

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2023

Remarks on Signing a Proclamation Establishing the Baaj Nwaavjo I'tah Kukveni-Ancestral Footprints of the Grand Canyon National Monument Near Tusayan, Arizona

August 8, 2023

Thank you, thank you. Please have a seat if you have one. If you don't have one, you can sit down anyway if you want. *[Laughter]*

Well, thank you very, very much. Maya, thank you for the introduction. When I was your age, to be able to stand up and introduce anybody, let alone a President, I would have frozen. Thank you. You're an impressive young woman. And I'm going to come down to those waterfalls pretty soon.

It's great to be here with Secretary Haaland, our first Native American Cabinet Secretary, and Brenda Mallory, the Chair of our Council of Environmental Quality.

And, Governor Hobbs, congratulations, and you're doing a heck of a job.

And Senator Kyrsten Sinema and Congressman—where is the Congressman? Is he here? There—we've been hanging out since I got here a little bit. Raúl has been a good friend and done a great deal. He's one of the most popular Congressmen in the country, I think. Who have long championed this effort in Congress. And Congressman Greg Stanton has been a leader in—as well.

And thanks to all the State, county, and local officials who've worked so hard to see this day happen, make it happen. And you have. Believe me, I know you have.

To the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management professionals here, thank you. Thank you for caring for our public lands, the most precious thing we have.

And special thanks to Tribal leaders joining us, whose ancestors stewarded these lands since time immemorial. Got to meet most of you last night. I'm looking forward to saying hello to you again today.

And a special hello to Jimmy McCain. Where are you, Jimmy? I'm going to embarrass you. He didn't know—think he was going to be introduced. Where is—there you are, Jimmy.

Jimmy—Jimmy's dad was a dear friend of mine. We were like two brothers who—we got along together. When we argued, we argued like hell. We really went at it. But he was a man of—he was a great patriot and a man of enormous integrity. And, Jimmy, you're just like your dad: serving your country in Iraq and Afghanistan and continuing to serve as a second lieutenant in the United States Army. Thank you, thank you, thank you, pal.

And I say this with all sincerity—no one ever doubts that I mean what I say; sometimes I say all that I mean though—*[laughter]*—I think of your dad all the time, about how much he loved this country and how optimistic he was, optimistic about our future. So thank you for being here, pal, and thank you for your continued service.

America's natural wonders are our Nation's heart and soul. That's not hyperbole; that's a fact. They unite us. They inspire us. A birthright we pass down from generation to generation. And that's why from day one I've taken historic steps to conserve our natural treasures for all ages.

My first week as President, I signed an Executive order establishing our country's most ambitious conservation goal ever. I made a commitment that we will protect 30 percent of all our

Nation's lands and waters—conserve all—30 percent of all our Nation's lands and waters by 2030. And we're on our way. And we're delivering.

Just my first year in office, we've done more—protected more lands than any—than anyone since the 1960s, John Kennedy's era: 9 million acres in Alaska, in Bristol Bay and the Tongass Forest; 225,000 acres in Minnesota, the Boundary Waters.

We're working to protect 770,000 square miles in the Pacific Ocean southwest of Hawaii: a new maritime sanctuary—a network of islands and reefs almost three times the size of Texas—on track to be among the largest protected ocean area on the entire planet.

We've already restored protections for three national monuments gutted by the last administration, two not so far from here in Utah: the Grand Staircase and Bears Ears.

By the way, I'll never forget: I was standing in Washington, and a little girl walked up. And I could see her daddy say, "Go up and say something to the President." She walked up, and she said, "Mr. President, would you take care of Bears Ears for me?" And I didn't know what she meant when she said it: "Would you take care of Bears Ears for me?" Well, we took care of her, and we gave her the signing pen. *[Laughter]*

A third of the coast of New England in the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts.

