

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2023

Remarks at a Campaign Reception in Atherton, California
September 26, 2023

The President. Thank you.

[At this point, the President referred to a stepping stool used by the previous speaker.]

I'm going to move this thing here.

Event host Liz Simons. Oh, yes. Of course.

[An aide approached the President to remove the stepping stool.]

The President. I—no, no, no, no.

Ms. Simons. I think he wants to do it for you. *[Laughter]*

The President. I'd like to climb on that. *[Laughter]*

Well, folks, first of all, thank you. You know, I was telling some of the folks inside that one of the things that you sort of judge yourself by if you're in electoral politics is—I know this sounds strange—the caliber of the people who support you. It matters. And I can't tell you how much it means to me that people of your caliber have stepped up to help me, many of you not for the first time, and I thank you.

And you know, our host has talked about headwinds and tailwinds, et cetera.

My dad used to have an expression. My dad was a well-read man who got into college during the—just before World War II. Well, not just—probably 5 years before World War II began. And—but he didn't have the means to get there.

And his great regret was that he didn't go to college, but he was an extremely well-read guy. And my dad used to have an expression. He'd say, "Joey"—when he'd talk about employment and jobs and opportunities—he said: "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 say, 'Honey, it's going to be okay,' and think you have an even shot of doing it."

And you know, I think that—I think it's still very, very critical that we understand that so much of what people are looking for is not just an economic opportunity, but just to be treated with some dignity, just to be treated like they mattered. And that's what you all do. You all have been very successful. You're a fine group of people. But you treat people with dignity. And it really matters.

You know, Liz and Mark, thank you for welcoming me to your home. I don't want to go home. *[Laughter]* I want to stay right here. *[Laughter]*

You know, normally in events like this, I talk about our administration's record so far, because even though I—a lot of Americans don't know it yet, because a lot of it's just kicking in. But you know, we've created over 13.4 million jobs—more jobs in 2½ years than any President has created in a 4-year term.

And we've rallied the world to stand up to Putin and his vicious assault on the people of Ukraine.

We've—I made a commitment that I would put a Black woman on the Court, and I put one of the brightest women I've been for—I've been chairman of the Judiciary Committee. I've

worked with the Court for over 40 years. She is—she's incredible. She's really, really, really bright.

We passed the biggest investment in the history of the world on climate change. They said we couldn't get it done. In truth, we didn't get it done with one vote from the opposition, but we— we passed the legislation to provide for, over the next decade, \$369 billion in working for—to deal with the climate crisis in America. And it's beginning to take hold.

Well, if you notice, not a whole lot of people are denying that there's climate change these days. [*Laughter*] And you know, we passed the biggest investment in the history of the world to combat it in that area.

So there's a lot of good things we've done. I won't go into them all. And one of the objects we have to meet is: We have to make sure the American people understand and know them. Because although there's a lot of—you know, you have more job satisfaction than at any time in 40 years, and so on and so forth, but they still haven't connected the dots. And it's going to take a little bit of time.

But I wanted to talk about something else tonight. I wanted to talk about what's at stake for the country, at least from my perspective.

Can you all hear me clearly in the back?

Audience member. Yes, sir!

The President. 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.

I had just lost my son Beau, who should be the one standing here talking to you, not me. He was the attorney general of the State of Delaware. He went to the war in Iraq because his unit went, and he had to qualify—you're either State property or you're Federal property. He was in the National Guard, and he thought he should go. And unfortunately, he—I saw him a couple times over there; I've ever been in and out of Iraq and Afghanistan over 20 times. And—but he was bunked near one of those burn pits. And he became—he came home as a major and decorated war guy, but he—I was going to—so I decided I wasn't going to run again.

And I was going to write another book about—I was going up to foreign policy at the University of Pennsylvania, in the Biden school of foreign policy. And then—and in addition to that they—at the University of Delaware, my alma mater, a school on domestic policy at the university. And I was a professor at Penn.

So that's what I did.

But then along came Charlottesville. Remember Charlottesville when that happened and—in August of 2017? And those people—I never thought I'd live to see a time when people would be coming out of the woods, literally, carrying lighted torches, Nazi swastikas—holding them, accompanied by the Ku Klux Klan, and singing the same anti-Semitic bile that was sung in the early thirties in Germany.

And the young woman was killed. A young woman was killed who was protesting their—their protest. And I spoke with her mom.

