

Remarks at a Campaign Reception

October 20, 2023

The President. Well, thank you very much. Look, you're all standing. I'll try to make this as short and to the point as I can.

Folks, I never quite thought of it the way my hostess just explained what she thinks about why people do what they do. You know, I was thinking as you were speaking, I was lucky. I won the gene pool. My dad was a really decent, honorable man, very well read, couldn't—got into college when he was—before the war, but could never afford to go. One of his great regrets.

But he was a well-read man, and I learned so much from him just by his example. He didn't preach much, but my dad used to say: "Joey, a job is about a lot more than a paycheck; it's about your dignity. It's about whether or not you can show respect. It's about whether or not your kids are—you're going to be able to look at your kids and say, 'Honey, everything is going to be okay.'"

I remember—everybody asks why I have the position I have with regard to LGBTQ issues. I remember being—I was a young kid. I was a lifeguard when I was in high school and college, and I was working at a country club, a place that was—everybody thought that was a great deal, but I wanted to go—I was deeply involved in the civil rights movement as a kid. Our State was segregated by law.

And I remember my dad dropping me off at the city building on the way to work—his way to work—to get an application to be a lifeguard in the projects on the east side. And I was the only White employee for years there. *[Laughter]* No, for real. All 100 percent African American. And I just—it was a real experience.

As we were getting out of the car—many of you know Wilmington, Delaware. If you're a corporate lawyer, you know it because you know Rodney Square. *[Laughter]* And I was getting out at Rodney Square to go into City Hall, and there were two guys very well dressed. One—and they kissed one another, and one went to the DuPont building; one went to the Hercules building. I looked at my dad. My dad said, "Simple." It's the God's truth. He looked and said: "Joey, it's simple. They love each other. They love each other." It wasn't complicated. Not a joke.

And probably one of the best things—I never thought about it this way before until you just introduced me, but one of the best things that ever happened to me, I used to—I was a little kid in terms of stature, and I stuttered badly. T-t-tal-, talked like that.

And if you think about it, the only handicap everybody thinks they can still laugh at is stuttering. If I had said I had a club foot, no one would say, you know—and it was fixed. The point is that it made me realize everybody has something that they can't control, that's not—it's just who they are. It's just what happens. And so it taught me a lot. It taught me a lot, to have a lot of tolerance for people.

And the third thing—the fourth thing, I think, is that, you know, my mother was a—an Irish-Catholic woman who had a backbone like a ramrod. She was 5-foot-2, and you didn't screw with Jean Finnegan Biden. *[Laughter]*

But my mother was real simple. "Joey, when you get knocked down, just get up." *[Laughter]* No, I'm serious. "Just get up. Just get up."

I have a picture in my office of her holding Barack's hand the night we won the Presidency and Vice Presidency. And we were out in Chicago, and my mother was—he shortly was supposed to go out on the stage for a million people, allegedly, there. And she—as we walked off out of the bandstand, my mother wasn't even supposed to go out. She was 91 years old. She grabbed Barack's hand; she said: "Come on, honey. This is going to be okay." [Laughter]

Come to my office, take a look. There's a picture of it, and Barack's going—[laughter].

So I guess what I'm saying is that, you know, I don't think, at least in my case, I didn't sit down and plan out my life. It was that the events—but my mom also used to say: "Joey, you've got to be prepared to lose. You've got to be prepared to lose."

My dad—I'm on back of my—why am I going into all of this for? But anyway. [Laughter]

My dad, I have a—I have a photograph, a cartoon in the back—on my credenza behind my desk in the White House. And you know the cartoon—I'm not a big cartoon character reader, but—Hägar the Horrible? [Laughter]

Well, my dad was at my home in Wilmington. I was about to have a fundraiser at my home when I was running for reelection for the Senate for my 97th term or whatever it was—[laughter]—and——

Audience member. Four more years! [Laughter]

The President. And what happened was, we—I built a smaller home than I had been living in because my boys were gone, and—and it was on—it's on a 10-acre pond. It's called a lake. It's not a lake; it's a 10-foot pond. It was manmade.

But—and it's—and there was about 150 acres of woods behind it owned by the DuPont company—the DuPont family. And it's a lovely setting. I don't own the lake or the background, but it's beautiful.