Look, we've designated new national monuments as well: Camp Hale in Colorado, 50,000 acres; Spirit Mountain in Nevada, 500,000 acres; Castner Range in Texas, 6,600 acres; and just last month, honoring Emmett Till and his mother Mamie Till-Mobley in Mississippi and in Illinois. But—*[applause]*—folks, it's not hyperbole to suggest that there is no national treasure—none—that is grander than the Grand Canyon. The Grand Canyon, one of the Earth's nine wonders—wonders of the world, literally. Think of that. You know, it's amazing. An enduring symbol of America to the entire world.

The first time I saw the Grand Canyon, years ago, I was a young Senator. As I stood there and looked out, a phrase came to mind. It was instinctive. I said this must be—this is God's cathedral. That's what it reminded me of. It just is so magnificent. As a matter of fact—I said nine—it's one of the seven wonders of the world.

And so today I'm proud to use my authority under the Antiquities Act to protect 1—almost 1 million acres of public land around Grand Canyon National Park as a new national monument—*[applause]*—to help right the wrongs of the past and conserve this land of ancestral footprints for all future generations.

Over the years, hundreds of millions of people have traveled to the Grand Canyon, awed—awed—by its majesty. But fewer are aware of its full history.

From time immemorial, more than a dozen Tribal nations have lived, gathered, prayed on these lands. But some 100 years ago, they were forced out.

That very act of preserving the Grand Canyon as a national park was used to deny Indigenous people full access to their homelands, to the places where they hunted, gathered. Took precious, sacred ancestral sites.

They fought for decades to be able to return to these lands, to protect these lands from mining and development, to clear them of contamination, to preserve their shared legacy for future generations.

I made a commitment as President to prioritize respect for the Tribal sovereignty and self-determination, to honor the solemn promises the United States made to Tribal nations to fulfill Federal trust and treaty obligations. I've pledged to keep using all that available authority to

protect sacred Tribal lands. My administration has worked alongside Tribal leaders, including many of you who are here today, to keep that promise.

At a time—at a time when some seek to ban books and bury history, we're making it clear that we can't just choose to learn only what we want to know. We should learn everything that's good, bad, and the truth about who we are as a nation. That's what great nations do, and we are the greatest of all nations.

Only with truth comes healing and justice and another step toward forming a more perfect Union.

Folks, our Nation's history is etched in our people and in our lands. Today's action is going to protect and preserve that history along with these high plateaus and deep canyons, majestic red cliffs over 300 million years old—older than the oldest dinosaur ever known; central to the creation stories of so many Tribal people and so many Tribal nations; fundamental to who we are, to their way of life, to their most sacred ceremonies. Ancestors buried here, eternal sources of reverence and healing.

These lands also support a range of ecosystems and plants, from savannas to sagebrush to ponderosa pine. A haven of hironic [iconic; White House correction] species like bats, bison, bighorn sheep, and nearly 450 kinds of birds, including the bald and golden eagles.

They are the historic home of 3,000 cultural sites—cliff houses, cave paintings—ancient spots that help us understand the history of these civilizations.

They also are key to building resilience to drought and climate change. Creeks and streams flowing into the Colorado River, supporting farms and ranches across the Southwest and bringing clean water to 40 million Americans.

And by creating this monument, we're setting aside new spaces for families to hike, bike, hunt, fish, and camp, growing the tourism economy that already accounts for 11 percent of all Arizona jobs.

Folks, preserving these lands is good not only for Arizona, but for the planet. It's good for the economy. It's good for the soul of the Nation. And I believe with my core—in my core it's the right thing to do.

But there's more work ahead to combat the existential threat of climate change. You know, we've seen historic floods, more intense droughts, wildfires spreading smoky haze, which you could—I could sense today—thousands of miles. Record temperatures affecting more than 100 million Americans this summer. Over a hundred—I need not tell you all—over 110 degrees in Phoenix for 31 straight days.

You know, our extreme heat is America's number-one weather-related killer. Extreme heat kills more people than floods, hurricanes, and tornadoes combined. And it's threatening the farms, the forests, and the fisheries of—so many families depend on to make a living.

