

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2023

Remarks on Infrastructure Improvement Efforts in Las Vegas, Nevada
December 8, 2023

The President. Hello, hello, hello.

Please, take a seat, if you have one. If you don't, you can build one real quickly. *[Laughter]*

I'll tell you what, you know, I was thinking back there when Cesar was speaking that, you know, it's been a while. Harry Reid, I told you 35 years ago to get this sucker done. We're getting it done. *[Laughter]* You think I'm joking.

I've ridden on rail probably more than all of you combined. No, really. I've got to tell you—it's going to make this longer; I apologize—a real quick story.

I was a—I was Vice President, and the Secret Service is the best in the world, but they don't like you riding a train because so many things can happen on a train along the way. And so—but I was going home to see my mom. I was catching a 5 o'clock train. I used to take every single day the 7 o'clock train out of Washington.

I lived 150 miles from Washington, and I took the train every single day because my wife and daughter were killed. I started going home to see my—anyway. Make a long story not seem quite so long.

And I was getting on the train, and one of the senior guys at Amtrak—I became friends with all of them after all the years, and I've ridden 36 years as a Senator—and he comes up to me—his name is Angelo—and he comes over and says, "Joey, baby!" He grabs my cheek and—I thought they were going to shoot him. *[Laughter]*

And I said, "Ange, what's the matter?" He said, "We just—I just read in the newspaper"—because they keep meticulous mileage how many times you—how many miles you use an aircraft in—for the United States Air Force as Vice President. "I just read in the paper, Joey, you traveled 1,000"—or, excuse me—"1,200,000 miles on Air Force."

He said, "Big"—I won't quote him exactly. He said, "Big deal, Joey." He said, "We just had a retirement dinner in Newark, New Jersey." He said: "Just had a retirement dinner. You know how many miles you've ridden?" I said, "No, Ange." He said: "One million three hundred twenty-seven miles. I don't want to hear any more about the Air Force." *[Laughter]*

Well, guys, I'm a rail guy. Not a joke.

Deaths of Law Enforcement Officers in Las Vegas/Shooting at University of Nevada, Las Vegas

And you know, before I get started, though, I should say a few words about the terrible incidents that's happened and all my colleagues have recently spoke to.

First of all, two State of Nevada troopers killed in the line of duty. They were helping a driver on the side of the freeway and—when they were killed by a hit-and-run driver.

Then, 2 days later [ago; White House correction], a gunman opened fire at the University of Las—Nevada, Las Vegas. Three people killed, a fourth now in—hospitalized. I'm grateful to law enforcement officers who risked their lives and safety. The shooting spree—you saved lives. They walked in and saved lives.

And we join the people across the country praying for the families of those killed, whose hearts have been broken by yet another horrific gun violence.

Look, I own a couple of shotguns. I—haven't shot them in a while because I used to—usually just make target practice, skeet shooting.

But you know, the idea that we—the way we deal with guns—and students and educators experience this trauma of this shooting that you—that took place.

Las Vegas—Las Vegas has already—they've already had real difficulty. So much gun violence. The 2017 shooting still in the minds of so many people. I was out here meeting with the families.

Folks, we've got to get smart. There have been over 600 mass shootings in America this year alone, plus daily acts of gun violence that don't even make the national news. This is not normal, and we can never let it become normal.

People have the right to feel safe, be safe, and I'm fighting to make sure they do. But all these actions I've taken as President of the United States to end this gun violence epidemic is not enough. We need Congress to step up.

The idea—if you were driving your automobile here, and you left in—the key in the—in the—in the parking lot and you left the key in the ignition, and the kid came up and jumped in and stole it and they got in a crash, you're liable, civilly. Why, in God's name, do people not have to lock up their firearms? Why is that not a requirement?

All these mass murders—not this weekend, but—have been because people have picked up—kids have grabbed stuff off of counters, off of their—anyway. I don't want to—I get —angry.

We need to ban assault weapons and high-capacity magazines; pass national "red flag" laws, as you've done here; require safe storage; enact universal background checks and other commonsense measures to save lives. Because, you know, the Second Amendment didn't say you can own any gun, you can own any weapon. You couldn't own a canon when you—when the Second Amendment was passed. You couldn't—anyway. Don't get me started. *[Laughter]*

But look, I'm not going to rest until we do all we can to prevent more families and more communities from being torn apart by gun violence.

Infrastructure Improvement Efforts

Now, for the reason I came.

