

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2023

Remarks at a Screening of "Wonka" for Military Families at the Joint Forces Staff College in Norfolk, Virginia

November 19, 2023

The First Lady. You're supposed to come out too, Joe. *[Laughter]*

Hello, how are you? Hello. Wow, it's so—it's so nice to—I love that he's continued clapping. Thank you. *[Laughter]*

So it's really special for me to be here today because my dad was Navy. He fought in World War II. So, Navy always has a special place in my heart.

And I want to thank you, Ashley, for everything you've done for this community.

When our son Beau was deployed, we saw how much his children missed their daddy. And I know there are many here who miss their mom or their dad or spouse. While nothing can make up for that empty chair at the table, for us, the kindness of our community and finding moments of joy helped make it a little bit easier until we saw our son Beau again.

We're grateful to Warner Brothers for bringing joy tonight with this screening of "Wonka."

The families here may not all wear a uniform. But your President and I know that you serve too. And we're grateful for all that you do for our country. It's our duty and honor to make sure you feel supported. And that's what my Joining Forces—my White House initiative supporting military and veterans' spouses, caregivers, and survivors—is all about.

So wrap yourselves around—in this community, the community that surrounds you and the joy that comes when we laugh together.

Happy Thanksgiving. May God bless you. Thank you.

Joe.

The President. Well, thank you very much. I'm Jill's husband—*[laughter]*—and I'm proud of it.

Look, folks, I had a nice little talk prepared for you. But, you know, I look out there and I—reminds me every single day what I know.

You know, by the way, I'm all Navy, but I was appointed to the—I—anyhow, I was going to go play at the Naval Academy until I found out the other guys in the backfield were a guy named Roger Staubach and Joe—Joe Bellino. So I decided to go to Delaware.

But our son—so, I always used to root for Navy. But our son was a major, Bronze Star winner because—anyway—in the United States Army. I was asked to flip the coin at the Army-Navy game in—in Philadelphia when he was in. And he said: "Dad, let's get this straight. I know you're a Navy—you like Navy, but I'm Army." *[Laughter]*

But I tell you what. Army, Navy, Marines, all Air Force, you're the literal backbone of this country. One percent of you—only 1—1 percent defend 99 percent of us.

And there's another—you know, there's a—and none of them would be able to do it without the help they have at home, especially for the kids. You know, I know you miss your mommy or your daddy or your brother or your sister, and it's hard. It's hard.

There's a famous English poet who once said, "They also serve who only stand and wait." That's not a joke. It's not a joke.

For the year Beau was in Iraq and before that in Kosovo, I watched Jill. Every morning, she'd get up, and it'd be—drinking her coffee over beneath—over the sink and saying a prayer—a silent prayer every day.

So I just want you to know you are—you're the heart and soul of the—of this—of this country. I mean, you're—that's not hyperbole. You really are.

So you should be proud of your mommies and daddies. We're proud of all of you. And I want to assure you of one thing, and I hope I've demonstrated it so far: We always, always have your back. We'll always have your back.

And by the way, I like kids better than people. [*Laughter*] I wish I could stay and watch "Wonka" with you. But I'm not going to get to do that.

But, anyway, have a good time. Thank you, thank you, thank you for your service from the bottom of my heart. Really.

The First Lady. Happy Thanksgiving, everyone.

The President. Happy Thanksgiving. See y'all.

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 3:25 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to Roger Staubach, former quarterback, U.S. Naval Academy football team and National Football League's Dallas Cowboys. The First Lady referred to Ashley Burrets, wife of a U.S. Navy servicemember stationed aboard the USS *Gerald R. Ford*, who introduced the President and First Lady. She also referred to her grandchildren Natalie P. Biden and R. Hunter Biden II. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on November 20.

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