

Remarks at a Campaign Reception in San Francisco, California
June 20, 2023

Well, thank you very much.

Look, I got my instructions: I'm going to be very brief with my comments, and then I'm going to go answer any questions you want for as long as you want me to answer. Okay?

First of all, you know, I want to thank you for your collective passion. This is something that's not just for an issue—I mean, you know, a campaign. It goes well beyond that.

We all know the only really existential threat to humanity is 1.5 degrees Celsius. I really mean it. And I believe it; I've believed it for a long time.

And I've gone to all the COP meetings, and I think that the combination of the international recognition coupled with what—there's not many climate deniers any longer. There are selfish people who don't want to do what we have to do on climate because it's helping them initially, but they have no doubt of the danger that's being posed. And think how quickly that's changed. Not a joke.

You know, it was—I've now flown over in a helicopter more territory that was burned to the ground, more timber burned to the ground, than the entire number of square acres in the State of Maryland—took it all. It's like burning the whole State down. That just happened in the last year—almost—not quite 2 years, from New Mexico and Arizona, all the way up into the West Coast, including Nevada, including areas that go up into Washington State, Montana, Idaho, et cetera. And it's real.

When I was in—out in California and in Colorado, I was saying, "You know, I'm worried that we're going to lose the Colorado River." The whole damn river. Not a joke. People looked at me like I was—I was on something.

But—so people are finally realizing what you've known for a long time: We don't have a lot of time. We don't have a lot of time.

We're in a situation where, as I said, if we don't get it right in the next 5 years—and we're on target in the United States; we're not on target other places in the world. I've gone to every COP meeting.

You know, when I first—when I first got elected, the first thing I did was rejoin the—you know, the Paris Agreement. Well, you know, we've come a long way. But one of the things that's happening now is that—that's good is that the Inflation Reduction Act was—remember they said we couldn't get that done? Well, \$369 billion—billion, as in "b," dollars. And that, by 2030, we're going to be reducing emissions by 1 billion tons a year.

And we have attracted \$470 billion in private investment, much of it for clean energy. We're also in a situation where we have created more solar factories in the Midwest and the South, more—and wind farms across the Plains and off the shores, electric vehicle plants and clean steel, clean cement.

I thought I knew a lot about this beginning back in the eighties, but I had never thought—I never realized how much is emitted in the air by the production of cement—cement. And so, we're changing our trade policy relative to that and a whole range of other things.

Look—and you know, the tax cut is for families to buy energy-efficient appliances. People are picking up on it. They don't—not sure why they're able to do it. They're not sure it's the Inflation Reduction Act, but they know it's working. They know it's working.

You know, when you talk about it to most people, you say: "Look, if you put in new windows and doors and you—we'll give you a tax credit for doing it. You get a tax credit. If you put solar panels on the roof, you get a tax credit. You buy an energy-efficient appliance, you get a tax credit." And all of a sudden, that's working. That's working in a pretty big way right now.

But you know, we—and, by the way, I set out to conserve more land. The goal I set when I got elected—no one—no reason why anybody would remember because they didn't think it was impossible—that by 2030 I would, in fact, conserve at least 30 percent of all our land and all our waters off the shore of the United States of America. And—but we're on track to do it. I won't go through all of it, but—now.

And I know there's a concern about Willow up in Alaska. Well, here's—the legal judgment I got: There were four of these—five of these wells, plus where it would leak into the lake and—anyway, if we had denied it all, there was an even chance we'd lose in court. And so we provided for one—one well.

And in the meantime, I took 23 million acres in the region and put it off limits—23 million acres—[*applause*—in North Slope and the Tongass Forest and Bristol Bay.

You know, and after leading the world, we're—and we're leading the world and we've moved, as I said, to reenter Paris. We have mobilized the world's leading emitters and the poor countries to deal with climate change.

One of the things we did—remember, everybody, the other team making fun of "Build Back Better," my—that phrase? Well, guess what? We're—we, the United States, spent a lot of time doing everything to cause this problem. We're a big—major cause of the problem. What the hell do we expect?

In Africa, for example, there's going to be a billion people in Africa—a billion people by the end of this decade. And guess what? They didn't do a damn thing to cause it. But guess what? They don't have any money for infrastructure. They don't have any money to deal with—deal with what they need.

So we're building—for example, we're going to build a—we're—I've gotten other nations together, and we're going to build the largest solar facility in the world in Angola. We're going to be in a position where it's fundamentally change—I won't go on. I'm talking too much.

