

*Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2023*

**Remarks to United Auto Workers Union Members in Belvidere, Illinois**  
*November 9, 2023*

*[The President was introduced by United Auto Workers Local 1628 President Matt Frantzen, who presented him with a UAW T-shirt. The President then began his remarks.]*

*The President.* Hello, UAW! Hello, hello, hello.

Something you don't know: My State of Delaware—a little State—because we've got a small population, had the highest percentage of UAW workers in the United States of America. We had the largest GM plant. We had the largest Chrysler plant outside of Detroit. And we had a lot of shipping as well.

But here's the deal, I got raised on automobiles. My dad ran an automobile—he didn't own it; he ran an automobile agency for a long time.

*Audience member.* President Biden, you need to call for a cease-fire in Gaza! Ten thousand——

*Audience members.* Boo!

*The President.* Okay. No, no, no, let—let her go.

*[At this point, the audience disruption continued.]*

Let it—no.

*[The audience disruption continued.]*

*Audience member.* Get her out!

*The President.* No, don't. Let it—it's okay.

*Audience member.* We love you, Joe! We love you, Joe! We love you, Joe!

*The President.* Anyway——

*Audience members.* We love Joe! We love Joe! We love Joe!

*The President.* Look, I guess what I'm trying to say to you is, I grew up in neighborhoods where I know what it likes when a plant closes down. The largest General Motors plant, as I said; the largest Chrysler plant—when they shut down, people lost their sense of pride. Neighborhoods were in real trouble. People wondered whether they were going to stick around, what was going to happen to their families. It's a big, big deal.

So this opening in Belvidere, again, is a gigantic deal, as far as I'm concerned.

Matt, the UAW in Boone County is lucky to have you, pal.

It's good to be in Illinois with so many friends.

And, Gov, you've done one hell of a job. You worked so darn hard to get jobs back here in Belvidere. And by the way, you don't want to be on the other side of this guy. *[Laughter]* He knows what he's doing.

And two Members are here from the outstanding congressional delegation, Bill Foster and Eric Sorensen. Bill, where are you? There they are.

*Audience member.* Representative Vella!

*The President.* And Representative Vella. [Laughter]

*Audience member.* We love Vella!

*The President.* Didn't know he was here.

*Audience member.* He's here.

*Audience member.* Dave's here.

*The President.* And look, one of your great—where are you?

*State Representative Dave Vella of Illinois.* Right over here.

*The President.* I'm sorry, man.

And two of your great Senators, Dick Durbin and Tammy Duckworth, can't be here because they're in Washington voting. But I—they had to stay back. And by the way, they fight tirelessly for the people of Illinois, and Durbin busted his neck in this job too, as well.

Look, folks, they've worked nonstop to bring good jobs back to Belvidere.

Two people—two people from my team are here who did so much to support UAW negotiations: our Acting Secretary of Labor Julie Su—where are you, Julie?—and Gene Sperling. I think—I think Shawn—[applause]. I think Shawn would tell you they did a hell of a job.

And thank you to all the State and local leaders here today.

But, most of all, to the members of the UAW—you're tough, tough, tough as they come. The first outfit to ever endorse me as a 29-year-old kid when I was running for the United State Senate and been with me my whole career.

You know, the fact is, this starts at the top, though, with Shawn Fain. Shawn, you've done one hell of a job, pal. When I called Shawn to congratulate him on this historic deals with the Big Three automakers, he said the credit goes to all of you—all of you out there, and it does.

And it may be true, but it doesn't hurt to have a leader with a backbone like a ramrod, and that's Shawn.

You know, he and the entire UAW proved what I've always believed: Wall Street didn't build America. The middle——

*Audience members.* No!

*The President.* The middle class built America——

*Audience members.* Yes!

*The President.* ——and unions built the middle class.

*Audience members.* Yes!

*The President.* That was true in the 20th century, and it's still true today. And Americans know it. That's why unions are more popular today than they've been in decades.

About 6 weeks ago, I went to Belvidere, Michigan—excuse me, Belleville, Michigan—to join your brothers and sisters on the picket line. It brought back a lot memories of my marching on picket lines as a United States Senator. But what I didn't realize: It was the first time a President ever did that. [Laughter]

It was second nature. No, I'm serious. I didn't know that.

*Audience member.* That shirt looks good on you!

*The President.* Well, I tell you——

*Audience members.* Yeah!

*The President.* I've worn this shirt a lot, man. You have no idea. I've been involved with the UAW longer than you were alive, man. [Laughter]

Look, that day in Michigan, I said the auto strike was about a simple proposition. You guys sacrificed to save the automobile industry from the—in the middle of the——

*Audience member.* Yes!

