

Remarks at the League of Conservation Voters Capital Dinner
June 14, 2023

Hello, hello, hello! It's good to be home.

Thank you all for those introductions. And I want to get started by thanking League of Conservation Voters Action Fund, Natural Resources Defense Council Fund, NextGen PAC, the Sierra Club for supporting Kamala and me. There is no support I'd rather have. I mean it.

So many of you have been fighting this battle for a long time. And, Cristina, I don't have to tell you that it's the young people in this country in particular who are leading the way. And I mean that sincerely. One of the reasons I'm so incredibly optimistic. This is the best educated, most committed generation in American history, and they're going to take us over the end—over the—over—just work it out for us.

You know, many of you have been with me throughout my career, and I can't tell you how much it means to have your support again. I was just saying to Carol Browner that we've known each other a little while. She was 12 when she got started. I was a little older. *[Laughter]*

And that—you know, there's an old expression; we joke in the neighborhood I grew up in: "You go home with them that brung you to the dance." You all brought me to the dance a long time ago, when I got started. And you know, thanks in particular to the League of Conservation for hosting us tonight. And thank you all for your leadership in so many important issues over the years.

By the way, there's a lot of threats our children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren are going to face. This is the only truly existential threat. It's the existential threat. If we don't meet the requirements that we're looking at, we're in real trouble. Your work has never been more important than it is today. Together, we've made a lot of progress so far, but we've got to finish the job. We've got to finish the job.

And I'm glad to be here to take part in a tribute to my friend, Nancy Pelosi. And she is my friend. I honestly believe Nancy is going to go down in history as one of the most consequential Speakers in American history, and that's a fact. Nancy led the way.

You'd never had to worry when she was leading about whether she would pass the bill. She told you how many votes she had, and she had the exact number she'd tell you. *[Laughter]* That was really nice. You know, she was right every time, and we worked together a long time. She had the votes for so many life-changing pieces of legislation, including historic legislation to combat the existential threat of climate change.

Folks, last week, millions of Americans sheltered indoors and wore masks outside as they watched the haze—a yellow haze. My granddaughter and my daughter were up in New York, and they were taking a picture of my granddaughter's apartment, and you couldn't see a block away. You couldn't see the buildings, the pictures they showed me. You know, that haze settled over our homes and our neighborhoods. And you know, it's—it was a new experience for many Americans; already, the norm for communities across the Western States.

Last year, I, with the EPA and others, traveled in helicopter all the fires that were out West. And you know, I looked down, and I saw more timber burned to the ground than the entire State of Maryland. Not the timber, the—if you took a map of Maryland, every single—every single part of that State, that's how much burned to the ground. Hurricanes and other extreme weather

caused \$165 billion in damage. And we still have people wondering whether there's a climate change crisis?

Over the past 2 years, a third of Americans have been personally affected by extreme weather events. One-third. Folks, this is what climate change looks like. Only it looks worse if we don't do something now. But I don't have to tell you, it's not inevitable. It is not inevitable. With your help, we're doing something about it by reclaiming our leadership on the world stage; with the leadership that Members of Congress and all of you have made—the largest investment in climate, environmental justice, and conservation ever, anywhere in the entire world.

And by the way, if you don't mind my asking, would all the Members of Congress please stand? All the Members of the—[*applause*].

Well, let me tell you, the Inflation Reduction Act includes \$369 billion to combat climate change. And from day one, we've been reduce—we've been working to reduce our carbon emissions. Thanks to the historic law, by the year 2030, we'll be reducing emissions on a yearly basis by 1 billion tons a year. One billion tons a year. The law includes tax credits that are going to create tens of thousands of good-paying jobs, clean energy manufacturing jobs.

And if I could hold just—divert for just a second. Some of you were concerned, because I had been so deeply involved in the environmental movement with the folks here. What happened was I didn't announce my environmental plan for the first month after I got—I announced. And everybody wondered—wondered why. Because I said then I was convinced I could bring labor along.

Guess what? Labor is with us. Organized labor. Unions are with us. They're supporting us, particularly the IBEW. It's already attracting billions of dollars in private sector investment, even in districts—even in districts—that, in fact, you wouldn't expect. Districts that are all over the map. And then it's already attracting that money. Where Members are—of Congress voted against the bill, we're still having it.

I made a commitment. I said—like I said to all my folks when the—in the—all the Americans in the State of the Union Address: I promise to be President for all the people, so I'll see them on the—at the groundbreaking, all these folks. [*Laughter*] All of them. Even the ones that voted against. You think I'm kidding? You all think I'm kidding. I'm not.

