

Remarks at a Campaign Reception

December 12, 2023

Rosy, thank you very much.

Please. Please. Thank you. Thank you, thank you. Please.

Thank you all so very much. Many of you have been my personal friends and political friends for a long time. I know I don't look it, but I've been around a long while. *[Laughter]*

And I want to thank you all—all of you—for your steadfast support. And, Rosy, particularly, thank you for that introduction and all the work you did to make this successful.

And most of all—in light of the introduction, it seems a little out of place—but Happy Hanukkah. *[Laughter]* Happy Hanukkah.

We know that this year's Hanukkah is different after October the 7th attack. As I said after the attack, the safety of the Jewish people, the literal security of Israel as an independent Jewish state is literally at stake. But it is unshakeable, our commitment to Israel.

We continue to provide military assistance to Israel as it goes after Hamas. And I've personally spent hours—hours, without exaggeration—talking to the Qataris, the Egyptians, the Israelis to secure the freedom of more than 100 hostages. And we're not going to stop until we—every hostage is returned home—*[applause]*—every one.

We'll continue leading the world in delivering humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian civilians as well to emphasize to our friends in Israel the need to protect civilian life. And they understand it, the vast majority of the population.

But most of all, we condemn Hamas's using rape, sexual violence, terrorism, and torture of Israeli women and girls without equivocation, without exception.

You know, they—I saw some of the photographs when I was there—tying a mother and her daughter together on a rope and then pouring kerosene on them and then burning them, beheading infants, doing things that are just inhuman—totally, completely inhuman.

I also recognize your hurt from the silence and the fear of the safety—your safety because of the surge of anti-Semitism here in America and around the world.

As I've said before, and I won't belabor it, but it's—people say, why have I had this feeling for so long, since I ran for the United States Senate 170 years ago? *[Laughter]*

My dad really was a righteous Christian. He taught me about the horrors of the Shoah. He'd—we—and he's—as a consequence, I've taken my grandchildren—my—my three children and my grandchildren, when they turned age 14, put them on a plane and flew them to Dachau because I wanted them to see, wanted them to spend the day there and understand that silence is complicity.

Yesterday, at the Hanukkah reception at the White House, I met Holocaust survivors, including a widow of our dear friend, the late Elie Wiesel, who taught us about the perils of indifference.

I've been clear that our administration stands with you. We're aggressively implementing America's first-ever National Strategy To Counter Anti-Semitism: prosecuting hate crimes,

addressing anti-Semitism in schools, increasing security around Jewish centers of Jewish life, and more.

In this moment, we have to hold on to the core values of who we are as Americans. The core values are equity, equality, justice, freedom, dignity, respect—values that, from the inception of our Nation, have shaped literally the culture, contributions, and values of the Jewish Americans—including all of you that are here—Americans.

And that's what I want to talk about today.

You know, in 2020, you're the reason why we got 81 million votes, more than any Presidential candidate has gotten in American history. You're the reason—[*applause*]*—you're the reason why Donald Trump is not a former President, but a defeated former President.*

You're the reason why we're going to win in 2024 again, with your help, and we are. When we started, the pandemic was raging, the economy was reeling. Because of you—of you, look at what we've achieved: record job creation, historic economic growth, among the lowest inflation rates of any major economy on Earth. We've rebuilt our alliances around the world.

And because of the great help of Dick Durbin of Illinois, chairman of the Judiciary Committee, we've reconfirmed 61 judges—and more, the first Black appointed judge to the Supreme Court of the United States, a woman. And combined, we've appointed more Black women to the appellate courts of the United States and—than every other President in history combined.

Trump and the MAGA Republicans want to get rid of the Affordable Care Act. For the 51st time, they're trying—[*laughter*]*—literally. We made it more affordable. We made it stronger. We made the biggest investment in our history in the world—history of the world to combat climate change. We signed the first new gun safety law in 30 years.*

Despite actions of the Supreme Court and MAGA Republicans, we've relieved student debt for 3.6 million Americans, who now have a chance to buy their first home and pay their debts and get out of debt.

We're making a historic commitment to rebuild American roads, bridges, ports, airports, clean water systems, high-speed internet.

But for all we've done, the real heroes of the story are the American people. In thousands of towns all across America, we see the stories of revival and renewal; hope and optimism; pride—and pride in your work, pride in your family, pride in your town, pride in this Nation.

We know there's more to do, from childcare to eldercare, making sure the corporations pay their fair share. And we know that all the progress is at stake in this next election.

And by the way, we did all that, and we still reduced the deficit by \$7 billion.

But what's most at stake in this next election is the future of American democracy, in my view. And that makes this all—it all possible.

Let me be clear, Donald Trump poses, in my view, many threats to this country, from the right to choose—you just saw what the Supreme Court of Texas just did—to civil rights and voting rights to the American standing in the world.

The greatest threat he poses, though, is to our democracy. Because if we lose that, we lose everything. When I first ran for President, I said democracy was at stake in America. A lot of people thought when I made that speech at Independence Hall in 2020—2021, that I—that they—that they thought I was exaggerating. But they don't think that anymore.