*The President.* No, you—that's a fact. You did. Some of you weren't around; you were too young. [Laughter] But you—I mean it. But—the financial crisis more than a decade ago.

And now, the auto companies are doing incredibly well. So auto workers should be doing incredibly well as well. You saved the auto industry, and they should step up for you.

A simple proposition: You kept the picket line going for 46 days. You kept your negotiations working around the clock—negotiators. And in the end, the deal you reached set a new standard.

Over 30-percent increase in wages, with cost-of-living adjustments; bigger pay increases over the last—next 4½ years than in the last 22 years combined; greater retirement security; more paid leave; and community by—commitments by the Big Three to create thousands more full-time, middle class jobs, investing tens of billions of dollars building the auto future made in America.

Look, folks, these deals are gamechangers not only for UAW workers, but for all workers in America. Just ask the folks at Toyota, which last week announced it would significantly, finally increase wages for their workers.

Thanks for—you had no choice—they had no choice because of what you put—did. You helped everybody. And look, I—and I want to thank you for your commitment to the solidarity, for exercising your right to bargain collectively. You made this happen.

*Audience member.* Thanks.

*The President.* And it's no—no, by the way, it's a bigger thing, I think, than even you all realize. You've changed—you're changing the face of the country economically.

I also want to recognize Ford, GM, and Stellantis. They negotiated, ultimately, in good faith. And, as a result, auto workers will be rewarded and the iconic Big Three are going to still lead the world in quality and innovation because of you.

Look—but I'm a little selfish. I want this type of contract for all auto workers. And I have a feeling UAW has a plan for that. The future of the automobile industry will be made in America by American union workers.

And I see the future here in Belvidere. The Belvidere Assembly Plant was the beating heart of this community for nearly six decades, just like it was back in Delaware, where I was raised. Eight months ago, the plant idled indefinitely. One thousand two hundred of you lost jobs.

When that happens, the community loses more than jobs. They lose their sense of pride, lose their sense of being, lose their sense of dignity. You've got to—what do you turn and say to your kids? What do you say to one another? Everything changes. It's devastating.

Then, this June, I had a combination with Matt about the local—from the local UAW, as he just described. I said, "Tell me, what's going on in—with Belvidere?" He told me how critical it was to get that plant up and on line again.

So I told my team, "Make Stellantis know Belvidere is a priority." And I got on the phone and let them know personally I thought it was a priority.

*Audience member.* Yeah.

*Audience member.* Thank you, Joe!

*The President.* I can—[*applause*]. No, no, no.

By the way, I can't take a lot of credit for that. But I watched it before. I've watched it as a kid. I watched it as a Senator. I watched what happened in my community. It changed everything. The State had a lot of other things going, but those folks were hurt badly.

I can tell you one thing, it was a priority—it was my priority for you as well as a priority for all of you. That's why I personally brought it up with Mark Stewart, the head of the North American Stellantis.

Meanwhile, the UAW fought like hell to get these jobs back. And now you've secured nearly \$5 billion in new investment to bring thousands of jobs back to Belvidere. They'll reopen that plant assembly; build mid-sized trucks, a state-of-the-art battery factory, and a parts distribution center right here in Belvidere.

And, folks, I'm fighting for places like Belvidere because I came to the Presidency determined to put an end to this trickle-down economics in this country. I mean it. I'm serious. I'm deadly earnest.

For too long, the wealthy and big corporations have done just fine, but the rest of us were cut out of that deal.

Look, I see it differently. I don't look at the economy through the eyes of Wall Street or Park Avenue. I look at it through the eyes of the people I grew up with in Scranton, Pennsylvania, and Claymont, Delaware.

My guess is, that's how Shawn looks at it too—the people he grew up with in Kokomo.

Look, that view is that American workers are ready to work harder than anybody else. But they just need to be given a shot—a fair shot and a fair wage. That's not too much to ask.

[*An audience member fell down.*]

You okay? [*Laughter*] I want the press to know that wasn't me. [*Laughter*]

You know, my dad used to have a saying, for real. He'd say: "Joey, a job is about a lot more than a paycheck. It's about your dignity."

*Audience member.* Yeah!

*The President.* "It's about"—no, it really is.

"It's about respect. It's about your place in the community. It's about being able to go home and to look at your kid in the eye and say, 'Honey, it's going to be okay,' and mean it."

Well, guess what? That's exactly what's happening in Belvidere again.

With this UAW contract, you'll be treated fairly. You'll get a fair share of what you produce. And you'll get the dignity and respect you deserve, right here, at home—and I know maybe the press won't get this, but you all who are members of the union will get it—and to be able to look your kid in the eye and say, "Honey, it's going to be okay." It matters.

