

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2023

**Remarks at the Wisconsin Black Chamber of Commerce in Milwaukee, Wisconsin
December 20, 2023**

The President. Hello, hello, Milwaukee! It's great to be back.

You know, the press has heard me say this—the ones that follow me—that my dad had an expression—if you have a seat, take one. If you don't, I understand. Come up with me. *[Laughter]* Sit on the stage with me.

My dad used to have an expression. He'd say: "Joey, a job"—I mean this sincerely—"is about a lot more than a paycheck. 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.'"

That's what we're all about. That's what we all want to do.

And, Rashawn, thank you for that introduction. And thank you for doing what my dad always worried about: whether we'd be able to have those jobs with a little bit of dignity.

And I want to thank my colleague, Governor Evers. *[Laughter]* You—where are you, Gov? One of the best Governors in the country. He's sitting next to—he's sitting next to Congresswoman Moore. Stand up, Congresswoman. As she can tell you, whatever she tells me, I do. *[Laughter]* It's great to see you, kiddo.

And also, I want to—Mayor Johnson, thanks for the passport into the city. I appreciate it very much. And County Executive Crowley is here.

And I want to thank Senator—a good friend of mine—Tammy Baldwin, who couldn't be here today.

And I want to thank everyone here at Milwaukee's Black Chamber of Commerce for your partnership across the board on everything we've been working on. I come from a State that has the eighth largest Black population in the country, and as they say—the saying goes where I come—"You brung me to the dance" early on.

You're proof that Black small businesses with the talent, integrity, and ingenuity are the engines and the glue that hold communities together. And I mean that sincerely, you hold communities together.

You're the ones that sponsor the Little League teams. You're the one that—involved in the church events. You're the ones that hold the community together, and you keep it going. You keep it moving.

And every new business opening is a vote for hope—just hope. Hope. You know, you're making the American economy stronger and our Nation more competitive.

I'm here today to talk about something that doesn't get enough attention. I'm here to celebrate the progress we're making to support Black small businesses here and around the country. Because when Black small businesses grow, everything benefits. The community benefits. Everyone benefits. Not a joke. And it gives hope and prospects for people.

Since Kamala and I entered office, America has filed a record number of—in less than 3 years, 15 million new job—new applications to start new businesses—15 million.

It's led to the fastest growth in Black business ownership in over 30 years. Across the country, wages for workers are up. Black wealth is a record—up a record 60 percent since the pandemic.

So many of you—[*applause*]*—look, and by the way, we just—I mean this sincerely, from the bottom of my heart, we're just getting started. We're just getting—so many of you had the vision and took the risk to open businesses, and you bet on yourself. Together, we're transforming the economy by investing in all of America and all Americans.*

When—I said when I ran, if I was elected, I'd represent everyone: blue, red, no matter what color the State was. Wherever it was, we'd recommend—because think about it. Think of all the businesses that you know about throughout the Midwest and back in—my way as well that closed down because you had corporations deciding they'd get cheaper labor across the sea; they could move somewhere else. So they sent the jobs overseas and brought the product back home.

And we changed that—supply chain. We're sending—we're having the jobs here and sending product overseas.

And from the time I got involved in public life—I've only been around a few years. [*Laughter*] Oh, bless me, Father.

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

Anyway. [*Laughter*]

We're doing it by building an economy from the middle out and the bottom up, not the top down. Not a whole lot trickled down on my dad's kitchen table with a top-down economy. But when you build from the middle [build from the middle; White House correction], when you increase the middle class, the poor have a shot and the wealthy still do very well, the middle class does well, and we all do well.

That's what we call Bidenomics. This—[*applause*]. And by the way, so far, we've created 14 million new jobs, more jobs in 3 years than any President has created in 4 years in history.

This is a fundamental break from trickle-down economics, economics that supercharged my—well, was supercharged by my predecessor, the guy who thinks we're "polluting" the blood of Americans these days. He cut taxes for the wealthy and big corporations, shipped good-paying jobs overseas, shrank public investment in infrastructure and education.

We used to have the number-one infrastructure in the world. Now we're number 16 or 17. We're changing that. We hollowed out communities, leaving too many Americans behind.

It's a cycle folks on 30th Street Corridor here in Milwaukee know well. It's an area where it says—it became the backbone of Milwaukee's industrial might—might. Ten thousand Black people migrated—tens of thousands migrated from the South to the middle of the country, to Milwaukee, for good-paying manufacturing jobs. Then decades of discrimination and trickle-down economics left communities like this one behind.