And the guy who was holding office at the time came along, and they asked him what he thought of it. And he said, "I thought they were very fine people on both sides." And that's when I decided that I couldn't stay on the sidelines anymore.

The—and you know, one of the things—you be careful what you teach your kids; they're listening. I—we have a tradition in the Biden family—it's only been invoked in my life about 10,

11 times—where any child in the family can ask for a family meeting, and this has to be taken seriously. If they want a family meeting, the family meets, because they have something important they want to say.

And I have my deceased son's two children, one is now a freshman at the University of Pennsylvania, one is a senior in high school; and my son Hunter has three children—four children, but we're—they're very small. Actually, five children—two of them are under the age of 4. But they're in the—and you know, they're grown women now.

And they asked to meet, and they came to sit with me. Because the only thing holding me back was I knew it was going to be kind of an ugly campaign. I knew what we were about to face.

And you know, some of you—either because of the family business and/or being involved in public life—you know your kids can't escape whatever it is that you're doing. Especially if in their whole lives their grandfather or father had either been a Senator or a Vice President or a President or—and they're—or a attorney general.

And so they came to see me and my wife, Jill and I. It was—we—they called for a meeting on Thursday. Two were in New York going to school and—at any rate—and they started off and they said: "Pop, you've got to run. Daddy would want you to run," and went through the rationale.

I'll never forget what my youngest said, little Hunter Biden, who is now the senior in high school. He took out his phone. He said, "Pop, we know it's going to be mean." And he took out his phone. There's a picture on the internet of me walking out of the church where my son had his burial mass with a flag-draped coffin and my—and a military escort—my hand on the coffin and my hand under my grandson's chin. I used to always hold my son Beau—when he was little, I'd hold him by the chin, and I'd walk.

And I looked at it, and he said, "Look at the caption, Pop." And it said, "Biden molests another child." And he said, "So we know it's going to be mean, Pop, but you've got to run."

And so, we ran. And I ran because I thought everything this country stood for, everything we believed in, everything that made America "America"—our virtual democracy—was at risk. And I don't think that's hyperbole. I believed it was at risk. And so I thought I had no choice.

And I think people thought that I was being hyperbolic when I said that our democracy is at risk or when I made that speech at—at Independence Hall talking about, "We have to restore the soul of America." But I think it's turned out, people—most people realized that wasn't hyperbolic. It's really what was at stake.

Well, people don't say that anymore. They think that today—the doubts about our democracy were at stake in 2020. But, thank God, because of people like you, we won. We won. And you know, I might add: We won convincingly by 7 million votes in 2020, a victory that withstood not only more than 80 legal court challenges, but—all the way up to the Supreme Court—but also an insurrection on January the 6th.

If and when any of you come to visit me in the Oval Office, I'll take you into that dining room where the other guy sat for hours looking at that television right off the Oval Office.

And so here I am, again. I'm running again. I think we've made progress. But I think we have not only the ability to save our democracy, but to increase its effectiveness. I think we're in a position where we have a chance. I've never been more optimistic about America's prospects, both domestically and in terms of foreign policy, than I am today.

But it's going to take a whole hell of a lot of work. And so, believe me, I think I know better than anyone of that.

But there's something else that I also know—that when I came to office, the Nation was flat on its back. And you know, I—people sometimes focus on my age. I don't know why. I'm only 35. *[Laughter]* But believe me—believe me—I get it. *[Laughter]* I get it. Believe me, I know better than anyone.

But there's something else I know: When I took office, the Nation was flat on its back. And—but you know, with age hopefully comes a little bit of wisdom. And I've been doing this a long time.

And I knew what to do to vaccinate a whole nation. And we got it done. We got it done quickly to rebuild our economy, which is underway.

When Russia invaded Ukraine, I knew what to do to rebuild our alliances. Remember, everybody was talking about NATO splitting up, not sticking together? Well, I've spent over—I think it's now up to 190 hours with the heads of state of NATO, just making sure we're in constant contact.

You know, and above all, when democracy was at stake, I think I knew what to do as well to redeem the soul of the Nation, to talk about it.

When I announced I ran last time, I said I was running for three reasons. One, to restore the soul of America. Two, to rebuild the economy from the middle out and the bottom up, because that way, the wealthy do very well and everyone else has a shot. And to unite the country.

