

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2023

Remarks at the Thanksgiving Turkey Presentation Ceremony and an Exchange With Reporters

November 20, 2023

The President. Before I begin, I'm going to ask for a vote: Do I free the turkeys today?

Audience members. Yes!

The President. Anyway, good to see you all. If you have a seat, please take it.

It's great to see you all. It's a—good morning. I'm honored to welcome—welcome to the biggest edition of this wonderful White House Thanksgiving tradition. And it really is.

We've got a lot of special guests here today: children and families from my staff and Cabinet. Where are y'all? Holler. There you go. All right.

Students from Washington Eliot-Hine Middle School.

Audience members. Happy birthday!

Audience member. Happy birthday!

The President. Well, thank you very much.

Jill and I met them during the back-to-school visit. I'm glad you remembered us. Thank you.

Audience member. [Inaudible]

The President. [Laughter] I remember.

And Future Farmers of America, leaders of 4-H Councils, and leaders across the agriculture community.

I just want you to know, everyone here, we're excited to have our honored guests with us today: Liberty and Bell. This is their day.

Thanks to the chairman of the National Turkey Federation Steve Lykken—Steve and your entire family—I met—got to meet the entire family. And by the way, I—it's my birthday today, and they can—actually sang "Birthday" to me.

I just want you to know, it's difficult turning 60. [Laughter] Difficult. [Laughter]

His entire family raised these birds on their family farm in Minnesota. And, Steve, you are—you're grateful to—we're grateful to your entire family. You have a beautiful family. Thank you very much.

God, they're big. See, I'm used to chickens in Delaware. [Laughter] We've got a \$4 billion industry in chickens, but there's no chicken that big, man. I tell you.

Just a few weeks ago, I visited another family farm in Minnesota where we talked about the pride of small towns and communities—rural communities—the pride that people have being able to know they can stay there and continue to keep their farms—and how, because of the investments we're making, we're restoring hope and opportunity so family farms can stay in the family and children don't have to leave home if they wish to stay and make a living on the farm.

Look, it matters.

And thanks to all of the families across America—who feed and fuel our Nation and the world, I might add. The world.

The national turkey presentation is—and pardon marks the unofficial start of the holiday season where, here in Washington—a time to share joy and gratitude and have a little bit of fun.

This is the 76th anniversary of this event. And I want you to know I wasn't there at the first one. *[Laughter]* I was too young to make it up. *[Laughter]*

One thing I want to make clear that was not clear then—you know, even though Liberty and Bell are from Minnesota, they're named for a famous Liberty Bell in Philadelphia in Pennsylvania. These birds have a new appreciation for the word "Let Freedom Ring." *[Laughter]*

So I'm told by the Turkey Federation of Liberty Bell—and Liberty and Bell, they love Honeycrisp apples—*[applause]*—not bad, huh?—ice hockey—*[laughter]*—I sure in hell would like to see them play ice hockey; 1,000 [10,000; White House correction] Lakes; and the Mall of America. *[Laughter]*

Now, just to get here, Liberty and Bell had to beat some tough odds—the competition. They had to work hard, show patience, and be willing to travel over a thousand miles.

You could say even it's harder than getting a ticket to the Renaissance Tour or—Britney's [Taylor's; White House correction] tour. She's down in—it's kind of warm in Brazil right now.

Look, folks, based on their commitment to being productive members of society, as they head to their new home at the University of Minnesota, I—are you going to bring them on up or do I do it there? That's a big bird, man. *[Laughter]* I'm impressed.

I hereby pardon Liberty and Bell. All right.

Congratulations, birds. Congratulations.

Look, now let me conclude, on a serious note, about why we have Thanksgiving in the first place: to remind ourselves—and we sometimes forget this—how we have so much to be thankful for as a nation.

This week, we'll gather with the people we love and the traditions that each of us have built up in our own families.

We'll also think about the loved ones we've lost, including just yesterday when we lost former First Lady Rosalynn Carter, who walked her own path, inspiring a nation and the world along the way.

And let's remind ourselves that we are blessed to live in the greatest nation on this face of the Earth.

That's what I see when I travel America. I've met so many incredible people who do such extraordinary things, including, just yesterday Jill and I visited the largest naval station in the world, Norfolk Naval Station in Virginia, to serve what they call "Friendsgiving"—a Thanksgiving meal—to a thousand servicemen and their families. We owe them. We owe them big.

And to days ahead, our families and friends travel and come together to celebrate Thanksgiving, we can all give thanks to the gift that is our Nation.

And let's remember: We are the United States of America, and there is nothing—nothing, nothing—I mean this sincerely—nothing beyond our capacity when we work together. We've never come out of a situation, a bad circumstance not in—without being better off when we come through it. And this is always who we are as Americans.

So happy Thanksgiving. God bless you all, and may God protect our troops. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

[At this point, the President left the podium and greeted audience members. He then answered a reporter's question as follows.]

Hostages Held by Hamas in Gaza, Palestinian Territories

Q. Mr. President, is a hostage deal near? Sir, is a hostage deal near? Mr. President, is a hostage deal near?

The President. I believe so, but I'm not prepared to talk to you——

Q. You believe so?

The President. Yes!

Q. Thank you.

[The President crossed his fingers.]

Q. How soon?

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:41 a.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to musician Taylor Swift.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Thanksgiving turkey presentation; Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters, White House.

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