

Remarks in a Teleconference Call With Faith Leaders on the Jewish High Holidays
September 14, 2023

Well, thank you, Rabbi Asch. Thank you very much.

And thank you all—all the rabbis on this call for being such a source of strength and wisdom to communities across America.

[At this point, the President cleared his throat.]

Excuse me.

I have long felt that strength and wisdom. I—you might say, raised in the synagogues in my State. You think I'm kidding. I'm not.

But, back in Wilmington, Delaware, Beth Shalom was the home of countless friends for me: Rabbi Kraft—led by Rabbi Kraft, Rabbi Geffen, Rabbi Beals, who all became dear friends. We shared many deep conversations about faith and purpose. And there's always been—you've always been there for my family in difficult times as well as happy times, just like all of you are always there for your congregation and everyone in the neighborhood, Jewish or not.

And that's the power of Jewish communities across America and around the world. Like the Jewish proverb says, "What comes from the heart goes to the heart." We all feel it.

I'm honored to speak with you before the High Holidays. I've always believed the message of the High Holidays is universal. It's never too late to repent, to change, to begin anew. As Vice President and now as President, I've been honored to host many Jewish holidays and events that embody that message. Doug and Kamala have continued that tradition.

It's important to show the world that we celebrate and protect Jewish Americans, whose values, cultures, and contributions shape the very character of our Nation—and, I might add, from the very beginning—especially at a time when anti-Semitism has ridden—risen to record levels, echoing the worst chapters in human history.

I decided to run for President after Charlottesville. My son Beau had just died, and I had no intention of getting back into public life. But when I listened to what happened, I—when I watched on television people marching out of the woods, in the fields with torches, and carrying Nazi banners and singing the same God-awful—God-awful—anti-Semitic verses that were all the bile that we heard through Europe—that we all heard through Europe in the thirties.

And that's when I decided. As a matter of fact, that's when my grandchildren—my grandchildren actually asked for a family meeting. And I'm not joking. One was a junior—a senior at University of Pennsylvania, and they worked their way down through seventh grade. And they said, "You know, Pop"—they call me Pop—they said: "Pop, you know, Daddy would want you to run. He'd want you to run, because somebody has got to say something."

And so, you know, I decided to run after Charlottesville, when the neo-Nazis marched in the shadows, spewing the same anti-Semitic bile we heard in the thirties. And what did we hear? They were—when that young woman was killed, I spoke to her mother, and I asked—I—it was just devastating. Then the President, the last occupant of this place, was asked what did he think, he said there were "very fine people on both sides."

Again, that's when I decided I knew I had to run. That's when I decided I had to stay engaged instead of walking away.

Because hate never goes away. I thought that we could defeat hate. I thought as I—I got involved in the civil rights movement, I became a United States Senator, and then I got to the point where I convinced Strom Thurmond before he passed away to support the Voting Rights Acts.

I thought we could defeat hate. But it doesn't—it just hides. It hides. Hides. And when given oxygen, it comes out from under the rocks.

In the past several years, it's been given too much oxygen. It's simply wrong. It's immoral. And as we—you all know the expression I heard from my father all the time: "Silence is complicity." And I will not be silent. But I know—I know—it's still hard.

Next month marks the fifth anniversary of the synagogue shooting in Pittsburgh, the deadliest act of anti-Semitism in our Nation's history. This month, as you attend shul for the High Holidays, I know you're concerned about security.

As your President, I want to make clear to you and to all of your congregations: I have your back. I'm committed to the safety of the Jewish people. My administration is going to continue to condemn and combat anti-Semitism at every turn.

For example, I've secured the largest ever increase in funding for the physical security of nonprofits, including synagogues, Jewish Community Centers, Jewish day schools. Nobody—nobody—should ever have to fear walking down the street wearing the symbol of their faith.

I hosted the first "United We Stand" summit, convening leaders of all backgrounds and all faiths to declare that hate-fueled violence can have no safe harbor in America. The Justice Department—the U.S. Justice Department has made combating hate crime a top priority.