I ran for President to big—bring back good-paying jobs that you can raise a family on, whether or not you went to college, and give working families more breathing room. And the way

to do that is to invest in ourselves again, invest in America, invest in American workers. And that's exactly what we've done.

Folks, since I took office, our Nation has invested billions to supercharge advanced manufacturing here at home, including electric vehicles.

China is determined to dominate the electric-vehicle market by using unfair trade practices, but I will not let them. I promise you. *[Applause]* I mean it.

Look, let me give you an example: America invented the semiconductor, those little computer chips about the size of the tip of your little finger; they power everything in our lives, from cell phones to refrigerators to automobiles. As many as 3,000 are in a single electric vehicle.

And over as—over time, we went from producing 40—we invented the damn chips. *[Laughter]* No, we did. We invented them here in America. We used to present—we used to produce 40 percent of them; now we're down to 10 percent.

We saw what happened in the pandemic when we couldn't get those chips. Remember? The—people didn't know what the hell "supply chain" meant. We all know what "supply chain" means now, don't we? *[Laughter]* Well, I was determined that no supply chain was ever going to deny us, because it's going to start here in America—the supply chain. *[Applause]* No, I really mean it.

I literally went around the world convincing chip manufacturers in other parts of the world to come and invest in America. And the end result is, companies around the world are investing \$200 billion to increase chip production.

And by the way, they're going to produce a whole hell of a lot of jobs too. You know those "fabs," they call them—the factories they build, like the one they're building in east—west of Columbus, Ohio? Guess what? They employ thousands of people. And you know what the average wage in there is? A hundred and twelve thousand dollars, and you don't need a college degree.

And then I kept talking about science. How can you be the leading country without investing in science and research? And because of the CHIPS and Science Act, which I put together and signed into law, the United States is going to invest—the Government—invest another \$50 billion to manufacture these semiconductors at home. Now we'll be able to ensure that we have a supply chain in the Nation that we can rely on.

Then, thanks to bipartisan infrastructure law, which is over a trillion dollars—guess what?—we're building a network of 500,000 electric-vehicle charging stations all across America by your brothers and sisters, the IBEW. And that's a first-rate outfit, that.

These charging stations will be easy to find and reliable as any gas station. You'll be able to travel across the Nation.

Then, we had a thing called the Inflation Reduction Act, which I put together—which, I might add, not one guy on the other team voted for—and that law has driven nearly \$100 billion in investment in electric vehicles and EV batteries here at home.

And my administration announced a—\$12 billion to convert the existing auto factories to manufacture electric vehicles, if they—in the transition.

Because I strongly believe that when a company transitions to a new technology, they should retool, reboot, and rehire in the same factories with the same workers in the same community that existed there before. They should get the first shot at the jobs.

That's what you made happen here in Belvidere, and it should happen all across America.

Let me tell you all the investments we're paying for—we're paying off.

Sales of electric vehicles here at home have tripled since I took office. Eighty percent of electric vehicles on the road today were made in America. And that means good-paying jobs for American autoworkers.

That also means—let's think about this: When my predecessor, the distinguished—anyway—[*laughter*].

*Audience member.* We know.

[*The President made the sign of the cross.*]

*The President.* [*Laughter*] When my predecessor was in office, six factories closed across the country. Tens of thousands of auto jobs were lost nationwide. And, on top of that, he was willing to cede the future of electric vehicles to China.

He said if America invested in electric vehicles, it would drive down wages. It would destroy jobs. It would spell the end of the American automobile industry. Well, like almost everything else he said, he was wrong. And you proved—you have proved him wrong.

Instead of lower wages, you won record gains. Instead of fewer jobs, you've won a commitment for thousands of more jobs. Instead of less involvement and investment, you encouraged American auto makers to invest \$40 billion in the American auto industry, beginning now—\$40 billion.

And they were going to—we were going to shut down, remember—my other guy?

And here's the difference: When you were in the middle of the fight, I stood and others stood with you, shoulder to shoulder, on that picket line. My predecessor went to a nonunion shop and attacked you.

*Audience member.* Yes, he did! Yes, he did!

*The President.* I hope you—I hope you guys have a memory. Where I come from, it matters. The truth is, if you had listened to him—[*laughter*—thank God you didn't. [*Laughter*] If you had listened to him—look—and since—look, since I became President, thanks to the investments we've made in—more than 20 new auto plants have opened across America. Twenty new autos opened, not closed. And as a matter of fact, more are already on the way. And zero closed.

My administration will keep working to make sure UAW has what it needs to outcompete China and everyone else in the world. I've reminded other world leaders, it's never, never, never been a good bet to bet against America. It's never been a good—[*applause*]. Not a joke. Not a joke.

