

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2023

Remarks at a Campaign Reception in Kentfield, California
June 20, 2023

The President. Thank you, thank you, thank you. I'm going home now. *[Laughter]*

Stephanie and Mark, thanks for welcoming me into your home. And, Gov, I tell you what, we—I tell you what: I—it's amazing the job you do. I really mean it. And I can't thank you for your friendship—I can't thank you enough.

And as I've told you many times, I don't know how the hell you got her, but you're a good man. *[Laughter]* We both—we both married way above our station. *[Laughter]*

And look, you know, all of you being here, I don't know why you'd ever leave here. *[Laughter]* It's magnificent. And I want to thank you.

You know, I've met a lot of world leaders. And I come at this reelection thinking about what I was asked by Xi Jinping—I've spent a lot of hours with him over the last 12 years. I mean, in over—they keep meticulous records—82 hours' worth just he and I, 60-some of it in person.

And we were in the Tibetan Plateau, and he said, "Can you define America for me?" And I said: "Yes, I can. In one word"—the Gov has heard me say this before—"In one word: possibilities. Possibilities."

One of the reasons why we're always referred to, Mr. President, by others as "the ugly Americans": We think we can do anything. And we can do anything we set our mind to. But we just haven't focused much—very much in the last 4 or 5 years in terms of focusing on what we need to do.

I'm convinced if we work together, there's not a damn thing we can't get done. Now, I—and I mean that. I mean that sincerely.

You know, we've—when I announced the first time, I said I was running for——

[At this point, the President tapped the microphone.]

Is this working?

Audience member. Yeah!

The President. I indicated I was running for three reasons. Because remember when the—down in Charlottesville, Virginia, and there was—toward the end of the—the beginning of the last President's campaign, and they asked—these—all of a sudden, coming out of the woods in the fields, literally carrying torches—lighted torches, were hundreds of people who were singing and chanting the same anti-Semitic bile that was chanted in Germany in the early thirties, and accompanied by the Ku Klux Klan.

And a young woman was killed. And in the process, I've talked to her mom. And the President was asked, "Well, what do you think happened down there?" And he said, "Well, there were very good people on both sides."

And that's when I decided I had to get engaged, had to get back out, because I—my son had just passed. I didn't want to run again, didn't want to be engaged. But I came back to make the case.

And I ran on three principles that even my good friends and my staff were—thought maybe weren't able to be conveyed very well. I said, "The first reason I'm running is to restore the soul of this country."

And Jon Meacham wrote a book about the soul of America, about restoring the soul, a sense of decency, who we are, what we stand for. We're good people. We have always been a good people. And we stood for things that were of conscious concern for others.

The second reason I said I was running was to rebuild the economy from the middle out and the bottom up, because when that happens, everybody does well. Everybody does well.

And I said the third reason I was running—and the press, justifiably—and I'm not criticizing them—said: "That was the old days, Mr. Vice President." And that was—I said I was going to unite America.

How can a democracy function without being able to reach a consensus? How can it last very long?

And so I set out to do those three things. And one of the things that happened was that, you know, I found that things—people thought that things were in tough shape. I made a speech right after I—well, it was just before I was elected last time—at Independence Hall, talking about democracy, that democracy was at stake. Literally at stake.

And it turned out the press understandably thought that was—what the hell was I talking about? But over 63 percent of the American people agree that there's something wrong because of what's happening. Our freedoms are being stripped away.

And you know, but since then, we've made a lot of progress. You know, you can see most clearly that we got an incredible amount of bipartisan legislation passed. So much for not being able to bring people together.

And we also brought back NATO together in a way that—because we had Russia, which I indicated that it was going to invade, and they did, with 185,000 forces in Europe—in another country.

And Putin was convinced that he would be able to split NATO because we'd never stick together, we'd never do it. And we've been able to hold NATO together. Altogether, NATO is stronger today than it's ever been.

And then we began to invest in America again. Because, you know, when I talked about rebuilding from the middle out, we got to a position where we spent a lot of time concluding, Democrats and Republicans, that the best way to grow the economy was to go where the cheapest labor was in the world and ship our jobs overseas and, in the meantime, bring back products made abroad.

Well, you know, there's—those of you who are from other parts of the country before you got here, you saw that if you lived in the Midwest or in the—even in near Midwest, in Pennsylvania and other places, all of a sudden, that factory that's been there for 35 years that supported your grandfather and grandmother and, you know, had six, eight hundred people in it—when that factory shuts down, the whole city shuts down, the town shuts down. People lose their sense of dignity. They lose their sense of who they are. They begin to wonder.