And my deceased wife Neilia, who was a wonderful person—no man deserves one great love, let alone two—[laughter]—he—she was raised—if any of you are familiar with Upstate New York, the Finger Lakes, she was raised in Lake Skaneateles on the lake, and she loved the lake and loved the water.

And I was standing with my dad waiting for the company to come in, and I said, "Dad, I—you know, I wish Neilia could see this." And she had been deceased for 20-some years at that point. And my dad said, "Son, I'll be back in a minute."

He drove up to the local strip shopping center to a Hallmark store. Came back with a framed copy of a cartoon with Hägar the Horrible. Two frames: one his Viking ship was knocked down, it's on rocks, and his horns on his helmet are charred, and he's looking up at God, and he's going, "Why me?" And the next frame, he's in the same position, and a voice from heaven says, "Why not?" [Laughter]

My dad was—that's it. Just deal with what you're dealt. Deal with what you're dealt. And, folks, a lot of people have been dealt tough hands. And lot of people have been dealt tough hands.

And you know, I just got back from Israel not this morning, but yesterday morning. And I don't want to repeat what you probably all heard—what I talked about—the speech I made last night and other speeches, but here's the deal——

Audience member. Amazing.

The President. I didn't mean to—but you know, I've been a really strong, strong supporter of Israel. Again, learned a lot from my dad. My dad was, as I said, a well-read man and a great—he

never got to go to college; he got into Johns Hopkins. He's from Baltimore. But he could never afford to go during—the war came along, and that was it.

And—but my dad used to talk about how important it was that we—our dinner table—he'd come home from work and then go back after dinner. And he used to—our dinner table was a place where you had conversation and incidentally ate. *[Laughter]*

And my dad used to rail against the fact that the—that we didn't—we didn't let the Jewish ship that came in—we didn't bomb the railroad tracks on the way to the concentration camps, et cetera. And he really meant it.

What happened was when I decided that—when I got engaged, that I was going to do two things, one of which was I wanted to—my kids to understand that—the idea of silence being complicity.

It's—no, I mean—I mean this sincerely. So when they each turned 14—and we come from very modest means. We lived in a three-bedroom—we weren't poor, but three-bedroom, split-level home with four kids and a grandpop living with us. And—and so what happened was, we were—you know, my—anyway.

We got to the point where I—at age 14, my deceased son, Beau—who was the Attorney General of Delaware and volunteered to go to Iraq for a year, came back with glioblastoma because he was living near a burn pit—and his brother—younger brother Hunter, who was the wind beneath his wings, and my—and I had a little daughter who was then 18 months younger than that, and then another—and then we had another daughter Ashley, who is still alive.

And one of the things that happened was that it was one of these things where my dad used to say, "Family is the beginning, the middle, and the end." And what happened was that when—I got a phone call when I—I didn't plan on saying any of this, but when I got a phone call when I was—got elected when I was 29 years old to the Senate—you have to be 30, and I was—Teddy Kennedy was being—the Kennedy family has been wonderful to me.

And I was in his office hiring staff, and I wasn't old enough to be sworn in yet. *[Laughter]* I had to wait until the 17th—no, for real. And—and what happened was I got a phone call from my fire department in Delaware, and the poor young woman they put on the phone called and said: "You've got to come; there's been an accident. Your family was Christmas shopping, December 18th. Your wife and three kids—there's been an accident."

"What the matter?" She said, "A tractor-trailer hit them." And I said—well, she said, "Your wife is dead, your daughter is dead, and your two sons are not likely to make it."

Well, you know, one of the things that—what happened is, I watched how much it mattered to me at the time, the people that embraced me that didn't know me. And there's nothing like—and you've all been through similar things that may be worse than me. But the fact is, when you have people who have been through something and they've come out and they've made it through and they talk to you, you know there's hope. They give you hope.

So there's so many people in my state that gave me hope, that embraced me. And so one of the things that I've observed is that it matters when people speak up. And I'll get this very brief amount of substance here.

I became very involved with American foreign policy. One of the reasons why Barack asked me to be Vice President, because of my foreign policy background and being chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, as well as my desire to be engaged in that.