But none of this need be inevitable. From the start of my administration, we've taken an unprecedented action to combat climate crisis.

Last year, I signed the largest climate bill in the history not only of the United States, but literally in the history of the world. It's the biggest investment in climate conservation and environmental justice ever, anywhere, in the history of the world.

And it has many parts. For example, it will save working families thousands of dollars a year if they install rooftop solar or weatherize their homes and also conserve energy.

And it includes a record \$720 million for Native communities to ease the impact of droughts and rising sea levels, to bring clean electricity to Tribal homes.

In all, these historic measures put us on track to cut all American emissions in half—in half—by 2030, and we're well on our way. It also creates enormous employment, enormous growth in things that better people's lives.

My mom, God love her, had an expression when I lost my family. She said, "Joey, out of everything bad, something good will come if you look hard enough for it." Well, there's a lot of good that's going to come from the sacrifices of dealing with taking on the climate crisis.

Folks, these are investments in our planet, our people, in America itself: protecting our outdoor treasures, making our Nation more resilient.

But some MAGA extremists in Congress are trying to undo it all. I didn't get any help from the guys on the other team. Every single, solitary person voted against this historic clean energy investment. And now many of them are trying again to repeal these parts of the bills, but we won't let them. There's too much at stake.

Let me close with this. America's natural wonders are central to our heritage and our identity as a nation. Conserving them not only protects the livelihoods of the people who depend on them, it preserves key pieces of our history, of the full American story, for generations to come. It unites us through all ages and connects us to something bigger than ourselves—much bigger than ourselves.

Today marks an historic step in preserving the majesty of this place. First among American landmarks. Sacred to Tribal Nations. Revered by every American. It speaks to the soul of our Nation. It reminds us of who we are.

And we can't—we are the United States of America. And there is nothing—nothing—beyond our capacity when we act together. Nothing. Nothing at all.

And, folks, God bless you all. May God protects our troops.

Now I want to invite some of our guests on stage—I think they know who they are—who are supposed to come up—as I sign the proclamation establishing the Ancestral Footprints of the Grand Canyon National Monument.

Thank you, thank you, thank you.

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

I wonder who is going to be the first one to walk the million acres. The Secretary says she's sure many people have done it already.

All right, here we go.

[The President signed the proclamation.]

It's official.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:22 a.m. at the Red Butte Airfield. In his remarks, he referred to Maya Tilousi, member, Hopi Tribe, Havasupai Tribe of Grand Canyon, and Cheyanne and Arapaho Tribes; Rep. Raúl M. Grijalva; and 2LT James McCain (USA), son of former Sen. John S. McCain III.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Baaj Nwaavjo I'tah Kukveni-Ancestral Footprints of the Grand Canyon National Monument, establishment, signing the proclamation near Tusayan, AZ.

Locations: Tusayan, AZ.

Names: Grijalva, Raúl M.; Haaland, Debra A.; Hobbs, Kathleen M.; Mallory, Brenda; McCain, James; Sinema, Kyrsten L.; Stanton, Gregory J.; Tilousi, Maya.

Subjects: Arizona, Baaj Nwaavjo I'tah Kukveni-Ancestral Footprints of the Grand Canyon National Monument; Arizona, Governor; Arizona, President's visit; Bureau of Land Management; Carbon emissions, reduction efforts; Climate change; Climate resilience, improvement efforts; Council of Environmental Quality; Energy efficiency and weatherization, homes and buildings; Environmental justice; Extreme heat, community protection efforts; Forest Service, U.S.; Land and maritime conservation efforts; Natural disasters, climate change impacts; Public and Tribal lands, conservation and management; Renewable energy sources and technologies; Secretary of the Interior; Solar and wind energy, promotion efforts; U.S. servicemembers, service and dedication.

DCPD Number: DCPD202300677.