

Remarks at a Campaign Reception in San Francisco, California
September 27, 2023

Before you—before you go, I've got to tell a little story. *[Laughter]* You know, I didn't realize, even though I'd been Vice President and sat in that seat next to the President in front of the fireplace in the Oval Office for 8 years, that the outgoing President has to be out of the office by—I think it's 10 o'clock on Inauguration Day. And the incoming President doesn't—can't come in—I believe it isn't until 4 o'clock.

And so I asked my brother Jim, my best buddy—who has better taste than I do—to pick which desk I would—I knew what desk and rug I wanted in the room, but pick out and lay out the furniture.

And for—I was there for a long time as a U.S. Senator and then as Vice President. And there was one portrait that hung over—the Secretary of the Interior knows this—one portion that—portrait that hung over the mantelpiece, and it was George Washington. And it was a normal size; it was probably about 2½ or 3 by 4, or something like that.

And so I came in, and there was this gigantic picture of Franklin Delano Roosevelt—portrait, not picture. Portrait. And next to him, there's four other Presidents: Jefferson and Madison on the one side, and Washington and Lincoln.

So I looked at my brother. I said, "Why Roosevelt?" I admired him, but why? And Jon Meacham, who is a Presidential historian—was helping my brother set the office up—figure the office—said, "Well, because no President has ever taken office with the world in more financial disarray than he." And I said, "Oh, that's wonderful." *[Laughter]*

And then I said, "Why Lincoln?" He said, "Because the country hasn't been as divided since Lincoln." I said, "I'm out of here." *[Laughter] [Inaudible]*

But look, thank you all so very, very much. And as you can tell, I like kids better than people, so—*[laughter]*—I'm not going to go long because I want to see the kids. She brought everybody—her two sons out, but her beautiful daughter is sitting in the back on a bench back here.

Folks, Gretchen and Andrew, I want to thank you for organizing the event.

And your Lieutenant Governor, we were talking about—not the Pacific Ocean, but the Balaton—Lake Balaton in—when she was the Ambassador to Hungary, which I spent a lot of time in with—putting Hungary together. And thank you.

And Deb—Deb Haaland has not only made history as the first Native American Cabinet Secretary, but has helped me get so much done.

And I was raised politically by Danny Inouye. For real. He was the first guy to urge me to run for President. And Danny used to say, "Joe, it's Indian Nations—Indian Nations." And it is.

And, Deb, you're the best. You really are. You're doing a heck of a job.

And just like you, I owe it all to my sister, sitting to your left. Sis, welcome. Thank you.

Normally at events like this, I would talk about how much Kamala—and Kamala has been an incredible, incredible ally. No, she really has. She is so bright. She is so tough. She is just doing a first-rate job making me look better. *[Laughter]*

But I want—I ordinarily talk about what Kamala and I have accomplished in the first almost 2 years of our administration because today, a lot of Americans don't know it. You know, we've created 14—13.4 million jobs. More jobs created in 2—about 2 years than any President has in 4 years.

And we—together, we rallied the world to confront Russia aggression in Ukraine by holding NATO together and keeping cohesion in their—in the G-7.

And we put the first Black woman on the Supreme Court, Ketanji Brown. By the way—and she's the brightest person on the Court. *[Laughter]* Anyway, she's really first rate. I wish we could—I wish I could bring her along to meet all of you guys.

But—and we passed the biggest investment in history to combat climate change, because I believe climate change is the only existential threat we have. I mean that in a literal sense. Not a joke. If we don't get it under control, we will have mortgaged not only the next generation, but mortgaged humanity. I believe that with every fiber of my being.

And I especially want to thank—and I especially want to thank Kamala for her leadership in so many really important issues. I told her, "Look, when I was Vice President, all the tough issues, Barack gave to me." Well, I gave them all to her. *[Laughter]*

But no—but all kidding aside, she's done a remarkable job in so many issues: protecting women's freedoms, combating gun violence, and I could go on all the issues that she's brought to—she's fought like hell for.

And we have lunch once a week, and we talk over what more she wants to do. And she's doing an incredible job.

But, folks, tonight I want to talk about something else. I want to talk about what's at stake for America. And I mean it sincerely: what's at stake for America.

You know, when I left the Vice Presidency at the end of the Obama-Biden administration, I had no intention of running for office again.

Do we need all those fans on? Because—can you hear clearly in the back? Oh, okay. All right.

The—and I had no intention of running again because I had lost my son, the attorney general of Delaware and a decorated war hero out of Iraq. He had a Bronze Star, a Conspicuous Service Medal. And unfortunately, he—his—where he slept in his tent was about a hundred yards from a massive burn pit. And he went over one of the healthiest men in his group, and he came back with stage 4 glioblastoma. It wasn't if he'd make it; it's just how long he'd have.

And I was going to write a book. I was going to write a book about foreign policy. I set up an institute at the University of Pennsylvania, where I had the foreign policy institute, where they gave me not only professorship but gave me a budget to hire key staff. And the staff included Tony Blinken, who's now Secretary of State, and many other really serious foreign policy folks.