And so I ended up spending, for example, the better part of 2 years in the Ukraine dealing with the oligarchs, the corrupt system that they had. I'm one of the few people who spoke to Rada

and told them they had a chance to do something that never happened in Ukraine: establish a democratic institution and really make it work.

And so I got to know the Ukrainian people in those 2 years. In those 2 years, I probably spent a total of 3 months in Ukraine during this period of time. And so, when Putin made the move he made, some of you may remember, I predicted he was going to do it. I predicted when he was going to do it. And he did.

Over, you know, 180,000 people crossing the border, invading another country because it was part of Mother Russia. It was—never existed.

Ukraine is an example of what tyrants do when no one stands in their way. And so I was determined we had to respond. We were determined we had to respond. And we did. And we did.

And now there is a lot of discussion about whether or not it's worth it. The reason I was—made the speech I made last night was to make the case that it was essentially: If we don't, no one else will.

I spent over 180 hours—they calculated, my team—talking with the European leaders to get them to stay united. One thing Putin has agreed—was counting on from the beginning was being able to crack NATO, being able to crack the alliance so people would walk away.

And everybody asked me why do I think it's so important the United States continue to be a leader in this. We have contributed as much as all the rest of those nations combined and the GDP about the size of our population in that regard.

And guess what? Well, we've been able to slow him up, stop him. He's already lost in the sense that he cannot—can never occupy that country and successfully do it. But what he's done, I've—I'm not going to forget the mass graves and the—using rape as a weapon of war and so many other terrible things that he's done and continues to do. And if we walk away—and I met today with the European Union von der Leyen. And the—if we walk away, they—Ukraine—I mean Russia—will win.

Russia has said, within 5 days, if the United States doesn't support Ukraine, they'll go down. We probably will because the rest of the world will not sustain it, will not—we're the reason why. Not me, the United States of America is the reason why, leading the world.

We are, as Madeleine Albright said, the essential nation. We are the essential nation.

And don't worry, I'll get to Israel. *[Laughter]* It's no more or less important than anything else in terms of—those people are dying the same way in Ukraine. Okay?

And the reason why I'm so devoted to—and I have a reputation, as you probably know, of being maybe the most arduous supporter of Israel in the United States Congress back when the days of Jack Javits and others as well.

But here's the deal: If you think about it, what's the reason why it's so important for Israel to be sustained? Because I'm absolutely convinced—I am convinced with every fiber of my being: If there were no Israel, there's not a Jew safe in the world—not in the entire world. I really mean it. In the entire world.

[Inaudible]—including the United States, it can be counted on. So that's why I'm pushing so hard. That's why I spend so much time. But here's the other piece of it. The—I had a—I've had a long talk with—well, I won't go into it too much into detail.

But the fact is that I went over for three reasons this last time, and I've been over a lot: to meet with the war cabinet; to meet with Bibi, who I've known for over 40 years. Bibi keeps a picture, he said, on his—on his desk, a picture of he and I when I was a young Senator, and I

guess I was 33 years old and he worked for the Embassy. And I wrote on the picture of the two of us standing side by side, I said: "Bibi, I love you. I don't agree with a damn thing you say."
[Laughter]

And he reminded me of that. And that's close to true. [Laughter] But we've been friends for a long time. But here's the story.

Look, why is it that things are happening the way they are now? Well, I think the reason they're happening the way they are now is, I used to think when I was the chairman of Judiciary Committee coming out of the Civil—when I got Strom Thurmond to vote for the Voting Rights Act—no, I really did—[applause]—I thought you could defeat hate.

But you can never defeat hate. It just hides under a rock. When it's given oxygen, it comes back out. You've just got to keep at it. It's relentless. You cannot slow up.

And when I got elected, I made a decision, and you heard me say it. I was going to have an administration that looked like America. And I meant it. Not to be—not for political reasons, for practical reasons, to let everybody know. We have more LGBTQ people in significant spots in our administration, in the administration overall. We have more women than men in the Cabinet. We have Supreme Court Justices and others.

Now, by the way, not—we're doing this, but because we are who we are because of our diversity—because of our diversity. And everybody has to understand they have a place. Everybody has to understand they have place.