At solar factories in the Midwest and the South; wind farms across the plains, off our shores; electric vehicle plants; clean steel and clean cement projects and so much more all across America. Working families can save thousands of dollars a year on energy costs, including rebates to weatherize their home, tax credits for electric heat pumps, rooftop solar, electric vehicles, new and used.

It's a big deal. It's really starting to have an impact. And we're focusing on communities that have been denied the basic security and basic dignity that comes with clean air, clean water, and clean energy jobs, and that have been denied environmental justice.

I signed an Executive order to make environmental justice the responsibility of every single Federal department in the United States Government. For real. And I made a historic pledge to direct 40 percent of all the benefits from these Federal investments in climate change and clean energy to communities that have been left behind for much too long.

With your support, we're living up to that pledge. It's called my Justice40 Initiative, making the biggest investments ever in frontline—frontline, fence-line communities that have been smothered by the legacy of pollution.

Replace—we're replacing every single lead pipe in America. We're cleaning up old industry sites. Look, we're including brownfields and supersites—Superfund sites. And with the bright—you know, we have—the blight of communities is there for decades that have been just clobbered.

All across Appalachia, the Southwest, we're plugging abandoned wells—gas and oil wells that leak methane and dangerous gases—creating jobs paying the same amount of money to those workers that dug the wells in the first place to cap those wells.

We're helping school districts across the country electrify their schoolbuses so kids don't have to breathe the polluted air from diesel exhaust. We're doing the same for the cities and towns. And just today, the Treasury Department issued guidance so, for the first time, local communities, including churches, nonprofits, can take advantage of the clean energy tax credits that are going to bring cleaner air and cost savings to every corner of America.

We're also taking historic action to preserve our country's land and water. In my first week in office, I issued the Executive order establishing the country's first-ever national conservation goal. We called it "America the Beautiful." And it's a nationwide campaign to conserve by 2030 at least 30 percent of the lands, waters that support and sustain our Nation. Thirty percent. And we're getting it done.

Anybody from Colorado here? Camp Hale—50,000 acres protected. Boundary Waters in Minnesota—225,000 acres protected. Spirit Mountain in Nevada—500,000 acres. The Castner Range in Texas—6,600 acres. Chaco Canyon—330,000 acres in New Mexico. Bristol Bay and the Tongass Forest—9 million acres in Alaska. All protected. And the list goes on.

We're working to designate 777—770,000 square miles in the Pacific Ocean as a new national marine sanctuary. And we're going to get it done. This is an area larger than Alaska and Colorado put together and almost three times the size of Texas. It would make it the largest ocean area on the planet with the highest level of protection.

Look, folks, in just my first year in office, we—and I mean "we"; all of us in this room—protected more lands and waters than any President since John F. Kennedy. And on day one of my Presidency, we moved to reenter the Paris accord, because the United States should lead the world—lead the world—in climate.

Last December, the world did follow our lead when countries across the globe committed to safeguarding at least 30 percent of the lands and waters worldwide by 2030. And by the way, there's more than when we just say they're off limit. We're paying farmers to plant carbon-absorbing plants. We're paying farmers to put more in conversation.

We've mobilized the world's leading emitters to help poorer countries deal with the impacts of climate change. They called it, at the G-7, the Build Back Biden—Build Back Better. And we realized that got confusing. *[Laughter]* So now we don't call it that. What we call it is—here's the bottom line: Look, we're the ones that caused the problem—the United States. We cleared all our land. We did all the things that—to make our—make things more easy for us to make money. Not a bad thing at the time. No one really fully understood. But we, the major emitters in the world, have an obligation to help those countries.

You know, soon—soon—Africa will have 1 billion people. China has their Belt and Road Initiative. It turned out to be their debt and destruction initiative. No, I'm serious. Not a joke. Well, we're going to—in, and we're going to help.

We have plans to build a railroad from the Pacific all the way across the Indian Ocean. We have plans to build in Angola one of the largest solar plants in the world. I can go on, but I'm not. I'm going off script. I'm going to get in trouble. *[Laughter]*

But look, at the U.N. Conference in Glasgow, Scotland, we launched the Global Methane Pledge. When I raised it inside with a small group of people, they said, "I think we can do that." We helped recruit over 100 countries to follow the lead in setting strong standards to tackle methane pollution, oil and gas operations, and holding companies accountable.