Remember January 6, Trump sitting in the private dining room off of my Oval—the Oval Office for hours, watching it all unfold as a mob attacked the Capitol and desecrated the Capitol. Capitol Police died. It threatened the life of his own Vice President because the Vice President refused to violate his constitutional oath.

The same mob went looking for Nancy Pelosi. Some up—spun up the same lies, inspired an assault on her—who attacked her husband Paul with a hammer months later, smacking him in the head with a hammer. It's despicable. And silence coming from him.

Trump became the first losing Presidential candidate in history who refused to accept the will of the American people. He didn't even show up at the Inauguration. I can't say I was disappointed, but he didn't show up. *[Laughter]* My guess is, he won't show up for the next Inauguration either.

But listen to his words today. He says he's running not to serve the American—the people of America, but to get "revenge" and "retribution." His words, not mine. "Revenge" and "retribution."

Just the other day, he said—he said he liked to be a "dictator." Going to be a dictator—only "for 1 day."

As we Catholics say——

[At this point, the President made the sign of the cross.]

[Laughter] He called those who oppose him "vermin," language that echoes that what was heard out in Germany in the thirties. He talked about, quote, "The blood of our country is being poisoned." Sound familiar? Same era. And he threatened the use of American military in the streets of America to go after political opponents.

He embraces political violence instead of rejecting it, and he can't let that happen—we can't let that happen.

Look, all of you here understand what freedom means. It means truth. It means to have the courage to hold a mirror up to our Nation and say: "Is this who we are? Is this who we want to be? Can we be better?"

Unlike Trump, we don't believe America is dark and negative—a dark and negative nation driven by anger, fear, and revenge.

When Trump was—spoke at his Inauguration, he talked about "American carnage." When I spoke at my Inauguration, I spoke about possibilities.

We believe we are a hopeful and optimistic nation driven by a simple proposition: that everybody deserves a fair shot.

We're the only nation in the world built on—not on ethnicity, religion, geography. We're the only country built on an idea—an idea all Americans—all of history—the idea that we hold these truths to be self-evident that all men and women are created equal, endowed by their Creator. We've never fully lived up it, but we've never walked away from it either.

Trump wants to—that's what Trump wants to do, but we're not going to walk away from it.

Look, let me say that—as all this relates to Israel—I spend a lot of time, probably 75 percent of my time, dealing with foreign leaders and traveling the world. There is a real concern around the world that America is losing its moral center. There's a real concern that with America—American principles continue to be the vanguard of who we are. I've spent more time with NATO pulling together and holding it together than I think anyone has.

When Dr. Kissinger—3 weeks before he died, we—he and I had our real differences when he was active Secretary of State and I was a Senator—but he called to tell me—he said—he asked me to call him, and I did. He said that—he wanted me to know two things. One, not since Napoleon has Europe not looked at Russia with a—with fear in its eyes about what Russia would do, until now. Well, guess what? They are fearful of what we may do.

But it takes me to my concluding point about Israel and about all freedoms around the world. Israel—it's an existential threat to Israel—its very existence. Israel has a tough decision to make. Bibi has got a tough decision to make. There's no question about the need to take on Hamas. There's no question about that. None. Zero. They have every right.

Bibi and I talk a lot. I've known him for 50 years. Some of you know he has a picture on his desk—at least when I'm there, he has it on it. *[Laughter]* Eight and a half by eleven, with a picture of—where I wrote, "Bibi"—when we were both young men, he was at the Embassy here and I was a Senator. I said, "Bibi, I love you, but I don't agree with a damn thing you have to say." *[Laughter]* That remains to be the case. *[Laughter]*

He's a good friend, but I think he has to change and—with this government. This government in Israel is making it very difficult for him to move.

You know, Ben Gvir is not what you would call someone who—this is the most conservative government in Israel's history—the most conservative. I've known every, every, every single head of State in Israel since Golda Meir. And I've known them because I've spent time with them many times.

And this is a different group. Ben Gvir and company and the new folks, they don't want anything remotely approaching a two-state solution. They not only want to have retribution, which they should for what the Palestinian—Hamas did, but against all Palestinians. They don't want a two-state solution. They don't want—anything having to do with the Palestinians.

Folks, the Palestinians have been not governed well at all. A lot has happened that's very negative.

But I spent an awful—an awful lot of time with the Arab countries. Everyone from Saudi—without going into too much detail because it would be inappropriate—from Saudi Arabia to a number of other states, they want to normalize relations.

At the G-20 meeting with all the 20 major nations in the world, I got a resolution passed that no one thought could happen, saying we're going to build a railroad from the middle of India all the way up to England and a pipeline across the Mediterranean to unite the countries. And the train is going to go—literally, not figuratively—from—from India into Saudi Arabia, Saudi Arabia into—to Jordan, Jordan to Israel, Israel, et cetera.

Because there—we have an opportunity to begin to unite the region—unite the region. And they still want to do it. But we have to make sure that—that Bibi understands that he's got to make some moves to strengthen PLA [PA; White House correction]—strengthen it, change it, move it. You cannot say there's no Palestinian state at all in the future. And that's going to be the hard part.