And so we decided to—decided we were going to no longer find—not have access to the source of what we needed to build our economy. And so we went out, and I decided we're going to try to bring back—we used to—we invented the computer chip. We're the guys that came about and did that. And the little chip is smaller than the tip of your finger. Whether you need 300 of them for an automobile, all of a sudden—you need it for everything we have.

We used to—we used to—40 years ago, 40 percent of the chips were made in America. Now down to 10 percent.

So I started around the country, and we convinced \$300 billion worth of investment—\$300 billion worth of investment, building these new—they call "fabs," creating jobs that are of consequence for people.

And, for example, out in just outside of Columbus, Ohio, Intel went out there, and I call it the "field of dreams." They were the first one to commit. They're going to build—they're going to spend a whole lot of money: \$100 billion building two new fabs out there. And 5,000 full-time employees, 7,000 people building the facility at the prevailing wage.

And guess what? The average salary in those fabs is going to be up close to \$130,000. And you don't need a college degree. You don't need a college degree to do it.

And now we have over \$300 billion committed to build these facilities across the country. \$450 billion in foreign investment and private investment to begin to rebuild America in a way we didn't—we haven't looked at it that way in a long time.

We've, in the meantime, as you heard the Governor say, all the jobs we created and all the manufacturing jobs. But beyond that, we did something else. We unleashed, I think, a sense of—once again, a sense of expectation in America that we can do anything.

We used to—you know, when we recall the—you know, the possibilities, you know? Well, guess what? We used to believe that we could—there wasn't a single thing, if America set its mind to it, couldn't get done. I'm not—that sounds like hyperbole, but I mean it.

But so what's happened? We started to figure out we can do it again. For example, the largest computer chipmaker in South Korea invested in the United States billions of dollars. And I visited with him in South Korea. I said, "Why?" He said: "Because it's the safest investment I can make anywhere in the world in the United States of America. That's why I'm doing it. And you have the best workers in the world."

And so we're beginning to restore not just opportunity for jobs, but pride and dignity in work.

My dad used to have an expression. He said: "Joey, a job is about a lot more than a paycheck. It's about your dignity. It's about your sense of yourself. It's about being able to look your family in the eye and say: "Honey, it's going to be okay. It's going to be okay."

Well, that's starting to happen again. That's starting to happen again. We're restoring a sense of dignity to a whole lot of people who were left behind. And they're coming back.

And we're in a situation where we decided when—you know, I know there's a lot support from this crowd, but the fact is that how many times over—this is just 6 years ago—how many of your friends who were doing well didn't think there was much to global warming?

Well, all of a sudden, I flew over more territory with the Governor in a helicopter, and other Governors throughout the country, from Arizona and New Mexico, all the way up to the State of Washington State and Idaho and the rest. More timber has burned to the ground than comprises the entire landmass of the State of Maryland.

And people are no longer wondering whether or not we have a problem with the environment. People are stepping up. And we were able to pass legislation for \$368 billion for environmental investment. Did both to do a whole range of things that are going to fundamentally change the way we work. We're now in a situation where, just since I've become President, we have made sure that we have thousands and thousands of acres put in conservation. More land in conservation than any time since John Kennedy was President.

And I made a commitment that 30 percent of all our lands and all our waters are going to be in conservation by the year 2030. We're well on our way to doing that. And that's going to make a profound impact on what we have and what we deal with in terms of the environment.

And as I said, with regard to Europe, when I told people that we were going to bring—I thought we could bring Japan along. You know, Japan hasn't increased its military budget for a long, long time. But guess what? I met with the chairman—the President—the Vice—excuse me, the leader of Japan for, I guess, on three different occasions, including in Hiroshima. And he convinced—I convinced him and he convinced himself that he had to do something different.

Japan has increased its military budget exponentially. And guess what? When is the last time you heard Japan being interested in what's happening in the middle of Europe in a war and contributing to the help and support of the state of Ukraine?

And so things are changing. We put together in Southeast Asia—and by the way, I promise you we're going to—don't worry about China. I mean, worry about China, but don't worry about China. *[Laughter]*

No, but I really mean it. China is real—has real economic difficulties. And the reason why Xi Jinping got very upset in terms of when I shot that balloon down with two boxcars full of spy equipment in it is, he didn't know it was there. No, I'm serious. That's what's a great embarrassment for dictators, when they didn't know what happened. That wasn't supposed to be going where it was. It was blown off course up through Alaska and then down through the United States. And he didn't know about it. When it got shot down, he was very embarrassed. He denied it was even there.