Unfortunately, our MAGA Republicans in Congress are trying to undo the—all the progress we've made. They made it abundantly clear when the first bill they passed, this new Congress—while they were holding the country hostage over the debt limit—was to repeal the climate provisions of the Inflation Reduction Act and replace them with handouts to the fossil fuel industry. Not a joke. Literally.

We made clear—they made clear that we'd rather—they'd rather threaten the default of the U.S. economy than cut or get rid of, for example, \$30 billion in taxpayer subsidies to oil companies who made \$200 million last year—billion. I said "million." Billion dollars last year.

Imagine the choice. Imagine seeing all this happen—the wildfires, storms, floods—and doing nothing about it. Imagine taking away those clean energy jobs from working-class folks all across the country. Imagine turning your back on all those moms and dads living in towns poisoned by pollution and telling them, "Sorry, you're on your own." I was determined not to let that happen. And with your significant help, we didn't let it happen.

You know, we started negotiations, and the MAGA Republicans in Congress—and they had a bullseye on the Inflation Reduction Act. They wanted to gut it. That would—remember, that was their original proposal. They wanted to gut it. We didn't budge. In the end, we didn't just protect some of the climate and clean energy provisions. No. We protected every single, solitary one of them. Every one.

The ink isn't even dry on our agreement, and they're back at it again with a bill last week to repeal those clean energy tax credits that they attached billions of dollars in investments to, creating tens of thousands of jobs. And with your help, we're going to stop them again.

Let me close with this. Look, I was one of the first people to introduce a climate bill in the United States Senate way back in 1986. And I come from the State of DuPont. *[Laughter]* Oh, excuse me, State of Delaware. *[Laughter]* We have more corporations incorporated in Delaware than every other State in the Union combined. But I was convinced we had to begin this.

When I was running for President, I made it a priority to meet with environmental justice leaders in fence-line communities. Their stories were unforgettable, and I knew they were true.

I grew up in Claymont, Delaware, on the Pennsylvania State line, where that arch goes up in Delaware, right along the Delaware River. There are more oil refineries in Marcus Hook, in that area, than any place including Houston, Texas, taking care of 10 million people in the region.

And we lived—when we moved there, we lived in a place called Brookview Apartments. And what used to be I-95—what's now I-95. It used to be—it's called the Philadelphia Pike. It was from Wilmington and Philadelphia. And it was a four-lane access road, but it was too dangerous for a third-grade kid to walk to school. It was only about a half a mile. So my mother would drive me to school every day.

What—we—on cue, from the first major frost and the—in the late fall, my mom would get in the car, turn on the windshield wiper to get the dew off of it, and there'd be oil slicks—literally, oil slicks—on the windshield.

How many folks across the country have had similar experiences? As a result, saw higher-than-usual rates of childhood asthma, cancer. For the longest time, Delaware had one of the highest cancer rates in America, in large part because the winds blow east, not north or south.

Today, those communities across the country—there's people living downwind from these factories, seeing the—literally the paint on their cars peel off because the air is so corrosive. Landfills and garbage incinerators located right in the middle of communities. Drinking water contaminated by radon and arsenic. That kind of inequity and injustice doesn't just go against everything we stand for as a nation.

And so, when I got elected President, with Kamala's partnership, we vowed to enact the most ambitious climate and environmental justice campaign in American history. And that's exactly what we've done with your help.

We've made a lot of progress, but there's so much more to do: getting to 100 percent clean energy by 2035; moving to all-electric vehicles in the future, made in America; building 500,000 EV charging stations from coast to coast; conserving 30 percent of our lands and waters by 2030. And with your help, I'm optimistic we're going to get it done, especially with the support of so many young people across this country representing your organizations.

You represent the best of us. That's not hyperbole. You represent the best of us. That's the God's truth. And you are as important as any group in foreign policy dealing with national concerns, because this is, as I said—I'll end where I began—the existential threat to humanity. So let's finish the job. Let's keep going.

Every time I'd walk out of my Grandpop Finnegan's house up in Scranton, he'd yell, "Joey, keep the faith." And my grandmother would yell: "No, Joey, spread it. Spread it." Let's remember who we are. We're the United States of America. There is nothing, nothing beyond our capacity when we do it together.

God bless you all, and may God protect our troops.

Thank you, thank you, thank you. We've got a lot of work to do. A lot of work to do. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. We can do this!

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:59 p.m. at the Anthem. In his remarks, he referred to Vice President Kamala D. Harris; Cristina Tzintzún Ramirez, executive director, NextGen America; and former Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Carol M. Browner, in her capacity as chair of the board of directors of the League of Conservation Voters; and Rep. Nancy Pelosi.

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