And in May, my administration released the first-ever National Strategy To Counter Anti-Semitism with input from many of you. It's the most ambitious, comprehensive effort to combat anti-Semitism in American history.

And my administration has already started aggressively implementing it. We've published security guidance for synagogues across the country. We've launched a national campaign to combat anti-Semitism in schools, colleges, and universities. We've delivered trainings on religious workplace accommodations. And so much more.

The strategy also calls for Congress, State and local governments, social media and other companies, civil society, and faith leaders to do their part to counter anti-Semitism. Speak up. Be seen. This is a challenge for our whole country, and we are charging forward on all fronts.

At the same time that books are being banned—if you can believe that, in the United States of America, that books are being banned in our schools—and history is being erased, we must also answer lies with truth.

That's why I appointed Deborah Lipstadt, a Holocaust expert, on our first Ambassador-level Special Envoy To Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism. That's—she's Special Envoy to that.

We also—that's also why, last Hanukkah, I marked a new tradition: lighting the first permanent White House menorah to send the message that the story of the Jewish life in America is not just significant, it is permanent. It matters.

My dad was what many of you would call a righteous Christian. He taught us about the horrors of the Shoah on our—at our family dinner table. Our dinner table was a place where we sat to have conversation and incidentally eat.

And he asked me, and I did—I passed that lesson down to my children and grandchildren, taking each one of them when they turned 14 years old, put them on a plane and took them to

Dachau so they could bear witness and no one could pretend they didn't know what was happening. Forced people to face the reality of what happened.

When I visited Israel again last year, I went to Yad Vashem and reaffirmed America's unshakeable commitment to Israel's security and its right to exist as an independent Jewish state. My support for Israel's security remains longstanding and unwavering, including its right to defend itself against attacks.

When I hosted President Herzog at the White House this summer, I told him how proud I was of our support of Israel's Iron Dome, which has intercepted thousands of rockets and saved countless lives in Israel.

I'm so proud to continue our support by nominating Jack Lew, an Orthodox Jew, to serve as our Ambassador to Israel. Jack has an incredibly distinguished career and will be an outstanding Ambassador.

Let me close with this: As we enter the High Holidays, I'm thinking about my dear friend, the late Elie Wiesel, and other Holocaust survivors that I've met over the years and come to know. I'm thinking about their journey to find the light, their enduring message of resilience, hope, and faith.

For thousands of years, that's been the message of the Jewish people. That's the message of Jewish Americans today who continue to enrich every part of American life. That's the message—that's the message—of Rosh Hashanah.

And to—you know, I've always—I'm always—I just think we always have to stay hopeful and always believe our actions have the power to shift the balance of our fate, our Nation, and our world for the better.

Thank you for all you do for our Nation.

From Jill and me and our family, *Shana Tova*. May it be a happy, healthy, sweet New Year for all of you. And may we all be described—may we all be inscribed in the Book of Life. Thank you for including me.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:33 p.m. from the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Erica Asch, rabbi, Temple Beth El in Augusta, ME; David Geffen, former rabbi, and Michael S. Beals, senior rabbi, Congregation Beth Shalom in Wilmington, DE; Douglas C. Emhoff, husband of Vice President Kamala D. Harris; Susan Bro, mother of Heather D. Heyer, who was killed during the vehicular attack in Charlottesville, VA, on August 12, 2017; and former President Donald J. Trump. He also referred to his grandchildren Naomi K. Biden Neal and R. Hunter, Natalie, Finnegan, and Roberta "Maisy" Biden. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on September 15.

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Names: Asch, Erica; Beals, Michael S.; Biden, Finnegan J.; Biden, Natalie P.; Biden, R. Hunter, II; Biden, Roberta M. "Maisy"; Bro, Susan; Emhoff, Douglas C.; Geffen, David; Harris, Kamala D.; Herzog, Yitzhak; Lew, Jacob J.; Lipstadt, Deborah E.; Neal, Naomi K. Biden; Trump, Donald J.

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Semitism; Vice President; Virginia, 2017 civil unrest and violence in Charlottesville; Yom Kippur.

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