

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2023

Remarks at a Campaign Reception in New York City
September 18, 2023

The President. Hello, Broadway!

My name is Joe Biden. I'm Jill Biden's husband. And she's got to go to Washington. Be safe, kid. Love you.

The First Lady. Love you.

Audience members. Aww!

The President. I was doing an event with members of the Black caucus earlier this evening, and I got this e-mail, this note in the middle of the—my speaking. Jill said, "You're missing the best show I've ever seen." [*Laughter*]

Thank you, Jeffrey, for that introduction and for organizing this special lineup of performers. Thank you, thank you, thank you. Jill got here before me, so she was able to enjoy the show.

Folks, looking out at all of you, I have just one thing to say: Broadway is back. Broadway is back. And I can't tell you how grateful I am to have your support. I wouldn't be here today without you all. I really mean that.

When my two boys were young—and Jill loved Broadway—we'd come up at least twice a year from Washington to make sure we saw a play. And we were—our boys were young, Beau and Hunter, and Jill—we took them to see Bette Midler. [*Laughter*] Anyway, in the middle of her show—it's the God's truth—Bette Midler looked down, and she said, "Who would bring two kids to a show like this?" [*Laughter*]

Well, my boys used that as a badge of courage. "Bette Midler picked us out of the crowd," they'd tell people. Well, families from all over the world have memories like that to cherish. They come to New York City, just like you did with your families, because Broadway gives us something irreplaceable. It gives us the truth—the truth.

Normally, at events like this, I talk about the record of my administration, but even today, a lot of Americans don't know about it. Things I've—how we've created 13 million jobs, how we rallied the world to confront Russia's aggression in Ukraine, or how we put the first Black woman on the United States Supreme Court. Or how we passed the biggest investment in the history of the world to combat climate change.

But, folks, tonight I want to talk about something else. I want to talk about what's at stake in this country. You know, when I was Vice President at the end of the Obama-Biden administration, I had no intention of running for office again. We just lost our son Beau, a major in the United States Army, a decorated war veteran, a guy who won the—anyway, he was a—I wish you could have known him.

He was going—and I was going to write a book and set up the institute of foreign policy—and I set up the institute of foreign policy at the University of Pennsylvania, where I became a professor—and domestic policy at the University of Delaware. And that's what I did.

But then Charlottesville happened in August of 2017, something I never, never, never thought I'd see in America. But you sure remember what happened, along with me. We saw people crawling out of fields with lighted torches, carrying swastikas, their veins bulging, and

chanting the same anti-Semitic bile and racist bile we heard in Germany in the thirties, accompanied by the Ku Klux Klan. And in the process, a young woman was murdered.

When the President was asked about what was—what comment did he have, he said, and I quote, "There are very fine people on both sides." Very fine people on both sides? When I heard that, I knew I could no longer sit on the sidelines, because the President of the United States had just drawn a moral equivalency between those who stood for hate and those who stood against it.

You see, I believe silence is complicity. And I would not be silent any more than you were. So I ran.

With the strong support of my remaining children—and God love them—I ran because I thought everything—everything in this country, everything it stood for, everything we believed in, everything that made America "America," even our very democracy—was at risk. And I had no choice, like many of you.

I think people tonight—I was being hyperbolic at the time, thought that. "Joe, what do you mean our democracy is at risk? What do you mean we're in a battle for the soul of America?" Well people don't say that anymore. I don't think anyone today doubts our democracy was at stake in 2020. And thank God, because of people like you, we won.

And I might add—I might add—we won convincingly, clearly, and without question by 7 million votes, a victory that not only withstood not more than—not one, but 60 legal court challenges and an insurrection on January the 6th.

So now I'm running again. And you may have noticed, a lot of people seem focused on my age. *[Laughter]* Well, I get it, believe me. I know better than anyone. *[Laughter]*

But there's something else I know. When I came to office and this Nation was flat on its back, I knew what to do to vaccinate the nation, to rebuild the economy. When Russia invaded Ukraine, I knew what to do to rebuild NATO and the alliances and rebuild our alliances and rally the world.

And, above all, when democracy was at stake, I knew what to do to redeem the soul of this Nation.

So let me answer that as simply as I can. I'm running because we've made progress, but our democracy is still at stake. I'm running because our most important freedoms—the right to choose, the right to vote, the right to be who you are, love who you love—these basic rights are being attacked. They're being shredded.

I'm running because our children should have the right to go to school without fear of being gunned down by a weapon of war.

I'm running because there are people banning books in this—did you ever think we'd be banning books like we do?

I'm running because, all across America, hate groups have been emboldened. I'm running because far too often it's still the case that you can get killed or attacked walking the streets in America just because you're Black or because you're wearing a symbol of your faith.

Look, folks, I'm running because, no, I will not side with dictators like Putin. Maybe Trump and his MAGA friends can bow down and praise him, but I won't. I've known him for 25 years, and I'm going to stand up to him as I always have and always will.

I'm running because—hear—hear this—I want the entire nation to join me in sending the strongest, clearest, most powerful message possible that political violence in America is never, never, never acceptable.

And I'm running because democracy is at stake and because, 2024, democracy is on the ballot once again. And let there be no question. Donald Trump and his MAGA Republicans are determined to destroy American democracy. And I will always defend, protect, and fight for our democracy. That's why I'm running. In my entire career, I never thought I'd ever have to say anything like that.

You know, this country we live in is so special. We are the only country in the world—we're the most unique country in the world. We're not built on our ethnicity or religion or geography. We're built on an idea. We're the only country built on an idea that we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men and women are created equal. Endowed by the creator, they deserve to be treated equally throughout our lives.

We've never fully lived up to that commitment, but God knows we have never, in 240 years, walked away from it. Never walked away from it. And we're not going to walk away now.

I don't believe America is a dark, negative nation, a nation of carnage driven by anger, fear, and revenge. Donald Trump does. To his supporters, he says, "I am your retribution." I am your retribution? "We're a failing nation," he says. "Either they win or we win. And if they win, we no longer have a country."

Did you ever hear, you think, a President of the United States speak like that?

Audience members. No!

The President. Well, I believe we are a hopeful and optimistic nation, driven by the simple proposition that everybody deserves a fair shot—just a shot.

You in this theater, in music, in the arts, you understand what freedom means: to tell the truth, to have the courage to hold a mirror up to the Nation and say: "Is this who we are? Can we be better?"

Folks, that's what's at stake. And I need you—indeed, I need every American who loves democracy—to join us in 2024 to make sure we make it stronger, not attack it. And when you do that, we'll have something few generations can say. We'll be able to say, "We will have saved American democracy."

It sounds like hyperbole, but it's a fact. I've never been more optimistic about our country's future in the 800 years I've served. [*Laughter*] We just have to—we have to remember who in the hell we are. [*Laughter*]

We are the United States of America. And there is nothing—nothing—beyond our capacity if we work together. There's never been a problem we've had where we did not come out stronger than when we went in.

And, ladies and gentlemen, it's time for us to stand up. There's nothing we can't do when we work together—nothing.

May God bless you all, and may God protect our troops. I love you.

Thank you, thank you, thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:47 p.m. at the Lunt-Fontanne Theatre. In his remarks, he referred to theatrical producer Jeffery Seller; actor and musician Bette Midler; Supreme Court Associate Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson; former President Donald J. Trump; and President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin of Russia. This transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on September 19.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Campaign reception in New York City.

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