

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2023

Remarks During a Meeting With the President's Board of Advisers on Historically Black Colleges and Universities

September 25, 2023

The President. I'm going to turn the meeting over to the fellow I asked to chair all this. We used to—I used to be a really good Senator because of this guy. He was running my show. And all of a sudden, he got a Ph.D. from Delaware State University and quit. What the hell?

[*Laughter*]

Tony, it's yours.

Chair of the President's Board of Advisers on Historically Black Colleges and Universities Tony Allen. Thank you, Mr. President. And thank you, Madam Vice President. I just want to say we've had an excellent meeting with all of you. We had the great pleasure of being appointed by you in March of '22 and have really gone about the work of building on what I think is an incredible foundation this administration has set for HBCUs.

I've said it publicly many times, and I'll say it once more: No other President, no other administration in American history has given so much to HBCUs so quickly, so clearly, and with a clear vision for doing more. And we just want to applaud this administration for that work.

Your initial investment from—of \$7 billion just in the Department of Education alone is outstanding. And I want to add that that includes 3.6 million dollars—billion dollars—excuse me—during the pandemic, which was critical for us; \$1.6 billion in loan forgiveness for infrastructure concerns at HBCUs—45 public and private HBCUs benefited from that work; another 1.4—5 billion dollars in annual appropriations; and \$12 million, which might not sound like a lot of money to any of you, but was really important when HBCUs were under terroristic threat not so long ago.

So, just to give you a sense of that commitment, we have framed our recommendations around President Biden, Vice President Harris's core fundamental tenets in that regard. And there are four.

One, let's continue to work on infrastructure, both as it relates to physical infrastructure and technological infrastructure. We already know that HBCUs—we're the best return on investment in higher education and provide a quality education, and we want our living and learning spaces to match that quality education.

Two, let's make sure we're spending time continuing to build the research capacity of our institutions. We think we have unique expertise across an array of disciplines that will help the American economy. And we have a number of HBCUs who are in the R2 position, which is a Carnegie Classification, that are ready for their R1 status.

Three is connected pathways. And the President and the Vice President have already done this, particularly as it relates to using the bully pulpit to spend time with industry supporting this notion of real opportunities for our students from the time they come to our campuses through graduate school.

And then finally is HBCU preservation and growth. We believe that that is critically important because, as many know—particularly my colleagues in this room—still the number-one factor for a low-resourced student getting into the middle class who is African American is their attendance at an HBCU.

So I'm very proud to chair this body. I'm very proud of my colleagues and the continued work. I'd only add that our report comes with a detailed fact pattern established by the Institute for Black Economic Mobility at the McKinsey Institute that they provided pro bono.

So we believe our work is real, sound, and will really help set the trajectory for our institutions.

With that, I am proud to introduce and turn it over to my dear friend, the President of the United States, Joe Biden.

The President. Tony, thanks for the introduction. And, Dr. Glover, thank you for cochairing this effort. Look—and the Board of Advisers. I think we're making—with your help, we're making a lot of progress. And there's a lot more to do.

But you know, we just finished a meeting about the critical role HBCUs play—in the private discussion we had in here—and what they can do to continue this legacy of excellence and growth.

You know, it's not just about, you know, hourly wages. It's about being able to accumulate wealth. It's being able to focus on more than just what's—what you're going to put on the table tonight. And we've done a good job on that, but there is a lot more to do.

And HBCUs produce 40 percent of all Black engineers in America, 50 percent of all Black lawyers, 70 percent of all Black doctors and dentists, and 80 percent of all Black judges. And HBCUs are engines of economic mobility because—helping form—increase the Black middle class.

I know everybody talks—I'm focused too much on the middle class. When the middle class does well, everybody does well. The poor have a road up, and the wealthy still do well—although they've got to start paying their taxes.

And that's why it's—we—it's critical we invest in these universities. Folks have the audacity to say I cut funding for—I saw—heard something on one of the—on the internet—that I cut funding for HBCUs. And I—that's the furthest thing from the truth. But then again, there's a lot on the internet.

But I've kept my promise to make historic investments in HBCUs. Tony mentioned \$7 billion so far, including research investments, the largest increase in Pell grants in over a decade—the significant percentage of African Americans going to college who receive Pell grants. The student debt repayment plan is—the total lifetime payment per dollar borrowed for Black students and families is cut in half, and I established a Board to do even more.

We just had a good discussion around ensuring HBCUs continue to be strong financially and affordable for students.