I came to thank the Carpenters and your president, Doug McCarron, who's been a friend of mine for a long time, for—*[applause]*. Where is he? Stand up. Doug does what he says. He never backs down, and he always knows what to do. God love you, Doug. I'm—you're a great friend. Thank you. Thank you very much.

Look, folks—*[applause]*—and you know, I was telling Doug, the first union ever to introduce me were the Carpenters from New Castle, Delaware, a town that's 370 years old on the Delaware River. His name was McCullough, and he was a crotchety old son of a gun.

And I was running for the Senate as a 29-year-old kid. I come from a very modest family. Anyway, to make a long story short, I was running, and I—if I got elected, which I did, I was going to be 17 days too young to be sworn in. I had to wait a little bit.

And McCullough looked at me. He said: "I'm going to endorse you, Biden, because you understand what we're doing. But, damn, boy, I'm not sure I'm doing the right thing." *[Laughter]* "You're awful young. You're not even old enough to be President—old enough to be Senator."

You guys have been with me from the very beginning.

And I want to thank Governor Lombardo and Members of Nevada's outstanding congressional delegation: Jacky Rosen is a friend; and Catherine Masto—Cortez Masto, every—all but the guy she's married to is pretty good—[*laughter*]—former Secret Service; and Dina Titus and Representative Susie Lee and Steven Horsford, who is chair of the Congressional Black Caucus. Their relentless work for the people of Nevada brought this historic project home to your great State.

I also want to thank our partners from the private sector, Wes and the whole team at Brightline, for supporting this project. It's a big deal. Where are you? [*Applause*] There he is. And I mean big deal. It's a lot of money, a lot of involvement.

My "Investing in America" agenda has now surpassed over attracting \$628 billion in private investment from all over the world in manufacturing and clean energy here at home, just since we took office about 2½, 3 years ago.

What's happening here in Nevada is another great example. And special thanks to my friend Governor Sisolak. I don't know where the Gov is, but he knew me—he heard me—had to hear me talk about this for a long time back when he was Governor. [*Laughter*]

And finally, I want to thank a special member of my team, Mitch Landrieu. Now, Mitch is from N'awlins. That's New Orleans, in English. [*Laughter*] And he used to be the mayor. His dad was the mayor. He knows what he's doing. He's been leading the charge to implement this bipartisan infrastructure law.

We actually got—surprise—we got about 36 Republicans to vote for it. You know, that's—you know, that's—that's real—[*applause*]—so thanks, Mitch.

You know, nearly every day for 36 years as Senator, I told you, I took that train back and forth to Washington. Three-hundred-mile round trip. It took 4 hours, sum total, from the time I left the house and got back to the house in my—and each way.

You know, I did it for my family. But I came to see how train travel opens an enormous possibility for the Nation. Rail connections—it connects jobs and opportunities for people. It gets goods to market, traffic off the street, travelers on the move.

Railroads made America a force in commerce and innovation in the world, uniting the country, building the most powerful economy ever in the history of the world. And over time, though, we fell behind.

Our infrastructure used to be the best in the world. When I took office, we were ranked 13 in the world in our infrastructure: roads, bridges, et cetera. Now we're turning it around in a big way.

We're in an economic competition for the 21st century. By the way, China has had trains going 220 miles an hour for a while now—220 miles an hour for a while now.

Look, we have the best economy. How can you be the best economy in the world without having the best infrastructure in the world? And we're going to do that.

That's why I'm here to talk about an ambitious vision for America to be fully within our reach. And I really believe it is.

When I ran for President, I made a commitment to build a world-class, high-speed rail worthy of the United States of America—worthy of America—[*applause*]—I mean it—to put our Nation back on track with the fastest, safest, and greenest railways in the—world and, finally, to bring high-speed rail to our Nation.

Today I'm here to deliver on that vision. You have no idea how much this pleases me.

At long last, we're building the first high-speed rail project in our Nation's history. And it's starting here.

It's part of eight-two—\$8.2 billion investment we're making in 10 major rail projects across America, reaching tens of millions of people. We're putting high-speed rail on the fast track.

Together, we're finally going to make high-speed rail happen between Las Vegas and Los Angeles. Folks, we've been talking about this project for decades. Now we're really getting it done. And I want to thank the Members of the—Nevada's congressional delegation for all they've done to make it possible.