And I became a professor there. And then I set up an institute of domestic policy at the University of Delaware, my alma mater.

But that's what I did. That's what I decided to do.

But then along came Charlottesville in Virginia, in August of 2017. You all may remember what happened. I never thought I'd see it in my lifetime. You had hundreds of people marching out of the woods and the fields—not a joke—out of—marching from the fields carrying torches, their veins in their necks bulging in anger, singing the same anti-Semitic bile that was sung on the streets of Germany in 1932 and -3 and -4, and carrying swastikas—carrying swastikas. If you

remember, try to think back at the time. Accompanied by the Ku Klux Klan and one of the leaders of the Klan.

And a young woman was killed, a bystander. And I talked with her mom.

After it was over, the President—the then-President was asked—he said, "What do you think about what happened?" And I'll never forget the comment. He said, "There are very fine people on both sides." "Very fine people on both sides."

Those words coming out of the mouth of a President in that year just stunned me. It actually stunned me. And you know, I—making a moral equivalency between that young woman and those racist SOBs—excuse my language—I just knew I couldn't stand by. Because, you see, I was raised to believe silence is complicity. I mean that sincerely. And so I would not be silent, so I ran.

And I ran because I thought—I genuinely thought everything this country stood for and believed in, everything that made America "America," even our democracy, was literally at risk. Again, not hyperbole. I believe that.

And we had no choice. You might remember, I—some thought I was being hyperbolic at the time when I—they said, "Joe, what do you mean democracy is at risk?" or "What do you mean you're going to restore the soul of America?"

The soul is who we are. It's who we are. And we were not anything remotely like what was happening.

I come out of the civil rights movement. I thought we could change things when I convinced Strom Thurmond to vote for the Voting Rights Act before he died. I thought we could change things. I was wrong.

You can never defeat hate. Hate just hides under a rock, and when a little oxygen is breathed under that rock, it comes out—it comes back out. That was happening. It was happening.

And look, the fact of the matter is, I don't think anyone today doubts democracy was at risk that last election and—in 2020. And, thank God, because of people like you, Kamala and I won.

And I might add, we won—and I might add, notwithstanding what's even being bandied about now, we won convincingly, without question, by a margin of 7 million votes—more votes cast for a President than at any time in American history.

The victory—but here's the thing: A victory that has not only withstood 60 court challenges, all the way to the Supreme Court, but an insurrection on January the 6th—an insurrection.

I walk into that little dining room off my office where the President sat while that was going on, and think to myself: "How could you sit there? How could you sit there and watch what was happening?"

I told someone earlier tonight that, you know, when I made the first visit as chair—as President of the United States over to England, to the G-7, to the European leaders, I sat down and I said, "America is back." And Macron looked at me and he said, "For how long?" And then the Chancellor of Germany said: "What would you think, Mr. President, if you read tomorrow in the morning paper here in London that a group of a thousand people stormed the Parliament"—think about this in the literal sense—"stormed the Parliament, broke down the doors of the House of Commons, killed two bobbies in the process in order to overthrow an election? What would you think about England? What would you think about anyone?"

And you know, I never quite thought about it as profoundly as that. What would we think if we picked up the paper and read that about the Chancellor—about Germany or France or England now?

And so, folks, you know, democracy was at stake. And notwithstanding the fact that we have in this position—in the position that we have moved to rebuild this country in a way that we now have the strongest economy in the world.

We have more to do. I'm not suggesting it's over. We have more to do, but we have the strongest economy in the world.

But guess what? I'm now running again because we made progress, but because our democracy, in my view, is still at stake. I mean that sincerely.

We're running because our most important freedoms—the right to choose, the right to vote, the right to be who you are, to love who you love—is being attacked and shredded. Literally, think about it: It's a constant attack.

We're running because our children should have the right to go to school without fear of being gunned down by a weapon of war. More children in America die every year in America from gun violence than any other cause—any other cause: car accidents, anything. More children die in the United States of America.

Did any of you think as parents that you'd ever see your children having duck-and-cover drills in school?

Well, ladies and gentlemen, you know, I'm running also because it's still too often that you can be attacked walking down a street just because you're Black or because of the symbol of your religion you may be wearing.

I'm running because—no, I'm not on the side of dictators like Putin. I know Putin better than anybody who's held this office. I met with him many, many times over the years.

But maybe Trump and his MAGA friends know how to deal and praise Putin, but I will not. I think it's outrageous what they say—outrageous and undermines all of our interest. And by—I'm going to stand up to him, and we always will.

Look, Kamala and I are running because we hear this: We want the entire nation to join us in sending the strongest, clearest, most powerful message possible that political violence in America is never, never, never, never acceptable. Never acceptable—[inaudible].

And we're running because democracy is still at stake in 2024, and democracy is on the ballot.

And let there be no question: Donald Trump and the MAGA Republicans are determined to destroy American democracy because they want to break down the institutional structures that allow it to happen.