But the—did—the very important point is he's in a situation now where he wants to have a relationship again. Tony Blinken just went over there—our Secretary of State; did a good job. And it's going to take time.

But what he was really upset about was that I insisted that we reunite the Quad—so-called Quad. He called me and told me not to do that because it was putting him in a bind. I said: "All we're doing—we're not trying to surround you, we're just trying to make sure the international rules with air and sea lanes remain open. And we're not going to yield to that—on that."

So now we have India, Australia, Japan, and the United States working hand in glove in the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean.

We have a situation where I've met with all 50 of the major maritime states in East Asia. And they're—I mean, I never thought, as a kid coming out of the Vietnam war era, that we would have Cambodia, Vietnam, and Laos wanting closer relationships with the United States of America.

So my point is, the world is changing, and we have an opportunity to not take advantage of it at everyone else's expense, but to change the dynamic in the world. We're in a position now where Russia is—well, let me put this way: If I told any of you—or matter of fact, if you told me that Russia was going to send 185,000 troops into the country of Ukraine without it being armed, and that the Russians at this point were still going to have lost well over 100,000 personnel and be in the shape they're in, I think you would have looked at me like I was crazy.

Well, the Ukrainian people are tough as hell, and we can't let it happen, because if we let it happen, then next is, you have the rest of eastern NATO nations are in trouble.

My generic point is, there's enormous opportunity. Enormous opportunity. And the world is looking to the United States. I mean, they really are. They're looking to the United States. Former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright was right when she said America is the essential nation.

Because who else will organize it? Who else can lead it, any other nation in the world be able to do it by themselves?

And so we put the—we pulled our allies together. Things are changing around the world. And there's great danger too. There's great danger. I'm not suggesting there's not danger, but unless we are prepared, unless we know what we're about, unless we're engaged. And that's why the first thing I did basically was say we're ending the policy of "America first." It's not America first. It's America with our allies, because that's what we need around the world. We need those efforts.

We're also working like hell—and I'm not going to go into a whole foreign policy thing. I apologize. But you know, just to put one thing in perspective, Africa is going to have 1 billion people by the end of this decade. A billion people. A billion. And guess what? They don't have the capacity to deal with a lot of their needs. And it's overwhelmingly in our interest.

So we're in the process of making sure that we help build the first railroad across the continent; that we have Angola have the first—the largest solar facility in the world; that building up the infrastructure for those countries, because it's in our interest that they do well financially and not disrupt.

And so I guess the whole point of this is that we're also working on making sure that we deal with some of the other problems, which I'll just tick off.

One is the whole idea of dealing with gun violence. The idea that more children die as a consequence of a gunshot wound of a bullet than any other reason in America is sick. It's really sick.

And the fact that the NRA has such overwhelming power—you know, the NRA is the only outfit in the Nation that we cannot sue as an institution. They got—they—before this—I became President, they passed legislation saying you can't sue them. Imagine had that been the case with tobacco companies. How many more people would be dead today if we weren't able to rein in tobacco companies and the use of tobacco? Well, it's that way now. We can't.

And by the way, you know one of the reasons why the AR-15 is so strongly supported by so many folks in that industry? Number one, it's the cheapest weapon to make, and it's the highest profit motive they have for any weapon that is made. It makes more money to sell an AR-15 than any other weapon you can buy.

And so we have to change—there's a lot of things we can change, because the American people by and large agree you don't need a weapon of war. I'm a Second Amendment guy. I taught it for 4 years, 6 years in law school. And guess what? It doesn't say that you can own any weapon you want. It says there are certain weapons that you just can't own. Even during when it was passed, you couldn't own a cannon. You can't own a machinegun. *[Laughter]* No, I'm serious.

So what's the deal with the idea that it's an absolute—you know, I love these guys who say the Second Amendment is—you know, the tree of liberty is water with the blood of patriots. Well, if want to do that, you want to work against the Government, you need an F-16. You need something else than just an AR-15. Anyway.

The generic point—*[laughter]*—the generic point I want to make is—and I'm going to end this because I'm bored myself now. *[Laughter]*

But you know, we have to make sure that we have some economic freedom, the ability to get a good job. And freedom is really under siege, particularly freedom of choice: the right of a woman to choose, the right of a woman to determine what—between she and her doctor what she needs in her body. And now they're going after contraception.

And mark my words—and I said that when the decision came down, the *Dobbs* decision. Because two of the Justices said: Let's make it clear, not only there's no constitutional protection for the right to choose, there's no constitutional protection for contraception, there's no constitutional right in the law for HB—excuse me—for gay, lesbian—you know, the whole—the whole group. There's no constitutional protection. And they're coming after it.

