

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2023

Remarks on Labor Day in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

September 4, 2023

The President. Hello, Philadelphia!

Audience members. Four more years! Four more years! Four more years!

The President. Hello, hello, hello!

Audience members. Four more years! Four more years! Four more years!

The President. Whoa! Thank you, thank you, thank you. Hello, Philadelphia! And thank you, Brittany, for that introduction. And by the way, where I come from, I learned women can do anything a man can do. *[Laughter]* Because all the women in my family are smarter than I am. *[Laughter]*

It's good to be almost home. You know, I wouldn't have been elected to the United States Senate in the first place were it not for Philadelphia—that's not a joke—with all the help and support I got from Philly.

Before I begin, we've got a lot of friends to thank. Ryan Boyer, president of the Building Trades. Ryan, thank you, pal. I don't know where Ryan is standing, but I know he's here.

And Danny—Danny Bauder—Danny, president of the Central Labor Council. Got to say hello.

And Gary Masino, president of Sheet Metal Workers Local 19. Thanks for hosting us today. Nothing to it. By the way, I think maybe the worse sentence in the English language for somebody who runs a place is "The President is coming." Like, "Oh, my God." *[Laughter]* Nothing but work. Nothing but a lot of work.

And by the way, you know, she couldn't be here today because she's celebrating Labor Day in Detroit, but I want to thank Liz Shuler—a great friend, a fearless leader of the AFL–CIO, and a great, great partner.

And so many current and former elected officials are here today—all friends of mine and friends of the labor as well.

Governor Shapiro and Senator Fetterman, they couldn't be here today because we're splitting the State. They're taking Pittsburgh, and I'm taking Philly.

Along—along with a few friends. By the way, Mayor Kenney is here, I think. Mr. Mayor, you show up here? You were able to come? There he is under the American flag.

Good to see you, Mr. Mayor. I'm sorry I keep bugging you all the time. He and I talk more than I think we talk to our staffs. Thank you, Mr. Mayor.

Audience member. *[Inaudible]*—have to be 89. You'll live to be 90! *[Laughter]*

[At this point, the President made the sign of the cross.]

The President. Oh—*[laughter]*.

I tell you what, someone said: "You know, that Biden, he's getting old, man. I tell you what." Well, guess what? Guess what? I can—and you know, the only thing that comes with age is a little bit of wisdom. I've been—but I—I've been doing this longer than anybody. And guess what? I'm going to continue to do it with your help.

Look, one of my friends from my hometown, Bobby Casey, from Scranton, Pennsylvania. And you know—and with Representatives Dwight Evans, a good friend. And Brendan Boyle is always there for me. And Mary Kay Scanlon—Mary Gay Scanlon is a—has been a great friend as well.

And look, former member Charlene [Cherelle; White House correction] Parker—where is—she's here? I know I saw her.

Audience member. The next mayor!

The President. I know—the next mayor. I was about to do that. I was going to see her first. [Laughter] You want to come up here and do this, old buddy? I'm happy—[laughter].

I told you when I ran for President that I'd—I told you I'd have your back. And I have.

You know, there are a lot of politicians in this country who don't know how to say the word "union." They talk about labor, but they don't say "union." It's "union." I'm one of the—I'm proud to say "union." I'm proud to be the most pro-union President, according to the experts about—in American history. And that's—and by the way, I make no bones about that.

Folks, on this Labor Day, let me tell you what we're celebrating. We're celebrating jobs—good-paying jobs, jobs you can raise a family on, union jobs.

You've heard me say it before, but my dad used to have an expression—I swear to God—he'd say: "Joey, a job is about a lot more than a paycheck. For real. It's about a lot more than a paycheck. It's about your dignity. It's about respect. It's about being able to look your kid in the eye and say, 'Honey, it's going to be okay,' and mean it when you say it."

And he was right. And I'm determined to make that a reality for every family in this country.

And we are making it a reality. Nearly 13 million 500 thousand jobs just since you got me sworn in, in January of 2020 [2021; White House correction]. Eight hundred thousand new manufacturing jobs.

But you wouldn't know it from all the negative news you hear. But we're getting through: This one of the greatest job creation periods in American history. For real. That's a fact.

And you know, it wasn't that long ago we were losing jobs in this country. In fact, the guy who held this job before me was just one of two Presidents in history——

Audience members. Boo!