Which leads me—and, again, I'm talking too long. I had a lovely speech here. [Laughter]

But you know, one of the things that—put it this way: When America remains silent, very few other nations speak up. All kidding aside, think about it. For example, when I go around the world—and I've been to over 140-some countries—when I go around the world, you know what we talk about? We talk about the rights of LGBTQ communities.

I was in India—was in India with Gandhi's daughters talking about "Can you do for us what you did in America; can you help us generate da, da, da?" I mean, for real. You know that.

And the fact is that it's a matter of—let me back up. I wasn't going to run in 2000 [2020; White House correction], and—because I had just lost my son Beau, and I just didn't—I just didn't want to run. The reason I wrote the book I wrote a while ago was—"Promise me, Dad"—with my son Beau on his deathbed, he looked at me and said: "Dad, promise me—I know you love me so much you'll quit. You'll quit. Promise me, Dad—promise me you won't disengage." True story.

And the point is that one of the things that I remember that got me—that really made me realize that things were—had to change is—remember Charlottesville? Well, I remember in Charlottesville, watching and reading about those neo-Nazis. And they were carrying swastikas. They were chanting the same anti-Semitic bile that was chanted in Germany in the thirties. They came out of those woods carrying torches. And a young woman was killed standing—a bystander, killed by the mob.

And when the guy that is probably going to be my opponent was the President, they asked him and said, "So what do you think?" He said, "There are very fine people on both sides." [Inaudible]—has ever said anything like that—anything like that. And that's when I decided that I had to run. I mean it. I'm not being—[inaudible].

This young man asked me a profound question in the rope line—in the rope line—[laughter]—in the photo line that would take 20 minutes to answer. I said: "Real quick: Decide

what you believe in and act on what you believe in because one person can make a difference if you stand up."

And look, we're at a place now where I see no fundamental difference between the abuse of LGBTQ rights, the abuse of—because you're Jewish or—[inaudible]—they're all—they're all the same. They're generated out of hate and fear. And the government has to speak up. The government has to speak up.

And I am—of all the terrible things that are going on, believe or not, I'm optimistic. Look, we're at an inflection point in history—literally an inflection point in history, and that is that decisions we make in the next four or five years are going to determine what the next four or five decades look like. And that's—that's a fact.

But if we each don't step up, if we walk away—if we walk away, who is going to—who is going to stay? Who is going to stay? But we also have—I want you to look at the optimistic side. If we do what I know we can do, we can change history.

For example, when I was at the G-20 in India, the 20 largest economies in the world, I got a resolution passed, an agreement passed, saying that we're going to build a railroad from New Delhi all the way up through the Middle East through the—and going into—you know, the Arab countries, from Israel, across the—not a railroad, but pipelines across the Mediterranean and then railroads—[inaudible]—to unite those countries in terms of economic stability—economic, so they all had an interest between them. We got it passed. We got it passed.

I think one of the reasons why they acted like they did, why the folks moved on the— Hamas moved on Israel as they have—is, they knew I was about to sit down with the Saudis, who are not my—I wouldn't call them the greatest democracy in the world. [Laughter]

But guess what? The Saudis wanted to recognize Israel, and they wanted—I got them to agree to overflights, and they were about to recognize Israel. And that would, in fact, unite the Middle East. We would have to pay a pretty high price—[inaudible]—that—[inaudible]—countries across from that—[inaudible]—a lot of trouble.

My point is, I think many people fear us being able to do things that unite others. And we're in a situation where we were able to do a great deal relative to—for example, in the Indo-Pacific.

I remember I was talking—my—[inaudible]—and my senior staff is really—they're very experienced. And I was going to get—I was going to be able to get Korea—South Korea and Japan to unite in helping in Europe. They didn't talk to one another. They're still fighting over the 50 years of, you know—anyway.

Well, guess what? I went to see them both. They agreed. And guess what they're doing? They're both supporting the fight in Ukraine against Russian oppression. [Inaudible]

Because they understand if they remain silent, they may be next. They may be next. What happens in Taiwan, what happens in the—what happens in the Taiwan Strait, what happens in the Indian Ocean? What happens around the world?

So I think we have an opportunity to do things, if we're bold enough and have enough confidence in ourselves, to unite the world in ways that it never has been. We were in a postwar period for 50 years where it worked pretty damn well, but that's sort of run out of steam. Sort of run out of steam. It needs a new—a new world order in a sense, like that was a world order.