And here's why it matters. Some of you know what it's like to sit in traffic on interstates—not the one between here and L.A., which is real, but all interstates—and guess what? Trying to make that drive from L.A. to Las Vegas or Las Vegas to L.A. or anywhere in between is a pain in the neck. It can take up to 7 hours. But soon, it's not going to be anymore.

We're investing \$3 billion on this rail line so folks can make that trip in over—just over 2 hours—2 hours. Hundred and eighty-six miles an hour. And it won't just get there faster; the rail project reduces carbon emissions by 3—taking 3—it's the same as—as taking 3 million vehicles off the highway—3 million.

And all the studies show, by the way, if you get from—if people can get from point A to point B faster on a train than their car, they take the train—they take the train. Think of what that's going to mean to the environment. Think of what it'll mean for the local economy.

New rail line will transport 11 million passengers a year. That means more visitors, more business, more Las Vegas, more money. And if a casino worker wants to take their kid to California for the weekend, they can have breakfast here in Las Vegas and lunch in L.A. [Laughter]

Look, folks—[applause]—but what it really means, it means growth. It means opportunity for towns and communities between here and the California coast. And it's on track to be completed by the 2028 Olympics in Los Angeles. Guess where they're going to come and visit, huh? [Laughter]

It means, with high-speed rail, Las Vegas can host more than hundreds of—some of the hundreds of thousands of visitors and athletes that we're expecting around—from around the world.

And here's the best part: It means jobs—union jobs. Jobs, jobs, jobs.

I'm a big environmentalist. That's why I'm always talking about the environment. When I think environment, I think jobs. Thirty-five thousand jobs during the construction phase; ten thousand union jobs in the building trades: carpenters, electricians, ironworkers, laborers, and more. Jobs and jobs beyond.

In fact, once we complete this train line, it's going to be operated by union workers. That means a thousand—[applause]—that means a thousand new jobs for track and signal workers, on-board workers, shop craft workers, everyone—everyone—who works on the rail. And for those good-paying jobs, they don't require a college degree, but you've got to work just as hard to get one, man.

Union workers are the most highly trained, skilled workers in the—this is not a joke. You're the most highly skilled workers in the world. You know—[applause]—no, I'm—I'm not just saying it.

But you guys don't talk enough about. It's like going to college. You've got to be an apprentice for 4 to 5 years. You can't walk up and say, "I want to be a carpenter." You've got to go to school to be a carpenter, and you've got to do it here.

You know, the long term, it's—I had the Treasury Department do a study. The cost is more efficient to hire a union worker because you do the best jobs, the best results, and they'll last the longest, and long run, you're cheaper for the employer than if you weren't a union worker.

That's why I always say—look, folks, I say this all the time: Wall Street did not build America; the middle class built America, and unions built the middle class. That's the God's—that's the truth. *[Applause]* That's true. There would be no middle class without unions. That's a fact.

And by the way, I know I only look like I'm 41, but I'm not new to this. *[Laughter]* It's not—you guys don't even realize how important you are. You built the middle class. It would never have occurred without you—without union wages.

Another high-speed rail project we're announcing today is in California. Ultimately, it's going to take folks from Los Angeles, through the Central Valley, all the way to San Francisco, but—in less than 3 hours. But today, the journey can take 8 hours by bus or car.

Think of how this train will transform California's Central Valley with new businesses, new residents, visitors, economic opportunities, or what it will mean to folks who live in inland towns and commute to work in Californian coastal cities. It's a game changer.

I mean, you know, we make these speeches, but I mean every single word I'm saying literally.

To put all of this in perspective, this project in California is the most ambitious rail project in the entire Western Hemisphere. It expects to carry 31 million passengers a year, will be 100-percent powered by renewable energy, and, once again, this project is about jobs. It's already created 12,000 good-paying union construction jobs, with thousands more to come.

Many of us have pushed for this high-speed rail project in California for a long time. In fact, the very first Federal dollars that went out to—came from the Recovery Act, which was a change—which I was in charge of as Vice President to help us recover from the Great Recession of 2009.

The last administration tried to cancel it. Now, I promise you, once it's built——

Audience members. Boo!

The President. ——they're going to be—no, they're going to be claiming credit for it. *[Laughter]* Remember I said it. Remember I said it.

But they failed.

They want to—I want to thank two people who couldn't be here today who made the California project possible: Speaker Nancy Pelosi, the most effective Speaker in the House of American history.

She has relentlessly—*[applause]*. She's relentlessly pushed for high-speed rail in California, and she knows how critical it is to people's lives and to the strength of the economy across California and across the country. No one has done more to make it a reality.