And, Tony, you mentioned the four things that you suggested in your report: growth, infrastructure, the whole idea of student support, and research.

And I was reminiscing that when I was a Senator and then as Vice President, I realized we had the ability as Vice President—the President had the ability to assign Government programs that were funded to—if you're going to build a new aircraft carrier, who puts that on the deck? Well, we're supposed to pick Americans and—American material and American personnel.

And I remember going down to an HBCU in northeastern Virginia, and they had the capacity to do anything anybody else did, except one thing: They had no laboratories. They had no laboratories.

And so the infrastructure of the school is not just housing, not just the classrooms in which you meet in; it's the laboratories to be able to take advantage of the opportunities to compete for the contracts that are being put out by the Federal Government that generate—and with artificial intelligence around the corner—not around the corner, on our back right now—[*laughter*]
—you know, we have to increase that even more.

And with regard to the making sure that we engage in—making sure you have student support, well, that's why we increased Pell grant so significantly. And we're going to continue to do that. And that's why we're focusing so much on infrastructure and research.

And so the point is that—in the meantime, I want to say a word about—well, about those in Congress who are willing to shut down the Government. [*Laughter*] I know you all want me to stick exactly to the subject. You don't want to ask me any questions about anything else. [*Laughter*] I know that.

But—excuse me. You're having trouble hearing me?

I know you're—you know, anyway. In the meantime, I want to say a word about those in Congress who are willing to shut down the Government.

Just a few months ago, the Speaker of the House and I agreed to spending levels for the Government. We were up right to the very edge, almost reneged on our debt, and—that we could fund essential priorities and still cut the deficit by \$1 trillion over the next decade.

Now, a small group of extreme House Republicans, they don't want to live up to that deal, and everyone in America could be faced with not—with paying the price for that.

They're changing it. We made a deal. We shook hands. We said, "This is what we're going to do," and now they're reneging on the deal, which is not much of a surprise these days.

And the Black community, in particular, is going to suffer if that occurs. For example, a shutdown is going to risk nutrition assistance to nearly 7 million moms and children, and it's going to disproportionately affect Black families. The Department of Housing and Urban Development would have to stop nearly all of its enforcement work fighting housing discrimination. EPA would have to stop its important work bringing environmental justice to frontline and fenceline communities because most of the inspections in hazardous waste sites and chemical facilities would come to a halt. The historic work we're doing to increase the share of Federal contract dollars going to small, disadvantaged businesses would be disrupted.

Funding the Government is one of the most basic, fundamental responsibilities of the Congress. And if Republicans in the House don't start doing their job, we should stop electing them.

Now, there's a lot more to say, but let me turn it over to Kamala.

Vice President Kamala D. Harris. Well, I want to, as the President has said, welcome and thank each of you for your service: Chair Dr. Allen, Cochair Dr. Glover, and the Advisory Board.

I am proudly the first Vice President of the United States who was an HBCU graduate. And so the work—[*applause*].

The President. She made her staff wear the Howard jersey. [*Laughter*]

Vice President Harris. So the work of this esteemed group of leaders, under the guidance of our President, is especially meaningful to me for many reasons.

I strongly believe—based on experience and knowledge about what our country needs, in terms of its strength and growth and development—that our HBCUs are extraordinary centers of academic excellence and must continue to be supported, not only because of the historical role

that they have played in building and helping to contribute to America's leadership and global leadership, but also because, as the President has said: As we look forward, we know that our HBCUs are also pipelines for very extraordinary young people to enter the fields of work that we require to cure disease, to create that which we have not imagined, to supply us with the innovative approaches that will allow us to continue to work on the strength, prosperity, and security of our Nation.

So, for all of those reasons, I thank this group for the work you do in advocating for the resources and the growth of our HBCUs.

HBCU graduates are in every room where important decisions are made, and they should be. Right now among the many issues that we are tackling is how will we address artificial intelligence. One of the issues therein that we have discussed a lot—at this very table, in fact—is that we want to ensure that machine learning adapts to and includes the experiences of all people. We therefore will all benefit from HBCU graduates being at the table where those decisions are being made.

We came out of a pandemic some time ago. What we know is that when we look at health issues and public health crises, there will be disparities based on people's background, based on their race. And in order to best address those, we're going to want to have people in those fields of research who understand the culture, the mores, and the particular impact that certain communities have.

In the media, we want to make sure that those voices are represented so when the stories are told, the stories will take into account the experiences of particular groups based on experience and tradition and culture.