The President. He was one of—but there is an important point—one of two Presidents in history that left office with fewer jobs in America than when he got elected office. By the way, do you know who the other one was? Herbert Hoover. [Laughter] Isn't that kind of coincidental?

Look, but we're turning things around because of you. When the last guy was here, you were shipping jobs to China. Now we're bringing jobs home from China. When the last guy was here—[applause]. When the last guy was here, your pensions were at risk. We helped save millions of pensions with your help. When the last guy was here, he looked at the world from Park Avenue. I look at it from Scranton, Pennsylvania. I look at it from Claymont, Delaware. Not a joke.

Folks, all my time in public life, I've been referred to as "Middle Class Joe." I guess they thought that was a—the—somehow not very complimentary. Well, guess what? That's who I am. And it doesn't mean you're not sophisticated because you're middle class. It means you work like hell. And you know what? Your family has to work like hell to be able to make it.

Well, I'm awful sophisticated about one thing. I know who built this country. I've been saying this since I ran the first time. Let me say it loud and clear: Wall Street didn't build

America. The middle class built America, and unions built the middle class. That's a fact. That's not hyperbole. That's a fact. Unions built the middle class.

When I look out at this crowd, I see folks in my neighborhood when I grew up in Scranton and Claymont: people with physical courage and brains; people who busted their necks their whole lives to care for their families; people who get up every day and work like the devil to pay their taxes and volunteer in their communities.

You're too modest. You don't talk enough about what you have to do. But I tell you—leaders all the time, "American union workers are the best." And this is what I tell—I know every major head of state in the world. Not a joke. It's because I've been around. And they look to America for foreign policy issues. And guess what? I make the point: America has the best workers in the world. That's a fact.

And you guys ought to talk about it more. It can take 4 to 5 years to train as an apprentice. It's like going back to college. The jobs are constantly changing. The technology evolves. You have to keep stepping up. You have to get more training. You can't—you—and so you can't be the worst in the world. You're the best in the world. No, I really mean it.

You know, like the sheet metal workers who used to use hand-drawn blueprints to design ductwork in buildings now use sophisticated computer-aided design systems so the entire project can be laid out in 3D. It ain't your father's sheet metal workers. This is a different world, man.

You do the job right, and you do it on time. And you cost less for the—the guy you're doing it for or the person, the outfit you do it for, than if they didn't have labor.

People are starting to understand it. I met with the Business Roundtable. They're the big—bigshots in the corporate America. And I said—they said, "Why are you so prolabor?" I said, "Why you don't understand why I'm prolabor?" [*Laughter*] No, I'm serious.

And I said—when I was Vice President, I spoke with 364, I think it was, CEOs of the Fortune 500 companies. And we asked them, "What do you most need?" And do you know what they said? "A better educated workforce." And I said: "Well, what the hell are you doing about it? You're not doing much about it. You're fighting everything we're doing in the unions as well as on—in the Democratic Party to make people better educated. Why are you doing it?"

Well, guess what? All of a sudden, now you don't see them going after you nearly as much. Why? Because they know they need you.

America's support for union is higher today than any time in nearly 60 years. And I'm continuing to call on Congress to fully and finally pass the Protect the Right to Organize—the PRO Act—which makes it easier to—too many companies are still playing unfair, trying to prevent organization.

No, the bill is named after one of the greatest leaders in the labor I've ever worked with: Rich Trumka. And guess what? We're going to get it passed, come hell or high water.

And, folks, my plan for the country is to make the economy work for people like you. Because when it works for people like you, it works for everybody.

Like I said: In my first 2 years, I've created nearly 13.5 million jobs—more jobs in 2 years than any President has created in a 4-year term—more. Eight hundred thousand new manufacturing jobs.

Where is it written—where is it written—that America will not lead the world in manufacturing? I don't see it written anywhere, because we are leading the world.

Unemployment has been below 4 percent for the longest stretch in 50 years. We've recovered all the jobs lost during the pandemic. We've added millions more.

People are coming off the sidelines to go to work. More than 700,000 people joined the labor force last month, which means a higher share of American—working-age Americans are now in the workforce than any time in the last 20 years.

Job satisfaction is higher than it's been in 36 years, while unemployment is down and inflation is down as well.

Remember the experts said to get inflation down, we needed to—it's been the mantra of economists for a long time: You need to get inflation under control, you need to lower wages, you need higher unemployment. Not on my watch.