So, as down as you all may be, I just think that—I think we have a real opportunity to unite the world in a way it hasn't been in a long time. And enhance the prospect of peace, not diminish the prospect of peace.

And you know, we need every American—you know, Donald Trump talks about—he tells his supporters, he says, "I am your retribution." This is what he says. He means it. He said: "We're a failing nation. Either we—either they win"—meaning me—[laughter]—"or we win. If they win, we no longer have a country."

He goes on to talk about how he has great respect for Putin, how he's a real leader, how Hamas—I mean the things he says, the—the worst part is, he basically means—if you notice all—who are his friends? All the strongmen. All the—you know, you have North Korea. You have—anyway, I won't go through it. [Laughter]

But look, here's the deal. You know, what's at stake is literally American democracy, in my view. I know when I made that speech in 2020 in Independence Hall, people thought it was hyperbole. Everybody thought that except the American people. People are worried about our democracy.

Look what they're trying to do. All the basics rights we've taken for granted for a long time, what do they want to deal with? They want to take it away. They want to take it away, whether it's to change the court system, whether it's to move in a way to deal with LGBTQ legislation, whether it's about the right to vote, just—whether it's about the right to choose. Think about all the individual things that are frontal attacks.

But that other piece of good news: This is not your father's Republican Party. [Laughter] This is a different deal. These MAGA Republicans make about 30 percent of that party, and now you saw the—the significant gentleman from Ohio, he just got his rear end kicked by—[laughter].

Audience member. Third—third time.

The President. Third—well, beyond that's the last time, because here's the deal: We have to understand that violence in American politics is never, never, never, never acceptable. Never acceptable.

But guess what? He lost the third time in the vote, then they had a secret ballot when they got back in the caucus. And I think it was something like 140 people voted against him. Because you know why they didn't publicly? Intimidated. Intimidated.

And I've had serious people talk to me about how they worry about death threats with their positions. I mean, this is the United States of America. We're so much better than that.

And, I guess, what I was to say to you is, you know, in 2024, not because of me, but because of—if Donald Trump is the nominee, if we win in 2024, we'll be an extended generation to say we saved democracy, in a way. [Inaudible]

Look—I've got to stop myself here. [Laughter]

We have to remember one thing: We're the United States of America, for God's sake. Think about it. We're the United States.

There's never been a thing we've set our mind to we haven't been able to accomplish. Not one single time in American history. No, I mean it. When we've done it together—when we've done it together.

For example—I mean, think about it. They asked me about—when I said that about 8, 10 months ago, they said, "Well, what would you—if you could only do one thing, what would you do?" I said I'd cure cancer. They looked at me like "What's that about?" because nobody thinks that anymore. The American public doesn't think that anymore.

We can. We can.

But the point is, we used to think we could do anything if we joined together and set our minds to it. Name me one crisis we ever got into where we haven't come out stronger in America. Name me one. Name me one where we went in and didn't come out stronger.

Audience member. Before you, climate change. But you fixed that. [*Laughter*]

The President. Well, but it's changing. That's what I'm saying. We're a hell of a lot stronger. We're a hell of a lot stronger, but there's a lot more to do.

Audience members. Thanks for the IRA.

The President. But—so, anyway. Please don't lose faith. Not—not in me. Don't lose faith—[*inaudible*].

And the thing that I've learned, even though I've been—I've known every major head of state in the last 40 years in my job. There's nowhere I go—[*inaudible*—where I don't walk into the room and every other country—[*inaudible*—stands at attention. Not because they like us, but because it's the United States of America, and they're counting on us. They're counting on us, on our strength and on our diversity.

Thank you for the help. I appreciate it very much. And I'm sorry that I rambled so much.

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 6 p.m. at the residence of Claire Lucas and Judy Dlugacz. In his remarks, he referred to former Presidents Barack Obama and Donald J. Trump; President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin of Russia; President Ursula von der Leyen of the European Commission; Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel; and Rep. James D. Jordan, in his former capacity as a candidate to succeed Kevin O. McCarthy as Speaker of the House of Representatives. He also referred to his sister Valerie Biden Owens and brothers Francis W. and James B. Biden. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on October 21. Audio was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

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