We are the most unique nation in the world. That sounds like the usual American chauvinism, but we are. We're the only nation in the world that is not based on ethnicity, religion, or any—we're the only nation in the world based on an idea—not a joke—an idea: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men and women are created equal, endowed by"—and the list goes on.

We've never lived fully up to that, but we've never walked away from it. But we've been walking away from it of late.

And those of you—you're all successful business women and men. I lay 8 to 5, Madam Ambassador, if you went back to Hungary, they'd be asking you: "What's going on? What's going

on?" Whether they are—no matter who they are, there's a great concern about: Is America still the beacon of democracy and liberty in the world?

Well, we are.

But here's the deal: You know, the country we lieve [live; White House correction] in is—in my view, is—is special. But there are those in Congress who are sowing such division, they're willing to shut down this Government right now.

You know, just a few months ago after a long negotiation between myself and the Speaker of the House, we agreed to—on spending levels for the Government that—to fund essential domestic and national security priorities while still cutting more than \$1 trillion over the next decade. We shook hands on it. We agreed.

Well, only a couple months later, they're changing the whole deal. They're rejecting—they're trying to go back and take away everything that we fought for, including people going without pay in the military.

I could go on. I won't start. I'll get just angry a little bit.

But now a small group of these extreme Republicans don't want that deal anymore, and so now everyone in America could face a significant price to pay.

Funding the Government is one of the most basic responsibilities of the Congress. And it's time for the Republicans in the House of Representatives to stand up and do their job because the Republicans in the Senate, including the Senate leadership from Kentucky, are ready to stand up and work with a bipartisan agreement.

America elected them as well.

You know, Kamala and I don't believe America is dark or a negative nation, not a nation of carnage driven by anger, fear, as well as the sense of revenge.

You hear the—the former President saying, you know, he will seek revenge for what has happened. The President of the United States will seek revenge for what's happened.

I mean, I could go on. I won't—you know all the assertions he's made.

Ladies and gentlemen, Donald Trump does believe we are a nation driven by anger and fear and playing on it. To his supporters, he says, "I am your retribution." He says we're a failing nation. "Either"—I'm quoting—"Either they win, or we win. And if they win, we no longer have a country."

Did you ever think you'd hear a President or former President of the United States say those kinds of things? But it's constant.

And he has some significant support among the—what I call the MAGA Republicans. It's probably only—it makes up 25 percent of the population. But it's real, and it's serious.

I believe we are a hopeful, optimistic nation—I really do—driven by a simple proposition that everyone deserves just a shot—just a free shot. We can disagree on detail of what we should—how we should govern, what we should do, what before—but everyone deserves a shot.

Folks, that's what at stake in my view. And Kamala and I, we need you. We genuinely need you. Not a joke.

You know, instead, we need every American—indeed, we need every American who loves this country to step up and vote in 2024. If we do that, we're going to do something few generations will be able to say. We're going to be able to say we've saved democracy and we've buried this ugly hate again, until someone else tries to come along and breathe hate into it.

Folks, I mean this sincerely. I've never been more optimistic about America's chances in the world than I am today. And I know I don't look it, but I'm 180 years old. *[Laughter]* I've been around a long time. But I mean it. Think about it.

What we've done internationally: We've put the alliances—we pulled together; the idea we're going to unite Israel and Saudi Arabia, for God's sake; the idea that we have the North—South—South Korea and Japan in alliances working with us to defend Ukraine. I mean, just—the list goes on.

Or domestically, we're really actually moving, making significant progress.

But if we do what we need to do, we'll be able to say we've not only saved democracy, but we've generated a new economic growth and political reality in the United States of America.

We have to remember—and that's the best way to say it. We have to remember who are, for God's sake. We are the United States of America—the Unites States of America.

There is nothing we've ever set our mind to as a nation that when we've joined together to get it done, we failed. Nothing. Nothing, nothing, nothing. And that's not hyperbole. We've come out of ever crisis stronger than when we went in. That's America. That's who we are.

And, folks, we've just got to remember, we are the United States of America. There is nothing—nothing—beyond our capacity.

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

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:22 p.m. at the Century Club of California. In his remarks, he referred to former Presidents Barack Obama and Donald J. Trump; Jon Meacham, canon historian, Washington National Cathedral; Gretchen Sisson, sociologist, Advancing New Standards in Reproductive Health, and her husband, Facebook Inc. cofounder and venture capitalist Andrew McCollum, who hosted the event; Lt. Gov. Eleni Kounalakis of California; Vice President Kamala D. Harris; Supreme Court Associate Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson; Susan Bro, mother of Heather D. Heyer, who was killed in the vehicular attack in Charlottesville, VA, on August 12, 2017; President Emmanuel Macron of France; President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin of Russia; Speaker of the House of Representatives Kevin O. McCarthy; and Senate Minority Leader A. Mitchell McConnell. He also referred to his sister Valerie Biden Owens. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on September 28. Audio was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

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Locations: San Francisco, CA.

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