

Remarks at a Campaign Reception in New York City
September 20, 2023

Look, Amy and Cary, thank you for welcoming me into your home.

You know, maybe the worst sentence—worst sentence—in the English language is: In the middle of the week, the President is coming. [*Laughter*] It means about 6,000 other people show up beforehand. And thank you so very, very much.

You know, normally in events like this we talk about—I find myself talking about what we've accomplished and what we will further want to accomplish. And things like, we have created more jobs in the first 2½ years than any administration has created in 4 years.

We're in a situation where we rallied the world, and it took a little rallying at the time to take on Russia's invasion of an innocent country that has caused and made him, literally, designated as a war criminal across the world.

And how we passed the biggest investment in history of the world in climate change. And it's beginning to have some real impacts.

But I want to talk about what's at stake for the country. And this is a bit of an unusual way to go about this.

First of all, I—when I left the Vice Presidency at the end of the Obama-Biden administration, I had no intention of running for office again, and that's a fact. This was an—anyway, I had no intention of running again.

I had just lost my son, who was attorney general and a decorated war veteran. And anyway, and I was going to go—I was going—I was going to write a book. I was a professor at the University of Pennsylvania. They had set up the Biden School of Foreign Policy at the University of Pennsylvania, gave me a substantial budget to hire some staffers, like—staffers like Tony Blinken and others that—of consequence.

And then at the University of Delaware, they set up a at the University of Delaware, Biden Domestic Policy Institute. And so I was occupied. And that's what I did.

But then along came, in August of 2017, Charlottesville, Virginia. You remember those folks walking out of the fields literally carrying torches, with Nazi swastikas, holding them forward, singing the same vicious, anti-Semitic bile—the same exact bile that was sung in Germany in the early thirties. And a young woman was killed. A young woman was killed.

And this was—and I you may remember it. There was a consequential piece of business going on. And the former guy was asked, "What do you think would happen?" He was the sitting President. And he said, "I thought there were some very fine people on both sides."

And I mean this sincerely, from the bottom of my heart, that's when I decided I was going to run again.

And in the process, I might add, I was—the only thing that was holding me back was my grandchildren because I was worried because, you know, when you're running a Presidential campaign, your children or grandchildren become the targets of a lot of things. And I knew it was going to be an ugly campaign with the guy I was running against.

And what happened was, I saw—so I got a phone—we have a tradition in our family, for real—my dad started it, and only been invoked, I think, 9 or 10 times—that any child can ask for

a family meeting, and it has to be taken seriously. Literally, the whole family meets, because they have something serious on their mind.

I got a call from my granddaughter, who was—I guess she was then a freshman of Columbia Law School up here in New York, and I—and all the rest of my then fairly grown grandchildren, five of them—two of my deceased son's children and my—Hunter's three children. And they wanted to meet. So that was on a Thursday, and on a Saturday, we met with my wife Jill and my five grandchildren.

And they made the case in why I should run and how their whole lives, they've either had a grandfather or father who has been the attorney general, a Senator, a Vice President, or a—you know, deeply involved their whole life. So they weren't new to the political system.

And then they made the case that: "You've got to run, Pop." They call me "Pop." "You got to run, Pop, and Daddy would make—would want you to run," and so on. And they said—I said, "Well, you know, it's going to be a tough campaign if I run."

And they said to me, "We know that." And my youngest, who is now a senior in high school—his name is Hunter Biden; he's a grand—he's my son Beau's oldest son—only son. And he took out his cell phone, and he said, "We know it's going to be ugly, Pop," and he showed me a photograph of the—on the cell phone of me walking out of the funeral of my—a military funeral for my son. My hand was on the flag of the coffin, and I had my arm around my—he was then about this tall—around little Hunter. And I used to always hold Beau like that. I'd have my hand on his chin. And the caption on the bottom of the photograph was, "Biden molests another child."

And he said: "So we know, Pop. We know. But you've got to run." And so I decided to run. And from the help of a lot of people in this room, including a guy standing over against the window there and a few others, we were able to get elected.

But in the process of that, one of the things that happened was the—we found ourselves in a circumstance where it got to be kind of as mean as I had anticipated but even a little worse.

You know, you may remember that, you know, those folks from Charlottesville, as they came out of the fields and carrying those swastikas, and remember the ones with the torches and the Ku—accompanied by the Ku Klux Klan. And in addition to that, they had—there were White supremacists. Anyway, they were making the big case about how terrible this was. And a young woman was killed in the process.

And my predecessor, as I said, was asked what he thought. He said, "There are some very fine people on both sides." Well, that kept ringing in my head.