And Governor Gavin Newsom, a tremendous Governor who never gave up the fight to get this done. And, folks, we're not stopping now.

I know we're here about this project, but these projects are joined by others across the country. I made sure we had just not these two. North Carolina, Virginia, Illinois, Pennsylvania; improving rail service in Montana, Maine, New Hampshire, all the way to the Alaskan Railroad. We're supporting 69 rail projects still in their early stages across 44 States.

On top of that, we're investing \$9 billion to replace over 1,000 Amtrak engines and cars across the country with scale-of-the-art equipment made in America by American workers. Made in America by American workers.

And add it all up, we're making the biggest investment in history for passenger rail since literally the creation of Amtrak a half a century ago. All told, thanks to the bipartisan infrastructure law, over 40,000 infrastructure projects were announced across America, not just railroads, but bridges, roads, ports, airports, clean water systems, affordable high-speed internet.

And thanks to your congressional delegation here in Nevada, we've delivered \$3.2 billion, nearly 200 of these projects already here in this State. Over \$400 million in affordable high-speed internet statewide.

You know, we're helping school districts across the country, including Clark County electric—Clark County. Electricity school—electric schoolbuses can keep kids with childhood asthma more healthy. Diesel exhaust from schoolbuses pollute the air that these kids breathe.

We're installing sidewalks, street lights, bike lanes along Stewart Avenue here in Las Vegas in a—and in major roadways connecting Downtown and East Las Vegas. The list goes on. We're going to change the way people are able to live.

Folks, all of this project stands in stark contrast to my predecessor. He always talked about "Infrastructure Week." [*Laughter*] Four years of Infrastructure Week. But it failed. He failed.

On my watch, instead of Infrastructure Week, America is having Infrastructure Decade—[*applause*]*—Decade. Over a billion three hundred million—\$1,000,300,000,000. Trump just talks the talk; we walk the walk.*

Look, he likes to say America is "a failing nation." Frankly, he doesn't know what the hell he's talking about. I see shovels in the ground, cranes in the sky, people hard at work rebuilding America together.

Meanwhile, the vast majority of my Republican friends in Congress voted against the infrastructure law. But that doesn't stop them from calling up now and saying, "Hey, Mr. President, we need a project in my district." Well, that's okay. I promised I'd be President for every American. And like I said before, I'll see them at the groundbreaking. [*Laughter*]

Folks, I shouldn't be so flip. But I made a commitment. And this is the God's truth. I made a commitment to build this country, to stop the trickle-down economics. My dad was a hard-working guy, busted his neck. Not a whole lot trickled down on our kitchen table. Not a whole lot trickled down.

My dad used to say: "A job is worth a lot more than a paycheck, Joey. 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. It's going to be okay.'"

Well, I decided we're going to build the economy a different way—not a joke—back when it really was burgeoning after the thirties—to build an economy from the middle out and the bottom up. That way, the poor have a shot, the middle class do well, and the wealthy still do well.

Matter of fact, they should be paying a hell of a lot more taxes. That's another issue.

But to invest in ourselves again, in all of America, in all Americans. They started off making fun of it, calling it "Bidenomics." Well, guess what? It is Bidenomics.

We have a lot more to do to put—our plan is already paying off. This morning we learned that the economy added 199,000 jobs again this month. Solid, steady job growth—[*applause*]—like that, we call a "sweet spot" that's needed for stable growth and lower inflation, not encouraging the Fed to raise interest rates.

All told, we've created 14 million jobs since I took office, more than any President has created in all 4 years of a term. Wages are up more than inflation. The economy grew by 5 percent this last quarter. Today, the supply chains are strong.

But we have more to do to bring down inflation beyond the two-thirds we've brought it down. America has had the strongest growth and now has the lowest inflation of any major economy in the world, but there's more to do.

We know the prices are still too high for too many things. That's why I'm fighting to lower the cost for prescription drugs. Guess what? Insulin, 400 bucks a month for people. Guess what it is now? Thirty-five bucks. Thirty-five bucks.

And by the way, by 2025, no matter what—no matter what your prescription drug costs are—and some cancer drugs are 4-, 5-, 10-, as much as 13,000 dollars—nobody, as a senior, will have to pay more than \$2,000 a month [year; White House correction], period—period.

We're bringing down health insurance and utility bills.

That's why I'm fighting to eliminate the hidden junk fees that banks and airlines and other companies do to rip off consumers.

