

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

*The President.* Thank you, Brad. Thank you, thank you, thank you. Thank you. Thank you. After that introduction and reception, it's been nice being with you. *[Laughter]*

Well, Brad, thank you, pal. And I really mean it.

And, Doug, thank you for being here. You're doing double duty. The—you know, Doug not only made history as the first Second Gentleman—*[laughter]*—I don't know how the hell you do that. *[Laughter]*

*Douglas C. Emhoff, husband of Vice President Kamala D. Harris.* I married well.

*The President.* Well, you—well, the thing we have in common: We both married above our—above our stations. *[Laughter]*

Kamala has been a great, great partner.

And normally at these events, I talk about the record, but it seems to me that Brad did a better job than I could do. *[Laughter]*

Folks, look, we're in a situation where—and by the way, there's a guy standing back there who is one of the smartest guys ever, one of my closest friends in life, and a guy who you've probably heard about. He ran my operation for a long time. I don't remember his name. He has a mask on. *[Laughter]* But I don't—Ron, thank you buddy. Ron started working with me when he was 12 years old and—*[laughter]*—but, Ron, thank you. It's great to see you, buddy.

Hey, look, you know, because there is a—there's a lot of things that we have to do between now and—and next November—not this coming November, but next November. And part of it is to talk about my record as—and what we've done—our record—and what we've accomplished thus far.

But the fact is that, you know, we did create more than 13.4 million jobs. Well, that's more jobs than any President has ever created in 4 years. We did that in 2½ years with Ron's help and others. And we rallied the world to confront the aggression in Russia. That's true. And—but we also appointed the first Black woman on the Supreme Court and the first African American woman on—to be Vice President of the United States. And—both of whom are smarter than that guy and me. *[Laughter]*

But look, folks, the—you know—or how we made the biggest investment ever in the history of the world in climate change, which is a passion of mine, and we're going to get it done. We'll have a few major announcements about that in the next couple of days, as well.

But, folks, look, tonight I want to talk about something else. You know, when I left the Vice Presidency of the Obama-Biden administration, I had no intention of ever running again for office, and that's the God's truth.

I had just lost my son Beau, a major in the U.S. Army, attorney general in Delaware. And I was going to write a book instead. I was going to write a book to set up the—talk about how we could—that we were at a real inflection point in world history, and things that we're going to do in the next couple of years are going to affect what's going to happen in the next four decades or five decades. It happens about every five of six generations, and we're in the midst of one of those kinds of changes.

But you know, I was going to write that book, but I—and I set up an institute of foreign policy—well, the University of Pennsylvania did—at the University of Pennsylvania. They gave me a couple million dollars to hire staff. I hired some moderate staff, like the son of a woman that's here. His name is Tony Blinken. *[Laughter]* And a few others working with me at that—and by the way, your son is incredible, Mom. Your son is incredible.

And I became a professor there, and we also had a domestic policy institute at the University of Delaware. And that's what I did.

But then, along came Charlottesville. You may remember it in 2017.

And you know, these guys walking out of the woods, carrying torches—literally, carrying torches, holding swastikas, singing the same anti-Semitic bile they sang during the—that they chanted in—in Germany in the thirties, accompanied by the Ku Klux Klan. And a young woman—I spoke to her mom—was killed in the melee.

And the President was asked, "What do you think?" He said, "I think there are very fine people on both sides."

That's when I knew I could no longer stand on the sidelines. I had to get engaged because the President of the United States had just made a moral equivalency between those who stand—stood for hate and those who rejected it.

And, you see, I believe that silence is complicity. I really do. And I wasn't going to be silent, so I ran.

I ran because I thought everything this country stood for, everything this country believed in, everything this country—that made America what it was, even our very democracy, was at risk. And I mean it. I believe that. We talked a lot about it, didn't we? And—but I didn't think I had any choice at the time.

And you know, I think—I think people tonight understood what I was doing. But the truth of the matter was that they thought, when I talked about democracy being at risk, they thought I was being hyperbolic. But I wasn't. I really believed our democracy was at risk. And did I—and I got asked all the time when I said I was running because I wanted to restore the soul of America, wanted to restore a sense of decency, the idea that we talk to each other the way we do—I've been around—I know I don't look it, but I've been around a long time. *[Laughter]*

But look, you know, people—and I made a speech at Independence Hall about the threat to democracy and why it was so important. I'm going to make another one very shortly. And I—but I think, you know, I taught at Penn. I taught—and I taught constitutional law for 13 years on Saturdays at Delaware Law School. And you know, you always hear that every generation has an obligation to protect democracy.

And I thought—well, you just think: "No, not in America. This is—it's just automatic." But it really, I believe, is under siege.