And so I couldn't, quite frankly, remain silent any longer. So I decided I would run. And it became—I ran because I thought everything this country stood for was up for grabs for the first time in my career.

And I know I look like I'm 30, but—[laughter]—but I've been around doing this a long time. I've been a senator for 36 years, a Vice President for 8 years. And I had never quite seen it like this. And so, you know, I think people thought I was being a little hyperbolic when I said that everything we stand for was up for grabs, including our very democracy—our very democracy.

And so I announced I was running. And it was a—people thought I was—including my own staff—thought I was being hyperbolic when I said our democracy is at risk. But I meant it.

And they'd ask, you know, whether or not I think—about democracy, how could it be at risk in America? Well, I think it was, and I think the response to the election where we won by 7

million votes is evidence to the fact that the old, basic principles of what constitutes a victory and how to deal with a win or a loss was really thrown into jeopardy.

And a victory that withstood 60 legal challenges, including to the Supreme Court of the United States of America, and the insurrection on January the 8th [6th; White House correction]. And you know, so I decided this time around that—after January 6th, that I was going to run again.

And you know, as you might have noticed, a lot of people seem a little focused on my age. [Laughter] I get it. And believe me, I know better than anyone.

But there's something else I know. I came to office when the Nation was flat on its back, and I think I knew what to do. Only thing—as you know, a couple of you are over 50 here—you know, with age comes wisdom. You have experience. And so I knew what to do.

I vaccinated the Nation and began to rebuild our economy. When Russia invaded Ukraine, I said—we went out, and we were able to rebuild alliances in Europe and rally the world to respond to Russian aggression.

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

I said I was running for three reasons: one, to, in fact, make sure that we restore the soul of the Nation; two, we rebuilt the middle class from the middle out and the bottom up because, that way, when you—those of you who are very talented make a lot of money, you do very well as well. And also, in addition to that, I said we had to deal with uniting the country.

And the press, understandably, was very critical of the last part because they said: "Things have changed, Joe. You don't get it. It's not like it used to be. You can't unite the country. You can't unite the country; it's so divided."

And I asked my brother—I didn't realize at the time, even though I sat in the Vice President's chair in the Oval Office for 8 years, I didn't realize the outgoing President had to be out of his office by 10 o'clock on election day—on January 20th, the day you're sworn in. And the new guy or woman comes in not until 4 o'clock that day. And—or maybe—maybe it was three, but I didn't get there until 5.

And the other guy never showed up. Anyway. [Laughter]

But I asked my brother to do—what they leave that space for is to pick what desk I would use, what rug, what lamp, and those kinds of things. And he asked for the help from a guy named Jon Meacham, a Presidential historian.

And so I walked in, and, over the mantelpiece, there used to be, just over the years I was a Senator and Vice President, a portrait of George Washington. Well, it was gone. It was a gigantic portrait of FDR.

And then to the left, there was the George Washington portrait, and then there was Abraham Lincoln, and then Madison and Jefferson on the right. And I looked at my brother, I said, "Why—why FDR?" And he said, "Well, nobody has inherited this office in as much international disarray as since he was President." I said, "Well, that's wonderful." [Laughter] I swear to God. True story.

And then the next thing I said, "Why having, you know, Abraham Lincoln?" And I said it was a simple proposition. He said, "Not since that time has the Nation been as divided as it is right now."

And so, you know, things were looking not that great. But we made some real—we made some real progress. And so I think I knew what to do when I got elected, and I think we've done a fair amount of it already.

But let me answer this as simply as I can. I'm running because we made progress—that's good—but because our democracy, I think, is still at risk. And I mean it. I don't think it's hyperbole to suggest that. Because our most important freedoms—the freedom to choose, the freedom to vote, the freedom to be—the right to be who you are, to love who you love—is being attacked and shredded today, right now.

I'm running because our children should not have should have the right to go to school without fear of being gunned down with weapons of war while they're in a classroom.

I'm running because there are people banning books in our Nation. Did you ever think you'd be going through a period where they're banning books in school library—for school—fights at the town meetings?

And I'm running because all too often, for far too often, I can still—and it's still the case—you can—you know, you can be killed or attacked by just walking down the street because you're Black or because you're wearing a symbol of your faith. That hasn't happened in a long time.

And I'm running because, no, I will not side with dictators like Putin. Maybe my predecessor and his MAGA Republican friends can praise him, but not me. I think he's a dangerous, dangerous man.

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

I'm running because democracy is at stake and because, in 2024, democracy is going to be on the ballot again. And I think that my predecessor and the MAGA Republicans are literally determined to destroy the institutional structures of this democracy, the way they talk. You know, and I'm always going to defend it.