That's right. The answer was to lay people off and pay them less. But I never thought the problem was too many people working or working people making too much money. I've never seen that problem.

We have to do more to put inflation down, but it's down around 3 percent, about one-third of what it was a year ago. That's near the lowest point in 2 years, and wages are growing faster than inflation.

Folks, this just didn't happen. Together, we made it happen.

Decades of handing out excessive tax cuts to the rich and the corporations without making the investments in America and the American people—that had been a bust. It's all done—it was all done to hollow out the middle class; blow up the deficit; ship jobs overseas; strip the dignity, pride, and hope out of a community, one after another, as they shut down the factory and sent it overseas because labor was cheaper and we imported a more expensive product.

Well, guess what? I'm pretty sure you saw in your home what I saw in mine. Not a whole lot of trickle-down ended up on my dad's kitchen table as he busted his neck. So we're changing that. We're replacing trickle-down economics with what everyone on Wall Street is referring to these days as "Bidenomics." And guess what? It's working.

It's about building the economy from the middle out and the bottom up, not the top down. Because I'm not—this is not a political statement; this an economic statement. When the middle class does well, everyone does well.

I'm a capitalist. The poor do well. And guess what? You can still be a millionaire or billionaire, except one thing: Pay your taxes. Pay your taxes.

Bidenomics is a blue-collar blueprint for America. It's for you. For example, last week we announced the new proposal, a new rule that would extend overtime pay to as many as 3,600,000 workers. Now it's about 35 grand—36 grand before you can get—after that, you don't get overtime. Well, now it's 53 grand, man.

And guess what? Is you've got a whole lot of people working as the executive assistants, working a hell of a lot more than 40 hours and not getting paid overtime. Now you're going to get paid overtime. It would make a big difference for a lot of families.

We did something else that matters a whole lot to folks in this parking lot. And that's—we passed the Butch Lewis Act, which protected pensions for millions of union workers. It's one of the most significant achievements for union workers and retirees in over 50 years.

And for the folks at home who don't know why it matters, let me explain. Two to three million union workers, through no fault of their own, after paying into their pension for years, faced painful cuts to benefits they were counting on in retirement.

Why? They were going to [be; White House correction] left high and dry while companies they worked for didn't hold up their end of the bargain and finance their end of the bargain. We just couldn't let that happen.

And, I might add, we got it passed with not a single, solitary Republican vote. Not one voted to sustain these pensions.

Audience members. Boo!

The President. People worked their whole lives—no, I mean—I'm—think about it though. Why in the hell would they do that? Can you imagine if it was reversed? Imagine if they came along and said they were——

Anyway, I don't want to get going. [*Laughter*]

Democrats passed it because Democrats know the value of hard work.

We also passed the bipartisan infrastructure law. You can't have the strongest economy in the world with a second rate infrastructure. Can you believe we used to have the best infrastructure in the world and then we fell to number 13 in the world. Roads, bridges, internet—the whole deal. Thirteenth. The United States of America, 13th in the world.

But guess what? Guess what? The great real-estate builder—the last guy here, he didn't build a damn thing. [*Laughter*] Under my predecessor, Infrastructure Week became a punchline. On my watch, infrastructure is being a decade, and it's a headline.

And, folks, we're investing in America: in our roads, bridges, ports, airports, clean water, high-speed internet, and so much more. Over \$10 billion has already been committed to the State of Pennsylvania.

We've already announced \$78 million going to the city of Philadelphia to make improvements along the approximately 12.3 miles of Roosevelt Boulevard and North Broad Street—the Bucks County line, including upgrades to traffic signals, installing new transit and bike paths, pedestrian paths.

We're upgrading airports from Pittsburgh to Lehigh Valley, right here in Philly.

Audience member. Ninety-five!

The President. And—you've got it. Ninety-five is—we have—we've got a—I've got it, man. I've got it. [*Laughter*]

And, Bobby——

Audience member. You've got it, Joe!

The President. And, Bobby Casey, we're finally going to get that rail line from Scranton to New York. I'm going to get that done.

My grandfather—you think I'm joking. I'm not joking. It's a big deal. It's a big deal. And economically, it will be a big deal. Economically, be a big deal.

And guess who's going to build these projects?

Audience members. We are!

The President. You are! Labor. Union labor.