Look, did you ever think when you pick up the phone and call on what your balance in your account is, you're going to get charged 20 bucks, or you get in an airline, you want your kid sitting next to you, they tell you it's going to cost you another 300 bucks? I mean, this is ridiculous.

Let me be clear: Now that we've rebuilt supply chains and brought down costs, any corporation that is not passing on these savings along to consumers needs to stop this price gouging. The American people are tired of being played for suckers.

And by the way, does anyone here think that the Tax Code is fair? If you do, raise your hand.

Audience member. Nope.

The President. You've got it, baby. [*Laughter*]

I made a commitment that nobody making less than 400,000 bucks a year, which is way above what I ever made until I became President—[*laughter*]—but was—look, in 2020, 55 of the biggest corporations in America, the Fortune 500, they paid zero in Federal taxes, and they made \$40 billion—\$40 billion in profit.

But not anymore. Under the law I got passed and signed, big corporations now have to pay less than you pay. I could only get it up to 15 percent. But guess what? That paid for all the programs we're talking about. And probably less than what you—as I said, we have to do more, though.

Get this: We used to have—before the pandemic, we had, in the United States of America, 750,000 billionaires—I mean 750 billionaires. And guess what we have now? We have a thousand billionaires.

You know what their average tax rate is in the Federal Government? Eight percent. Eight percent. That's why I'm proposing a billionaire minimum tax of 25 percent—25. If billionaires and big corporations paid their fair share, it will strengthen Social Security and Medicare, and we wouldn't have all this talk from the other team talking about having to cut it. We could bring down the cost of childcare, eldercare for working class and middle class people.

Look, when we do that, the poor have a ladder up, as I said, and the middle class does very well, and the wealthy still do well. We all do well.

Let me close with this. When we see shovels in the ground and people hard at work on these projects, I hope you feel something that really matters—at least where I come from in Scranton, Pennsylvania, and Claymont, Delaware; it used to be a big steel town—pride: pride in America, pride in knowing we can get big things done when we work together.

You're all the real heroes of this story. We talk about what I did and others did. The American people, the American workers, neighbors and leaders in the community doing the work to bring your city into the future, that's what America does.

That's why it's never been a good bet—as I told Xi Jinping, it's never been a good bet to bet against America. Never, never, never.

And I've never been—I've been—never been more optimistic about our future. We just have to remember who in God's name we are. We're the United States of America, and there is nothing beyond our capacity—nothing, nothing, nothing.

We've always come out of every crisis we've ever faced—this is the God's truth; check it out—stronger than we went in, every time, when we work together.

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

Let's get this done. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:33 p.m. at the Carpenters International Training Center. In his remarks, he referred to Cesar Carreon, member, Las Vegas Carpenters Local Union 1977, who introduced the President; Nevada State Police Sgt. Michael Abbate and Trooper Alberto Felix, who were killed in a hit-and-run automobile crash in Las Vegas on December 7; Jemarcus Williams, suspect in the December 7 hit-and-run collision; Anthony Polito, suspected gunman in the shooting on the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, campus on December 6; Jerry Cha-Jan Chang, Patricia Navarro Velez, and Naoko Takemaru, who were killed in the December 6 shooting; Douglas J. McCarron, general president, United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners; Paul Masto, husband of Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto; Wes Edens, founder and chairman, Brightline; Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act Coordinator Mitchell J. Landrieu; Rep. Nancy Pelosi; Gov. Gavin C. Newsom of California; and President Xi Jinping of China. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on December 9.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Infrastructure improvement efforts in Las Vegas, NV.

Locations: Las Vegas, NV.

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procedures, strengthening efforts; Economic improvement; Electric and hybrid vehicles, promotion efforts; Gun control efforts; Gun violence, prevention efforts; High-speed rail infrastructure, improvement efforts; Inflation; Infrastructure improvements; Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act Coordinator; Insulin cost controls; Job creation and growth; Junk fees imposed on consumers, prevention efforts; Labor movement and organized labor; Law enforcement officers, service and dedication; Manufacturing industry, domestic investment; Medicare and Medicaid programs; Nevada, death of law enforcement officers in Las Vegas in hit-and-run collision; Nevada, Governor; Nevada, President's visit; Nevada, shooting in Las Vegas; Prescription drug costs, reduction efforts; Rail infrastructure, improvement efforts; Renewable energy sources and technologies; Social Security program; Tax Code reform; United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners.

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