Look, folks, the—that's simply the reason I'm running. And I know the country we all—I live in is so special. It's not a failed democracy. It's not a failed country.

We're the only country in the world where it's not built on ethnicity, on race, on religion, on geography. We're the only country—we're the most unique country—we're built on an idea—an idea; literally, an idea—that we hold these truths to be self-evident that all men and women are created equal, endowed—and the list goes on.

We've never fully lived up to it, but we've never walked away from it—never. And we're not going to walk away from it now.

I don't believe America is a dark, negative nation, a nation of carnage, driven by anger and fear and revenge. And you know—but my predecessor does, and he may be the nominee again. It looks like he is destined to be the nominee again.

And so, you know, he uses phrases like, "I'm your retribution." Did you ever think you'd hear a President stand up and say, "I'm running because I'm going to be your retribution, and we'll get even with these people"?

Or he says, "We are a failing nation." What President has said that when they're running for office? "Either they win, or we win, and if they win, we no longer have a country," he says. "If they win, we no longer have a country." Did you ever think you'd hear a President of the United States, a former President of the United States or a candidate run on that basis, talking about those things?

Look, I believe we're a hopeful, optimistic nation driven by a simple proposition that everyone deserves a fair shot. Just a fair shot.

As I said, my dad used to say: "Joey, a job is 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, folks, that's what's at stake.

And I—it's very important. I need you. I need everyone in America who loves this democracy to join together in 2024. Because if we do that, we will have done something few of us have ever done, and that is literally save American democracy.

Or if you think I'm and I—you can—sitting there thinking, "This guy has to be—this is a little bit of a hyperbole," but think about it.

Think about—imagine what—if he does anything he says he's going to do—the next President, what he says he's going to do—where will we be? Where will we be?

I traveled the world. I just literally came around the world—circumvented—circumnavigated the world in 5 days. Everywhere I go, even people of very different political philosophies said, "You've got to win." Imagine what happens—what happens if we do—if we don't.

And, folks, look, if we do what we need to do, I think we'll have done something, as I said, few generations have been able to do.

And I want to end on a note that is—that I'm—as long as I've been doing this job, I've never been more optimistic about America than I am today. I think we have a chance—I think we have a chance to do something really, really positive. I think we have a chance to begin to rebuild a country in a way that is more open, that is more wholesome, is more decent.

I think we're economically situated, relative to the rest of the world, to lead the world. I think we're in a position where you see—

Well, let me conclude with this. When I was—when I wasn't going to run, I was going to write a book—another book. And this was about, I was going to talk about when America was at an inflection point—the world was at an inflection point where the things that are happening today and the recent past and the next couple of years are going to determine what this country looks like five, six decades from now.

We go through these periods every six or seven generations. We went through the period—this period after World War II where we reorganized the world.

But think of what's going on now. Think what's going on. And we have a chance—we have a chance to make the world a hell of a lot better. We have a chance to deal with the environment. We have a chance to deal with economic inequality. We have a chance to deal with bringing nations together. Because the rest of the world is looking to us.

And so, I'm just telling you that—rather than go through all the policy points, I wanted to tell you just why I'm running. I think it's at stake. I think that's what we're talking about now.

And so, I appreciate your giving me the opportunity to be able to take another shot at this. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:09 p.m. at the residence of Amy Goldman Fowler and Cary Fowler. In his remarks, he referred to President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin of Russia; Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken; former President Donald J. Trump; and Jon Meacham, canon historian, Washington National Cathedral. He also referred to his grandchildren Naomi K. Biden Neal and R. Hunter, Natalie, Finnegan, and Roberta "Maisy" Biden and his brother James

B. Biden. This transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on September 21. Audio was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

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

Locations: New York City.

Names: Biden Neal, Naomi K. Biden; Biden, Finnegan J.; Biden, James B.; Biden, Jill T.; Biden, Natalie P.; Biden, R. Hunter, II; Biden, Roberta M. "Maisy" "; Blinken, Antony J.; Fowler, Amy Goldman; Fowler, Cary; Meacham, Jon; Obama, Barack; Putin, Vladimir Vladimirovich; Trump, Donald J.

Subjects: 2021 civil unrest and violence at U.S. Capitol; 2024 Presidential election; Anti-Semitism; Climate change; Economic improvement; Job creation and growth; New York, Democratic Party event; New York, President's visit; Russia, conflict in Ukraine; Russia, President; Secretary of State; U.S. diplomatic efforts, expansion; Ukraine, Russian invasion and airstrikes; Virginia, 2017 civil unrest and violence in Charlottesville.

DCPD Number: DCPD202300816.