Sheet metal workers, electricians, operating engineers, ironworkers, steelworkers, laborers, bricklayers, plumbers, pipefitters, cement masons, painters. Look, we're creating good-paying,

prevailing-wage jobs, where you don't need a college degree to make a decent income, but you got to work as hard to get a college degree.

And by the way, we're going to transition to an electric vehicle future made in America. It will be made in America. And that protects and expands good union jobs. Auto manufacturing has large been a middle—largely been a middle class career with good pay that you could raise a family on. Well, that's not going to change on my watch.

Look, one of the core principles throughout everything we've done is this: Make it in America with American products, with American labor. Most people don't know there's been a Federal law on the books. And 20 years ago, I didn't know it either, to be honest with you.

Since 1933, the law says that when Congress appropriates money for the President to administer, whether it's for an aircraft carrier or a Federal highway, the President is supposed to hire American workers and use only American products.

But guess what? For too long, too many Presidents didn't have the nerve to insist on it. Well, I'm insisting on it.

When I took office, I was determined that we'd never again be in a position where, during the pandemic, supply chains broke down and America and American companies couldn't get the parts and products they needed. So I was determined to bring the supply chains home, to invest in America. And guess what? And that's encouraging the private sector to do the same.

Since I took office, the private companies are investing their money—\$510 billion—investing in America—creating jobs instead of sending it overseas. For example, I met with the chairman of one of the largest semiconductor manufacturers in the world. And by the way, we invented the semiconductor. We used to have 40 percent of the market.

Well, it's based in South Korea, this group. It's called SK Group. They're investing \$22 billion in America, building facilities to make these chips here in America. When I asked the CEO why—why America, here's what he said: "Number one, there's no safer place in the world to have my investment than the United States of America." "And number two"—this is the God's truth—"you have the best workers in the world."

He was right about—on both counts.

The long and short of it is, we're making things here in America again with American workers, with American products, in American factories. For too long, we've been exporting jobs. Corporations were shutting down factories throughout the country, from Pennsylvania to all through the Midwest. For communities—generations having worked in a particular factory get shipped overseas because labor was cheaper, depriving that county and that city of pride, sending jobs overseas, and importing finished products from overseas.

Well, we're not doing that anymore. We're creating good-paying union jobs and exporting union-made products to the rest of the world.

And maybe equally important, we're bringing back pride to those scores of cities across America. I believe Americans who are willing to work hard should be able to get a job no matter where they live—in the Heartland, small towns, big cities; raise their kids on a good paycheck—paycheck; and keep their roots where they grew up.

And even with what we've done—unlike the last President—in my first 2 years, all this stuff—guess what? I cut the deficit \$1.7 trillion—cut the debt [deficit; White House correction] \$1.7 trillion.

And one more thing: One of the ways I was able to invest in you and still bring down the deficit was I started making people pay their fair share. Fifty-five—although you may remember

hearing me say this for the longest time—fifty-five of the largest corporations in America, the Fortune 500, paid zero in Federal taxes. Making \$40 billion, they paid zero.

Well, guess what? It's not fair, but I changed it. Now they're paying a minimum of 15 percent paying for all this stuff.

By the way, how many of you think the Tax Code is fair?

Audience members. Boo!

The President. You've got it, man.

You know, the idea that over a thousand billionaires—billionaires—billion, not million—billionaires in America, you know what they pay in Federal taxes on average? Eight percent. How many of you want to—if I had a deal, said: "Okay, no matter what you do, you only have to pay 8 percent. Raise your hand." You'd take it in a heartbeat, right?

Well, they pay a lower rate than you, than teachers, firefighters, and probably anyone in this parking lot. It's time we get paid—they paid at least a minimum tax.

The bottom line is this: You pay enough. It's time for big corporations and the very wealthy to start paying their fair share.

And I made a promise when I got elected so there would be no mistakes that no one making under \$400,000—any of you making 400—over 400 grand here? No one making under \$400,000 will see their Federal taxes go up a single penny. So I couldn't be—use the malarkey that they say I'm raising taxes on middle class people. *[Laughter]*

I made my promise, and I'll keep it.

Let me close with this. We've faced some pretty tough times in recent years. The pandemic took more than a million—a million—of our friends and neighbors, sons and daughters. There's a lot of empty chairs at Christmas and a lot of empty chairs when you sit down for Thanksgiving—mother, father, brother, sister, husband, wife.