When we invest in America and Americans, we never lose. Look, it's been true through our history, and it's still true today.

Folks, you know what I knew growing up: For too long, the economy hasn't worked for working people and the middle class. And, again, that's why I'm determined to build an economy—to build from the middle out and the bottom up, instead of the top down. Not a whole lot trickled down to my dad's kitchen table from that trickle-down economics.

When we do that, we—the poor have a ladder up, the middle class does well, and the wealthy still do very well, even though they don't pay their taxes. [*Laughter*] No, they've got to be—start paying more tax—the corporate—[*applause*]. We all do well, and America prospers.

And the critical piece of growing the economy is worker power. I'm not just saying that. From an economic standpoint—it's worker power. You know the agreements forged by Shawn

and the brothers and sisters of the UAW show how collective bargaining gives workers a seat at the table.

And when that happens, you ensure your wages and compensation honor your contributions, and your employers succeed as well. They don't lose, they succeed. They do better. They secure the pay and benefits you can raise a family on, retire with dignity.

And I might add, the deals you struck show how collective bargaining works for companies as well.

Look, the strong relationship between workers and management can mean record profits leading to record contracts. We're seeing it across the board, for UAW to rail workers, to port workers, to Teamsters, to health workers, to writers—did you see they settled the strike and—you guys are, really, a harbinger. They settled the strike in Los Angeles. Now you'll be able to see whatever the hell you want to see. *[Laughter]*

But look, it matters.

I asked the U.S. Department of Treasury to do a full-blown study to determine and—they recently released the report showing that—how unions are not just good for union workers but nonunion workers as well.

*Audience member.* Right. That's right.

*The President.* No, I—but everybody—for the longest time—the longest time—you know as well as I do—10 years ago, the reason we were in trouble is "unions, unions." It's the exact opposite.

Unions raise the standard across workplaces and industries, pushing up wages and strengthening benefits for everybody, whether you're a union member or not.

So let me close with this. Our economy has made strong gains since I came to office. We have the strongest economic growth and the lowest inflation rate of any major economy in the entire world.

We've got more to do. We've got more to do. But our economy grew—to bore you with a statistic—4.9 percent last year [quarter; White House correction]. That's the highest growth in 2 years.

More people are working today than ever in the United States of America—more. Unemployment has been under 4 percent for 21 straight months. That hadn't happened in a long time. Inflation has come down two-thirds since last summer, and it's going to come down more.

And wages are actually going up—not just in your industry, but wages are going up.

It's a fancy way of saying—is median household wealth has grown by 37 percent since the pandemic, meaning people are better off, 37-percent better off.

We have more to do, but we're finally building an economy that works for the people—working people, the middle class—and, as a consequence, the entire country.

When I look out at all of you and the communities like Belvidere, I see real heroes of your story—you know, you and the American worker, you're the American people.

Because of you, I can honestly say—and I mean this from the bottom of my heart—I've never been more optimistic about America's future than I am today. And I know I only look like I'm 30, but I've been around a long time. *[Laughter]* We have to just keep going.

Think this—think about this: Is there ever anything America set its mind to as a nation that we've done together that we haven't succeeded? Not a joke. Ever, anything.

*Audience members.* No, no.

*The President.* Well, you know, Donald Trump often says we're now—quote: "We are now a failing nation. We're a nation in decline."

*Audience members.* Boo!

*The President.* And by the way, the reason I'm mention it is, these MAGA Republicans—I don't know where they come from. *[Laughter]* No, I mean it sincerely.

But that's not what I see. I—like you, I know this country. I know what we can do if folks would give it half a chance.

That's why I'm so optimistic about our future. We just have to remember who we are. We are the United States of America. There is nothing beyond our capacity if we work together—*[applause]*—nothing, nothing, nothing. And you're making it happen.

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

Thank—*[applause]*. Thank you. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:56 p.m. at the Community Building Complex of Boone County. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Jay R. "J.B." Pritzker of Illinois; White House American Rescue Plan Coordinator and Senior Adviser to the President Eugene B. Sperling; Shawn Fain, president, United Auto Workers; Mark Stewart, chief operating officer, Stellantis N.V.; and former President Donald J. Trump.

*Categories:* Addresses and Remarks : United Auto Workers union members in Belvidere, IL.

*Locations:* Belvidere, IL.

*Names:* Duckworth, L. Tammy; Durbin, Richard J.; Fain, Shawn; Foster, William G.; Frantzen, Matt; Pritzker, Jay R. "J.B."; Sorensen, Eric; Sperling, Eugene B.; Stewart, Mark; Su, Julie A.; Trump, Donald J.; Vella, Dave.

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