What's the purpose?

The Speaker talked about limited spending, which sounds good.

And by the way, I was able to cut the deficit by \$1.7 billion in 2 years. And if we pass the budget I'm proposing, we'll lower spending way beyond that just in the first—we're going to lower the spending by six hundred—\$168 billion just because of the way we've changed Medicare—I mean, excuse me, prescription drug costs.

But let's take a closer look at what he didn't say. Critical programs for hard-working Americans, the ones they count on, would be splashed—would be slashed starting next year if he has his way. He didn't tell you the leading House Republican proposal would cut all the programs and discretionary spending by 22 percent.

It would mean higher costs for childcare, higher costs for preschool, higher costs for college. Two hundred thousand children would lose access to Head Start slots, and even more would lose access to childcare altogether.

It would mean higher costs for housing, especially for older Americans, for veterans, people with disabilities, and families with children; longer wait times for Social Security and Medicare benefits, robbing seniors of their healthy meals; 30 million fewer veteran outpatient visits, leaving our brave warriors unable to get checkups, mental health services, and treatment for substance abuse disorders.

Congress just passed the PACT Act, which I was very proud of, to help—it was bipartisan—to help veterans exposed to toxic burn pits, like my son. Now, these cuts will make it harder for us to meet that sacred obligation to protect those we send into harm's way and care for them when their families—when they return home.

They would deny tens of thousands of people suffering from opioid addiction—epidemic and addiction the treatment they need for recovery. They're also planning other cuts as well. We—they'd cut—10 million people, including 4 million children, would lose food assistance programs. Changes to Medicaid would also cause millions of people to lose their health care.

And now, what the Speaker didn't tell you is, the MAGA Republicans in Congress are still supporting over \$3 trillion in tax giveaways that overwhelmingly benefit the wealthiest Americans and the biggest corporations. I might add: We have now about a thousand billionaires. Know what the average tax rate is? Three—t-h-r-e-e—percent. Three percent.

And their cuts to those critical programs I talked about won't go to reduce the deficit after all. They'd just pay for the rest of the MAGA Republican agenda: massive tax cuts, giveaways that gear up for the rich and large corporations who have acknowledged they don't need them all.

Folks, if MAGA Republicans in Congress won't ask the wealthy or big corporations to pay a dollar more in taxes, but they'll make a 22-percent cut to programs across the board like education, scientific research, basic services people rely on, then they should tell the American people what that means and why they're doing it.

It means they want to go back to the same old trickle-down economic theories of the past while we, the economy—had been growing from the middle out and the bottom up—is sidelined.

Instead of investing in kids and cutting taxes for families with children, MAGA Republicans in Congress support more than \$3 trillion in tax cuts and giveaways over the next 10 years toward those at the very top of the agenda—on the income agenda.

You know, on the other hand, as I said, in my first 2 years, we brought down the deficit by a record \$1.7 trillion. And my budget that I've proposed, which I've laid out, would cut the deficit over the next 3 year—next 10 years by another \$3 trillion.

So I urge Congress to take the threat of default off the table. Pass my budget. If they don't pass it, at least argue with what they don't like about it, and let's vote on it.

But, in the meantime, we're not waiting around. That's what today is all about.

Let me conclude with this: The actions we're taking today are about dignity, security, and peace of mind for working families and caregivers all across the country, and they're good for the economy as well.

When I ran for President to rebuild the backbone of America, the middle class—to grow our economy from the middle out and bottom up, not the top down—2 years in, we're making progress. So let's finish the job.

I can honestly say I've never been more optimistic about the future of America. We just have to remember who we are. We're the United States of America. There is virtually nothing—nothing beyond our capacity if we work together. And I mean it—nothing if we work together.

So may God bless you all, and may God bless our caregivers.

Now I'm going to go over and sign that Executive order. Thank you.

[At this point, the President moved to the signing table.]

Good to see you man.

Participant. Good to see you, President Biden. How are you, sir?

The President. Good seeing you.

Participant. Thank you for getting it, sir. Appreciate that. Thank you for getting it, man.

The President. Hey, everybody. Come on. God bless you. Thank you. All right. Got everybody? All right.

I'm about to sign an Executive order increasing access to high-quality care and supporting caregivers.

And the page is so bright, I'm not sure where the line is. *[Laughter]*

[The President signed the Executive order.]

There you go.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:21 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to North Bergen, NJ, resident Kezia Bomtempo-Rodriguez; and Rep. Nancy Pelosi.

He also referred to his sister Valerie Biden Owens and her first husband Bruce Saunders; and his brother James B. Biden.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : High-quality care and caregiver support, efforts to increase, signing the Executive order.

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