You see what all the States have done, the number of States that have passed legislation, imposing on all those rights.

And so, folks, we're in a situation where I think things are beginning to change. But I think the American people need to have the confidence that we're going to do what we say we're going to do. And I think that the combination of keeping the economy growing and keeping the economy growing in a way that everyone has a shot at benefiting from it, everyone is engaged, keeping the—dealing with the freedoms that we have taken away.

We've got—I insist that we're going to pass legislation in a majority of the States reinstating *Roe v. Wade*. That's the only way we can get back these rights. And it's going to happen.

So, folks, you know, there's an awful lot that is being done relative to the environment. There's an awful lot being done in terms of our ability to grow the economy. There's an awful lot that needs to be done on education. I need not tell you, Mr. President.

You know, we learned—and I'll end with this: You know, the whole idea of—Head Start is a good idea. But what's even more important is—puts people in school. All the research done—and I'm going to mention the school; it's against my interest to do it. Stanford. I'm joking. [Laughter]

Stanford and Harvard did studies about what is, over the last 10 years, what is that will help people—keep people going in terms of education. If you send—we learned all those statistics—I remember all you involved in this stuff know—that when you come from a broken home, where there's no books and mom or dad is an addict, and they can't get things—you know, you have no guidance—by the time you get to preschool—to school, I should say—kindergarten—you will have heard a million few words—fewer spoken, total. Total. The same words, but a million words fewer. And you also are going to be in a situation where you have had significantly less exposure to learning, period.

Now, if you put kids in school—school—reading, writing, arithmetic—beginning at age 3, you increase by 56 percent the chance of them going all the way through all 12 years and having the chance to go to community college.

Why is it that it's not overwhelmingly in our interest? My wife is an educator at a community college; says any country that outeducates us is going to outcompete us—is going to outcompete us. It's true.

So one of the things I'm going to continue to work on is early education, as well as free community college for people who, in fact, don't have the income to get there.

And so, folks, with your help, we've gotten a lot done. And guess what? All the things we've done so far—and I was able in the first 2 years to cut the Federal debt by 1 trillion 700 billion dollars. More than any President has in American history. So don't tell me you can't do them both—you can't do them both.

Anyway, thank you for your time. Thank you for your help. Thank you for everything you've done for me.

And I'm fully aware—and I mean it sincerely—I wouldn't be standing here without many of you in this room. You're the one—there's an old expression in the steel town I grew up in in Delaware, called Claymont: Y'all brung me to the dance.

So thank you very, very, very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:48 p.m. at the residence of Stephanie and Mark Robinson. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Gavin C. Newsom of California and his wife Jennifer Siebel Newsom; President Xi Jinping of China; Susan Bro, mother of Heather D. Heyer, who was killed during the vehicular attack in Charlottesville, VA, on August 12, 2017; former President Donald J. Trump; Jon Meacham, canon historian, Washington National Cathedral; President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin of Russia; and Prime Minister Fumio Kishida of Japan. Audio was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Campaign reception in Kentfield, CA.

Locations: Kentfield, CA.

Names: Biden, Jill T.; Blinken, Antony J.; Bro, Susan; Kishida, Fumio; Meacham, Jon; Newsom, Gavin C.; Newsom, Jennifer Siebel; Putin, Vladimir Vladimirovich; Robinson, Mark; Robinson, Stephanie; Trump, Donald J.; Xi Jinping.

Subjects: Abortion; Anti-Semitism; California, Democratic Party event; California, Governor; California, President's visit; China, downing of spy balloon by U.S. military; China, President; China, relations with U.S.; Climate change; Early childhood education; Economic improvement; Federal deficit and debt; Firearm rights; Gun control efforts ; Gun violence, prevention efforts; Indo-Pacific, economic and security cooperation; Infrastructure development, international assistance for developing countries ; Japan, Prime Minister; Job creation and growth; Land and maritime conservation efforts; Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons, equality; Manufacturing industry, domestic investment; North Atlantic Treaty Organization; Quadrilateral Security Dialogue; Rifle Association, National; Russia, conflict in Ukraine; Russia, President; Secretary of State; Semiconductor manufacturing; Solar and wind energy, promotion efforts; U.S. Supreme Court opinion overturning 1973 decision in Roe v. Wade; Ukraine, Russian invasion and airstrikes; Virginia, 2017 civil unrest and violence in Charlottesville; Wildfires, damage and recovery efforts.

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