And I might add that, you know, I don't think anyone doubts any longer that democracy was at risk in 2020.

And you know, thank God, because people like all of you were here, and you jumped in, and we won. And many of you are repeat—it was your—it was your fault the first time. *[Laughter]* The second time, I don't know why you did it, but thank you.

But I might add, we won convincingly by 7 million votes. The victory withstood—the victory not only withstood 60 legal challenges—60—but we also overcame what—a literal insurrection.

I have a dining room—a private dining room off of the Oval Office. This guy sat there on January 6 watching what happened on television—watching it, doing nothing about it.

And so I'm now running again. Because guess what? I think that it's likely to be the same fellow, and it's likely that I think I can beat him again.

But you know, a lot of people talk about my age. I get it. I get it. Believe me, I know better than anyone, you know. *[Laughter]*

But here's something else I know. When I came to office, the Nation was flat on its back, but I think I knew what to do, with the help of Ron and a lot of other people.

We rebuilt the economy. We vaccinated the Nation, rebuilt the economy. When Russia invaded Ukraine, I knew what to do—because I've been doing it for a long, long time—to rebuild our alliances and rally the world.

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

So, look, I want to answer—I want to answer the question very simply, as I can. I'm running because we've made progress, but our democracy is still at stake.

There's a lot of specific things we have to do, and we will do them. Kamala and I will get them done, in terms of legislation and things we have to do. But democracy is literally still at stake.

I'm running because the most important freedoms—the freedom to choose, the freedom to vote, the freedom to be—have the right to be who you are and say who you are, love who you love——

My dad, I remember I was—when I was a kid, I wanted a—I was involved in the civil rights movement, and I wanted to be the only—there's a woman from Delaware here. I worked in the east side. It's the only African—an all-African American community. And the city swimming pool, and I wanted to be a lifeguard there. I was the only lifeguard—of 13 lifeguards, I was the only White guy that worked there for 3 years.

And I remember being dropped off at the Rodney Square, which is a—which is the center of the city—DuPont Building, Hercules Building, and so on. And I—getting out of the car, my dad dropping me off to go and get an application. And I looked over, and two men leaned up and kissed one another.

And I looked at my dad. I had never seen that before. He said: "Joey, it's real simple. They love each other. It's just simple."

And so, folks, look, there's an awful lot that's at stake, including all the things that we teach our children to be proud of.

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

I'm running because there are people banning books. Did you ever think we'd be having debates in the United States of America in this year about banning books in our schools? I mean, it's bizarre.

I'm running because, all across America, hate groups have been emboldened.

I'm running because too often it's still the case that you can get killed or attacked on our streets because you're Black or because you're wearing a symbol of your faith. That's happening in America today in ways that it hadn't happened in a long, long time.

And I'm running because, no, I'm not going to side with any dictators. And I know Putin, unlike the other guy doing it. I mean it. I won't, and I'll stand up to him, and I always have.

Look, I'm running because I—hear this: I want the entire nation to join me in sending the clearest, strongest, most powerful message possible that political violence in America is never, never, never, never justified. I mean it. Think about it.

I'm running because our democracy is at stake in 2024. Democracy is on the ballot again. And I really mean it. I know that sounds like hyperbole, but think about it.

Donald Trump and his MAGA Republicans are determined to destroy American democracy, the institutional structures. Listen to some of the things—you know, and the idea that—that, you know, the country we live in is, I think, so special; he talks about it being a failed country, about how the American people are doing—it goes on and on.

We're the only country in the world that is—we're unique in the world. We're the only country in the world that's not based on our ethnicity or our religion or geography. America is built on an idea. It's not hyperbole. America is built on an idea: We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all women and men are created equal. It goes on.

Think about it. That's who we are. We're the most heterogeneous nation in the history of the world. Not a joke. That's who we are.

But, ladies and gentlemen, the idea that we're all created equal is something that the—that this other team doesn't seem to buy into. You know, we've—you know, we've never fully lived up to the commitment, but we've never walked away from it before.

And I don't believe America is a dark—I don't believe America is a negative nation. I don't think America is on its last legs. I think America is just getting ready to get up and roar.

Folks, you know, I think this is a—the other team is driven by anger, fear, revenge. You know, think of the things the guy who's likely to be their nominee is saying.

He tells his supporters, and I'm quoting him, "I am your retribution." What a hell of a good way to run. *[Laughter]* He goes on to say: "We are a failing nation. Either"—I'm quoting him—"Either they will win, or we will win, and if we win—if they win, we will no longer be a country. If they win, we will no longer be a country."