So, for all those reasons, we need our HBCUs. They benefit everyone in our country.

The President has been very adamant since we came in office that we will—as Dr. Glover said, we will not just think of our HBCUs as an afterthought, but they will be at the forefront of our mind.

So our administration has at least—dedicated at least \$7 billion—Dr. Allen, I think you rightly calculated more——

Chair Allen. Yes.

Vice President Harris. ——to what we need to do to support these schools.

And we will continue to do it. Understanding that our HBCUs also have particular challenges, their endowments tend to be smaller than other universities who are similarly situated: 50 percent of our HBCU buildings are in need of repair; and 70 percent of the students at HBCUs are Pell grant eligible.

These are all areas that our administration has been working on, and we will continue to do that work. And again, I cannot thank our President enough. Sometimes he—I think he almost wants to let me know that he has spent more time at an HBCU than I have. [*Laughter*] It becomes a source of a healthy debate—[*laughter*]—between he and I in the Oval Office, quietly.

But, President Biden, I thank you for all that you do on leadership on this issue and so much more. And I'll turn it over to Mayor Benjamin.

The President. Before you do, Steve.

Director of the Office of Public Engagement Stephen Benjamin. Yes, sir.

The President. I—look, one of the things that—to keep in mind as a good measure, I think, is that land-grant universities—and HBCUs are mostly land-grant universities, as my university of Delaware—the State University of Delaware.

Land-grant universities used to be robustly supported by their State legislative bodies. They would support, in some cases, up to 60 percent of the land-grant budget for that university.

Well, since the—1987 to 2000, land-grant universities have lost—Black and White—more than \$13 billion in investments from the State—from the State university—from the States and government to help them. And that has exacerbated the problem in—for particularly Black land-grant universities, HBCUs.

And I think it's important that we understand that. You know, the one thing I—and I know you're tired of hearing me say this about all my initiatives, on the economy as well—is that if land-grant universities and, for example, HBCUs are doing extremely well—they're producing students that are going to make us wealthier, make us smarter, make us more compatible—it helps everybody. Everybody does better in the whole United States when the potential of HBCUs is realized. Everybody.

And so I just—I make no apologies for the kind of effort we're expending on HBCUs.

And I did spend probably more time on campus. *[Laughter]* But I didn't do nearly as well—*[laughter]*—either in the land-grant university I went to at Delaware or——

Vice President Harris. Howard University. *[Laughter]*

The President. ——Howard University.

But all kidding aside, it really makes a lot of difference.

But I'll turn it back to you, Steve.

Director Benjamin. Thank you so much, Mr. President; Madam Vice President; our Chairs, Dr. Allen, Dr. Glover; and this amazing body for your leadership.

We're going up wrap it up right now and let the press exit.

Contract Negotiations Between the United Auto Workers and the Big Three Automobile Companies

Q. Mr. President, do you support UAW demands?

The President. Do I support a what?

Q. UAW demands.

Q. Do you support the UAW demands, Mr. President?

The President. I can't hear—I heard—I heard——

Q. Do you support the UAW demands?

The President. One at a time.

Q. Mr. President, do you support the UAW demands?

The President. I think the UAW gave up an incredible amount back when the automobile industry was going under. They gave up everything from their pensions on. And they saved the automobile industry.

And I think that now that the industry is roaring back, they should participate in the benefit of that. And I—if you take a look at the significant increase in salaries for the executives and growth of their industry, they should benefit from it.

So, yes, I support—I always support the UAW.

Speaker of the House of Representatives Kevin O. McCarthy

Q. Have you spoken to Speaker McCarthy? Have you spoken to Speaker McCarthy?

The President. I haven't.

Q. Will you speak to him?

[At this point, the President shook his head.]

Q. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. Thank you. *[Laughter]*

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:43 p.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Glenda Baskin Glover, Vice Chair, President's Board of Advisers on Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : President's Board of Advisers on Historically Black Colleges and Universities, meeting with President.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Allen, Tony; Benjamin, Stephen; Glover, Glenda Baskin; Harris, Kamala D.; McCarthy, Kevin O.

Subjects: Automobile industry, strengthening efforts; College costs and affordability; Economic improvement; Federal deficit and debt; Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs); Historically Black Colleges and Universities, President's Board of Advisers on; Office of Public Engagement; Pell grants; Speaker of the House of Representatives; Student loans, repayment options; United Auto Workers, contract negotiations with Big Three automobile companies; Vice President.

DCPD Number: DCPD202300835