But you know, and at the U.N. conference in Scotland, we launched—well, one of you already raised this—the mobile methane—the Global Methane Pledge. Recruited over 100 countries to follow our lead. But I've learned today from one of you that you now have oversight using the satellites that—there's a hell of a lot of methane that's still emitting in areas of the United States where major corporate interests exist.

I got it started by making sure that we are in a position that we're capping all those oil and gas wells in Western Pennsylvania and Northern Virginia—West Virginia, and throughout the country.

And the point that I was making earlier is that, you know, we ought to be—I think we're going to be in a position to have 100 percent clean energy—and I'll talk about it if you want to talk about it later—by—clean—100 percent clean energy by 2035 in the United States. One hundred percent. And I explain why: all-electric vehicle future, 500,000 charging stations.

You know, one of the things that MAGA Republicans tried to do during the debt ceiling—they tried to blackmail me. No, I'm serious. Every one of the—every one of these—pieces of legislation that got passed, they wanted to wipe out as a condition of not reneging on the debt, from the Inflation Reduction Act to the infrastructure legislation, across the board. That was—everybody kind of forgets that was the demand.

They're coming back at it now, by the way. They're coming back at it again. And you know, they had a bull's-eye.

And, I mean, think about a couple of things, and then I'll stop, because I know you have questions.

You know—I know that you saw—read in the New York Times four Mondays ago, and then it was a couple of times since then, that, you know, one of the largest producers of—of clean energy—and it's—by the way, it's a hell of a lot cheaper: Solar is cheaper. *[Laughter]* Wind is cheaper. It doesn't cause cancer.

But all kidding aside, look what's happened: We're in a situation where we have—in Texas, they have one of the largest—they have—I forget the percentage now of—what the percentage is. But something—more than half of all their energy is produced by wind and solar. And guess what? Their legislature is trying to stop it.

Talk about mindless. No, I'm not joking. Not a joke. Not a joke.

So, folks, you know, greed still drives some people. But the point that—and I'll conclude with this point and stop: One of the things that—I think some of you may recall there was some frustration that I didn't announce my—when I was running the first time—the detail of my environmental plan, initially. And that was for a simple reason: I wanted to make sure that I was able to get labor—organized labor and environmental groups on the same page.

They said: "What are you doing? No one is going to do that." Well, I spent a lot of time with the IBEW, and I said, "Guys, your future lies in solar and wind and—and alternative energy. It doesn't rely on the fossil fuel industry." And I pointed out to them what was happening.

The end result was we were able to pass legislation that provided for building 550,000—550,000 charging stations.

But, by the way, all of a sudden, if you notice—name me a time when you ever thought you'd see within a matter of a week a Presidential nominee endorsed by the environmental community, endorsed by the AFL-CIO—all of them—and endorsed by some of the business communities. Because it's—people are figuring it out. They're figuring it out.

And so I think we have enormous opportunities—enormous opportunities. We still have a long way to go, and I was—well, I'll tell you later.

But Russia is still a gigantic problem, not just in their energy production but in methane. The last time I met with Putin was in Geneva, before he invaded. And I told him—I said: "You're in eight time zones. And guess what? The entire Arctic Circle is melting. Methane is coming out of the ground more rapidly than you can possibly stop it. It's not going to refreeze. It's not going to change. It's not going to happen." I said, "You've got a real problem, and the world has got a problem."

I've had the same conversation on a slightly different perspective with Xi Jinping. With—as my uncle would say, with the grace of God, the good will of the neighbors, and the creek not rising, I think John Kerry is going to be going back there pretty soon.

So there is a growing recognition that we have to do three things. One, we have to significantly eliminate the use of fossil fuels. But by the way, you can't eliminate it all right now.

It doesn't make even sense to do it all right now, even if you could—number one—but continue to fundamentally change the mix.

Number two, we have to make sure we're in a situation where we are investing in the Global South by providing them the where—the financial wherewithal to be able to do what they need to do to deal with it. They want to deal with it. They want to deal with it.

But—for example, I had a long talk with Lula in Brazil. You know, that you—this is one I already said. I don't have to explain this to you. It's the largest carbon sink in the world. They absorb more carbon out of the air than we pollute in 1 day, every day. And yet, understandably, if you're them, why can't we do what you did? Clear everything. Why can't we do what you did?

So we should be providing and I think the international community should be providing compensation for them for not doing what they're doing, et cetera. Anyway, I've—anyway, I'll stop. *[Laughter]*

I'll answer any questions you have. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:55 p.m. at One Market Restaurant. In his remarks, he referred to President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin of Russia; President Xi Jinping of China; Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John F. Kerry; and President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva of Brazil. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on June 21. Audio was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

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