It generated the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. It wasn't that long ago that 20 million people were out of work. But you didn't give up. Philadelphia didn't give up. America didn't give up. As I've said a thousand times, there is no quit in America. None.

All I hear with my friends on the other side—what they say is wrong with America. They keep telling us America is failing. They're wrong. I've got news for them. America has the strongest economy in the world right now, today; the lowest inflation rate among any major economy; 13.5 million new jobs.

And there's no one reason for it. It's not because of me, although a part—our products have helped. And not just the Democratic Party, it's you. I mean it sincerely, not a joke.

It's the American people—your grit, determination. You never quit. Whatever we set our mind to as a country—think about this—any goal we've ever set, we've never failed to accomplish. That's not going to change now.

America isn't failing, America is winning. And the rest of the world knows it. That's why our friends and allies are looking to us.

Look, I'm proud of the historic legislation my administration passed, a lot of which wouldn't have happened without—and so much of it affects you—without you. We passed the PACT Act, one of the most significant laws ever signed for veterans exposed to toxic metals and their families.

You know, I have a saying I've used my whole career. We have only one truly sacred obligation: to equip those we send into harm's way and care for them and their families when they come home and when they don't come home as well. It was part of my agenda in the State of the Union.

How many of you here are veterans? Raise your hand. We've got a lot of veterans here. Well, that obligation is sacred to prepare and equip you all and to deal with you when you come home.

Folks, we've taken the right steps not only to get our economy moving again, but to build to the future. And the real hero in this story is you. I'm not being solicitous.

The American people, the people of Philadelphia, the working people of this country—you're the ones getting up every day, walking out that door, and doing your work. And I've long said it's never, ever, ever been a good bet to bet against America. And it's not a good bet today.

We're still a country that believes in honesty and decency and integrity. We're still a country that believes in hard work and giving everyone a fair shot because we're still a country that believes that every one of us is created equal. We're still the beacon of the free world. Not a joke.

And it's because small towns and rural America, suburbs, big cities all across the country—everyday, ordinary people do the most extraordinary things. And let me tell you: America's best days are ahead of us. They're ahead of us, not behind us. It's about the future. This is about the future.

And I can honestly say I've been doing this a long while, but I've never been more optimistic about America's future.

We just have to remember who we are. We are the United States of America. There is nothing—nothing, nothing beyond our capacity if we work together.

So God bless you all. And may God protect our troops. You're the best. You're the best. You really are the best.

Thank you, thank you, thank you.

[Music began to play. The President resumed his remarks as follows.]

Well, thank you. They tell me if I work the rope line, we're going to slow the parade up so I'm not going to do that today. But—is that right? All right.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:42 a.m. at the Sheet Metal Workers' Local 19 union hall. In his remarks, he referred to Brittany Rivera, apprentice, Sheet Metal Workers' Local 19; Sen. Robert P. Casey, Jr.; Cherelle L. Parker, former member of the Philadelphia City Council and Pennsylvania House of Representatives; former President Donald J. Trump; and Tae-won "Anthony" Chey, chairman, SK Group.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Labor Day in Philadelphia, PA.

Locations: Philadelphia, PA.

Names: Bauder, Daniel P.; Boyer, Ryan; Boyle, Brendan F.; Casey, Robert P., Jr.; Chey, Tae-won "Anthony"; Evans, Dwight E.; Fetterman, John K.; Kenney, James F.; Masino, Gary J.; Parker, Cherelle L.; Rivera, Brittany; Scanlon, Mary Gay; Shapiro, Joshua D.; Shuler, Elizabeth H.; Trump, Donald J.

Subjects: America Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations; Apprenticeship programs and job training; Career training and continuing education; Corporate tax rates;

COVID–19 pandemic; Economic improvement; Electric and hybrid vehicles, promotion efforts; Federal deficit and debt; Global supply chain disruptions, efforts to address; Inflation; Infrastructure improvements; Job creation and growth; Labor Day; Labor movement and organized labor; Manufacturing industry, domestic investment; Overtime pay regulations, improvement efforts; Pennsylvania, Governor; Pennsylvania, President's visit; Rail infrastructure, improvement efforts; Retirement savings and pension programs, protection efforts; Semiconductor manufacturing; Tax Code reform; U.S. servicemembers, environmental exposures in war zones; Unemployment rate.

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