Well, I'm running because the most important freedoms we have now are at stake in our—because of the nature of the Court changing and the impact of States versus Federal Government. You know—and they are important freedoms: the right to choose, the right to vote, the right to be who you are and love who you love. And they're being attacked and being shredded right now.

And I'm running because our children should have the right to go to school without fear of being gunned down with a weapon of war. And all the data—some of you work very hard for our children and education. You know there's a great deal of concern at schools. And it's concern by children.

I spoke with a little girl who said: "I—you know, I—I don't—I like going to school, but there's one room I don't like to go in because there's no closet. There's no closet." Well, you know, I think our children should have a right to go to school without fear of weapons of war.

And I'm running because people are banning books in our Nation again. Did you ever think we'd be through that? I mean, seriously. Did you ever think we'd be in that situation, where book banning became—oh, anyway. *[Laughter]*

But I'm running because all across America, hate groups are being emboldened. And they are. They are.

And, folks, I'm running because, far too often, we still see a case that you can be killed or attacked walking down the street just because you're Black or because you're wearing a symbol of your faith—you're wearing a yarmulke.

I'm running because—no, look, I'm not going to side with dictators. You know, you hear this other guy that probably will be the nominee talking about how Putin knows that he was—"bright guy." He can deal with him. He knows what he's doing. How China—I mean, I don't know where he's been. *[Laughter]* No, no, I'm serious.

Think about it. I've spent more time with Putin than any world leader just because I've been around a long time. I've known him for a long, long time. He means what he says.

Look, folks, maybe Trump and his MAGA friends can bow down to Putin and to others, but I won't. And I'm going to stand up to him because we have to for our own safety's sake.

And you know, I'm running because—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, never acceptable—never acceptable—in democracy.

And right now—and I'm running because I think democracy is still at stake because—2024, democracy is on the ballot. And I know that sounds like hyperbole, but think about it.

And, folks, Donald Trump and the MAGA Republicans are determined to destroy this democracy. The democracy is based on institutional structures. When you undermine the institutions, it's awful hard for democracy to function. It's awful difficult for it to function.

And I'm always going to defend and protect and fight for our democracy. That's why I'm running.

And you know, this country we live in is so special. But there are those in Congress showing so much division, they're willing to shut down the Government now. You know all this fight going on about "we're going to shut down the Government and a new budget" and all the rest? Well, you may recall, we had a long, long negotiation, and I negotiated with the Speaker of the House when he wanted to renege on the Federal debt. And we worked it out without losing very much of anything in the process, and they made a commitment. We said it on the record, plus we shook hands. And that was it.

But now, because he's worried about being Speaker still, he's trying to renegotiate it all.

And by the way, all those things that were mentioned that we did, all that money we spent—guess what? I cut the deficit by \$1.7 billion [trillion; White House correction] in 2 years—\$1.7 billion [trillion; White House correction]. So we can walk and chew gum at the same time.
[Laughter]

But my generic point is this. Look, there is—we're now in a situation where, just a few months ago, the negotiation between the Speaker and me—we shook hands that we were going to keep the Government levels at essential domestic spending for—and national security priorities. And that still called for—that still reduces the deficit over 10 years by another trillion dollars—by another trillion dollars. That was the deal we made—and over the next decade.

Now a small group of extreme House Republicans—they don't want to live up to that deal. So now Americans could be forced to pay a heavy price because they've walked away and don't—and let—shut the Government down.

If the Government shuts down, it means members of our military—who are going to continue to work but not get paid, and the benefits they get for their children and their spouses are going to go away as well.

A Government shutdown are going to impact everything from food safety to cancer research to Head Start to funding for the Government.

It is—it's just a basic responsibility of the Congress, and they should be deciding what to do about it. One of the most basic responsibilities. And it's time for Republicans in the House of Representatives to start doing their job that we elected them to do.

I don't believe America is a dark or a negative place they paint it out to be in the—to hear my likely opponent—the way he talks about it. We're a nation—I—they talk about us being a nation of—a negative nation, a nation of carnage driven by anger, fear, and revenge. Well, they're trying to drive it that way.

But the truth of the matter is, to his supporters, my likely opponent says: "I am your retribution. We're a failing nation." These are his quotes, not mine. "Either we win, or they win. If they win, we no longer have a country." And it goes on to more drastic comments that he makes as a former sitting President.