He talks about the institutions. He wants to fundamentally change the—you're all lawyers. He wants to change the institutional structures of America. Not a joke. He talks about being—having to hire—firing a—fire 100,000 people. He's going to—I mean, you know, he talked about the deep state.

Guess what? When I got to be President, I found the deep state. *[Laughter]*

I mean, think about what he's done. *[Laughter]* Think about what they've done.

And, folks, look, I believe we are a hopeful and optimistic nation. I really do. And as I said, I've been doing this a long time. But I've never been more optimistic about America's chances. I really haven't.

The rest of the—I—look, Madeleine Albright talked about America being the essential nation. Well, as I go around the world, and I've known—I've been to now 140-some countries. I go around—I know virtually every head of state because I've been doing this for so long.

Without exception, I have everybody come up to me and say, "You've got to win." Not because of me, but because of the alternative they fear.

You know, when—the first G–7 meeting of the European nations, the major economies, was in February after I got elected, in England. And we're sitting down, and I—we were introduced. It was very casual, all the heads of state. And I looked at Macron. I said, "America is back." Macron looked at me and said, "For how long? For how long?"

And then the Chancellor of Germany said to me, "What would you think, Mr. President, if tomorrow you picked up the London Times and found out that a thousand people stormed the British Parliament, broke down the doors of the House of Commons, killed two bobbies in order to overthrow an election?"

And I hadn't thought of it from that perspective. But think what the rest of the world thinks and wonders about.

And so, folks, that's what's at stake. Everybody, everybody, everybody should understand just how consequential this election is. Not because of Joe Biden; because of the potential alternative.

And, folks, you know, I need your help. I need every American who loves this democracy to join us in 2024. Because if we do that, we'll have done something few generations get a chance to do: You will have literally—not hyperbole—saved American democracy.

And, again, listen to the words they use. Listen closely. You've never heard them in politics in American history since a long time ago, since back all the way to Abraham Lincoln's day. Think about it. Think about what they say.

Even if they didn't mean it, think about—think about who used that. They make George Wallace look like a liberal. [*Laughter*] I mean, think—I mean, it's just astounding.

So, look, folks, you know, as I said, I've never been more optimistic about America's chances. The rest of the world is looking to us. The American people are looking to us. And they do not represent a majority. They do represent somewhere around 30 percent of the American people.

And one of the reasons is, there's no longer any editors out there anymore. Everything—everybody gets their news in ways that they—anyway, I won't get into all that. [*Laughter*] That will be another story.

But the point is that I need your help. We need your help. And there's no group of people who understand the Constitution, understand our democratic institutions more than this group here. I really mean it.

And so I can't thank you enough for your help. I can't tell you how much—how important I think it is. And I promise you—I promise you: You'll never have to wonder where I stand. The problem is no one ever doubts I mean what I say; I just sometimes say all that I mean. [*Laughter*]

But we have a shot. We have a shot to make an incredible contribution to America. The world is waiting for us. The American people are ready. They're ready.

And by the way, all the things he was kind of enough to mention that we've done, we did it at the same time we reduced the debt by \$2 trillion. Okay? The last guy increased it by \$40 billion.

So, folks, we can do this. It's not above our paygrade. I want to thank you all very much, and I truly appreciate the help.

Thank you, thank you, thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:43 p.m. at the InterContinental New York Barclay hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Brad S. Karp, chairman, Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton and Garrison, LLP, who hosted the event on behalf of Lawyers for Biden; former White House Chief of Staff Ronald A. Klain; Supreme Court Associate Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson; Judith Pizar, mother of Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken; Susan Bro, mother of Heather D. Heyer, who was killed during the vehicular attack in Charlottesville, VA, on August 12, 2017; former President Donald J. Trump; President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin of Russia; and President Emmanuel Macron of France. The 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:* Blinken, Antony J.; Bro, Susan; Emhoff, Douglas C.; Harris, Kamala D.; Jackson, Ketanji Brown; Karp, Brad S.; Klain, Ronald A.; Macron, Emmanuel; Pizar, Judith; Putin, Vladimir Vladimirovich; Trump, Donald J.

*Subjects:* 2021 civil unrest and violence at U.S. Capitol; 2024 Presidential election; Civil rights movement; Climate change; Federal deficit and debt; France, President; Group of Seven (G-7) nations; Gun violence, prevention efforts; Hate-based violence, efforts to combat; Job creation and growth; New York, Democratic Party event; New York, President's visit; Russia, conflict in Ukraine; Russia, President; Secretary of State; Supreme Court Associate Justice; Ukraine, Russian invasion and airstrikes; Vice President; Virginia, 2017 civil unrest and violence in Charlottesville.

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