But in the meantime, we're not going to do a damn thing other than protect Israel in the process. Not a single thing.

But, folks, there's a lot to do—a lot to do. We're going to have to be—as strong supporters of Israel, we're going to have to be honest about what we're doing and what the goal is. The goal is Israel's security. And if Israel—Israel's—if there were no—many of you heard me say over the years: Were there not an Israel, we'd have to invent one—we'd have to invent one.

I believe, without Israel as a freestanding state, not a Jew in the world is safe—not a Jew in the world is safe. It's up to what happens at the moment.

And so we've got a lot of work to do, but we're not going to—in the meantime, none of it is going to walk away from providing Israel what they need to defend themselves and to finish the job against—against Hamas.

And, folks, look, if you think about it, one of the things that Bibi understands, I think, now—but I'm not sure Ben Gvir and his war cabinet do, who I've spoken to several times—is that Israel's security can rest on the United States, but right now it has more than the United States. It has the European Union, it has Europe, it has most of the world supporting it. But they're starting to lose that support by the indiscriminate bombing that takes place.

It was pointed out to me—I'm being very blunt with you all—it was pointed out to me that—by Bibi—that: "Well, you carpet-bombed Germany. You dropped the atom bomb. A lot of civilians died."

I said: "Yes, that's why all these institutions were set up after World War II to see to it that it didn't happen again—it didn't happen again. Don't make the same mistakes we made at 9/11. There was no reason why we had to be in a war in Afghanistan at 9/11. There was no reason why we had to do some of the things we did."

So those of you who have family back in Israel, you saw what happened when Bibi tried to change the Supreme Court. Thousands of IDF soldiers said: "We're out. We're not going to participate. We're not going to support the military." That wasn't any outside influence. That came from within Israel.

So, folks, there's a lot to do—a whole lot to do.

First and foremost, do everything in our power to hold Hamas accountable—every single thing in our power. They're animals. They're animals. They exceeded anything that any other terrorist group has done of late that I—in memory.

But, secondly, we have to work toward bringing Israel together in a way that provides for the beginning of option—an option of a two-state solution, because absent that—[*applause*]—[*inaudible*]. It's probably more than you wanted to hear, but—[*laughter*].

Look, I do not believe and I will not believe, after all this Nation has been through—our Nation—from independence to the Civil War to world wars; after being blessed by leaders like Washington, Lincoln, Roosevelt, Dr. King; after having stood as a beacon of freedom and equality for the entire world—I don't believe this Nation is going to turn to my predecessor.

Folks, if we do our job in 2024, we'll be saving what few generations can be able to say: We'll be saving American democracy in a way that is needed. And the rest of the world is looking.

Many of you—you're all very sophisticated people, and I'm not being solicitous. You travel the world. Have you met any foreign leader who suggests to you that they'd like to go back to where we were in the "America only" position again? Have you found one?

Madeleine Albright was right. We are the essential nation. Like it or not, we are—not Joe Biden, America is the essential nation. And they're looking for us to lead. And with your help, that's what we'll continue to do.

But nobody, nobody, nobody on God's green Earth can justify what Hamas did. They're a brutal, ugly, inhumane people, and they have to be eliminated.

Thank you all very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:54 a.m. at the Salamander Washington DC hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Lee "Rosy" Rosenberg, chief executive officer, Rosenberg Partners; Marion Wiesel, wife of the late Nobel Prize winner, author, and Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel; Supreme Court Associate Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson; former Vice President Michael R. Pence; Rep. Nancy Pelosi, in her former capacity as Speaker of the House of Representatives; and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Minister of National Security Itamar Ben Gvir of Israel. He also referred to his grandchildren Naomi K. Biden Neal and Finnegan, Maisy, Natalie, and R. Hunter Biden. Audio was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

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Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Ben Gvir, Itamar; Biden Neal, Naomi K.; Biden, Finnegan J.; Biden, Natalie P.; Biden, R. Hunter, II; Biden, Roberta M. Maisy; Durbin, Richard J.; Jackson, Ketanji Brown; Netanyahu, Benjamin; Pelosi, Nancy; Pelosi, Paul F., Sr.; Pence, Michael R.; Rosenberg, Lee "Rosy"; Trump, Donald J.; Wiesel, Marion.

Subjects: 2021 civil unrest and violence at U.S. Capitol; 2024 Presidential election; Anti-Semitism; Arab-Israeli conflict, peace process; District of Columbia, Democratic Party event; Federal deficit and debt; Federal student loans, partial forgiveness; Gaza, conflict with Israel; Gaza, hostages held by Hamas; Gaza, humanitarian situation; Group of Twenty (G-20) nations; Gun violence, prevention efforts; Hamas political-paramilitary organization; Hanukkah; Hate-based violence, efforts to combat; Health care costs and affordability; India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor; Infrastructure improvements; Israel, military operations in Gaza; Israel, Minister of National Security; Israel, Prime Minister; Israel, security cooperation with U.S.; North Atlantic Treaty Organization; Supreme Court Associate Justice; 2024 Presidential election.

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