Folks, I believe we're a hopeful and optimistic nation driven by a principle—a basic principle: No matter what your—everybody deserves a fair shot. Just a fair shot. No guarantees. We have significant ideological differences. We've always had them.

But they, in fact, now—now, the folks that—we're in a position where they're doing everything to prevent that fair shot from be able to be negotiated under the rules: the separation of powers we have, the way the Court works, the way the Congress works, the way—what he thinks the power of the Presidency is.

And so there is a lot at stake. But if we get by this election, and I believe we will, I think we're going to see a significant increase in not only the growth, but the attitude. Think about it.

A lot of you, I'm sure—you're very successful—travel internationally. Have you ever met a foreign leader or a major person that says, "Boy, I hope the other guy wins." [*Laughter*] No, I'm not being facetious. Not about me. It's about how he views the world in terms of his "America first" attitude.

We're—but we put it back together, and we're going to build it more clearly than it was before. But we've got to fund it, and we can fund it.

And so I'm optimistic that—you know, that people in America basically know in their gut what's at stake. They know what's at stake, and they're going to step up.

We're always going to have ideological fights. That's a—that's legit, and that's appropriate. But there is a set of rules we laid out called the Constitution.

We're the most unique nation in the history of the world, and that's not hyperbole. Every other nation is based on religion, ethnicity, geography. We're the only nation based on an idea. Think about it, for real: We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men and women are created equal—[*inaudible*—it goes on.

We've never lived up to it, but we've never walked away from it. We've never walked away from it. It's who we are. If we lose that, we lose the glue that holds us together.

And so, folks, I think we have an enormous opportunity to put our kids and our grandkids in a position where they live in an even better world than we do—and particularly since we're organizing the rest of the world to deal now with climate change, global warming, and a whole range of other things that we can work together on.

And so I just want you to know how much I appreciate the help. And I'm looking forward to the race. I'm looking forward to getting this underway. Because, like I said, when I made that speech in—before the last election in '02, you know—I mean, excuse me, in '22—and when we were supposed to get a shellacking, and I said we weren't going to. And I made that speech down in Independence Hall about democracy.

Well, it turns out 65 percent of the American people agreed that it was at stake, that there was a lot more than just the traditional disagreements. And so I—you know, we're going to do something that few generations are going to get to do: to say we've actually saved democracy and reasserted who we are as a nation.

And, folks, we have to remember who in God's name we are. Think about this, those of you who are students of history as well. Can you name me one thing America has ever set its mind to

we have not successfully done? Not a joke. One thing we've set a goal for we haven't been able to accomplish. Not one.

And, folks, there is no reason why—we've got to remember who the hell we are. We are the United States of America. Nothing is beyond our capacity when we do it together.

So this is still about bringing the country together. And I think we can do it. And I think the country is ready for it.

And so God bless you all, and may God protect our troops.

And I'm going to turn it over to Mark.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:03 p.m. at the residence of Liz Simons and Mark Heising. In his remarks, he referred to President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin of Russia; Supreme Court Associate Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson; 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; and Speaker of the House of Representatives Kevin O. McCarthy. He also referred to his grandchildren Natalie, Finnegan, Maisy, and Beau Biden, Naomi K. Biden Neal, and Navy Joan Roberts. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on September 27. Audio was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Campaign reception in Atherton, CA.

Locations: Atherton, CA.

Names: Biden Neal, Naomi K.; Biden, Beau; Biden, Finnegan J.; Biden, Jill T.; Biden, Natalie P.; Biden, R. Hunter, II; Biden, Roberta M. "Maisy"; Bro, Susan; Heising, Mark; Jackson, Ketanji Brown; McCarthy, Kevin O.; Obama, Barack; Putin, Vladimir Vladimirovich; Roberts, Navy Joan; Simons, Liz; Trump, Donald J.

Subjects: 2021 civil unrest and violence at U.S. Capitol; 2024 Presidential election; California, Democratic Party event; California, President's visit; Cancer research, prevention, and treatment; Climate change; Federal deficit and debt; Gun violence, prevention efforts; Job creation and growth; North Atlantic Treaty Organization; Russia, conflict in Ukraine; Russia, President; Supreme Court Associate Justice; Ukraine, Russian invasion and airstrikes; Virginia, 2017 civil unrest and violence in Charlottesville; Voting rights, protection efforts.

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