But today, we're making sure Milwaukee is coming back—and all of Milwaukee coming back. [*Applause*] You—mark my word. In Milwaukee, business applications are up 70 percent compared to before the pandemic. The share of Black people employed in Milwaukee in 2022 was the highest in more than a decade.

But the investments aren't just about jobs. The investments we're making offer opportunity, hope to communities to fully participate in the economy. I vowed that we would invest in all of America, and that's what we're doing. We're leaving no one behind. No one need be left behind.

Let me give you a clear example. We all know, as my introducer told me—told you guys, we all know exposure to lead water pipes is hazardous to our health, especially to children's health. It can damage their brains and kidneys. For real. Lead exposure disproportionately affects low-income communities and disproportionately affects people of color.

This is the United States of America, for God's sake. Everyone should be able to turn on a faucet and know whatever they're drinking was clean and pure and not have to worry about it.

Through the historic bipartisan infrastructure law, my administration is investing \$15 billion to replace every lead pipe in every community in this country. And our goal—our goal—was to do that. And I want to thank Kamala—I want to thank Kamala for leading this effort.

But you know, your United States Senator, Ron Johnson, voted against this law.

Audience members. Boo!

The President. Well, I tell you what: With your help, the great Governor and Congresswoman in this State, they already received \$130 million to do this work so far.

Before I came to Milwaukee [office; White House correction], Milwaukee was slated to take over 60 years to replace the lead pipes. But last month, we proposed a new rule that's going to require the water systems in Milwaukee to be fully replaced with—every one of them within 10 years—[*applause*]*—10 years instead of 60.*

Think of the lives saved. Think of the jobs and opportunity if you're small-business owners like Rashawn, replacing lead pipes in homes and daycare centers and schools.

We're just getting started. And so we are today announcing Milwaukee will be one of 22 communities in the country competing for tens of millions of dollars in Federal grants to grow small businesses, create good-paying jobs, and build factories of the future. It matters.

I'm also increasing the share of Federal contract dollars going to small, disadvantaged businesses from what was roughly 10 percent when I came to office to 25 percent—to 15 percent.

Here's how it works. Back in the thirties, it wasn't just that Roosevelt talked about unions being supported. They also had a rule in the past that very few Presidents, including Democrats, paid much attention to: that every dollar a President gets to spend—for example, the Appropriation Committee and the Congress passes redoing decks of aircraft carriers. The President gets to pick who does that job—who does that job, all those Federal programs.

Well, guess what? The vast majority—and it's supposed to be all American—it's supposed to be all American products. And guess what? Hardly anybody paid attention. But I'm paying attention. It's got—[*applause*]*—we're investing in America and American workers.*

In 2022 alone, we awarded nearly \$70 billion to small, disadvantaged businesses because of that law.

Through the American Rescue Plan—another law that your distinguished Senator voted against—we invested nearly \$80 million in Wisconsin for the State Small Business Credit Initiative, helping countless small businesses grow.

Through the Small Business Administration, we've delivered \$50 billion in capital this past year to small businesses across the country, doubling the number and the value of [loans to; White House correction] Black-owned businesses since 2020.

I know that's a lot, and I'm talking to the Black Chamber of Commerce for—thanking them for helping small-business owners learn how to benefit from these transformative investments. I used to have a friend named Pete McLaughlin who was a great ball player at Providence College. And he used to say, "You've got to know how to know." You've got to know how to know. And

that's why I want to thank the chamber here for teaching people how to know what's available to them.

All this groundbreaking work is producing groundbreaking results: record job creation, historic economic growth. We have among the lowest inflation rates of any major economy in the—on this Earth. And we're fighting to lower costs to give folks just a little bit more breathing room, as my dad used to say.

But let's be clear, Republicans are against so many critical actions that help working and middle class people, especially Black Americans.

Just remember how the pandemic hit Black businesses especially hard; how my predecessor—on his watch, women- and minority-owned small businesses found themselves last in line to access emergency relief through programs like the Paycheck Protection Program.

On my watch, energy and emergency relief went to minority-owned businesses first, not last.

We also, when I came to office, we cut Black child poverty in half because of the child tax credit. As I tried to extend it, every single Republican Congress—in Congress voted against continuing the program, but I'm not giving up until we get it back.

And by the way, all the data shows it saves the economy money. The spending on child poverty saves money in health care, education—a whole range of things. This is not a—down the drain. It generates growth.

We drafted and I signed into law that—a law that will lower prescription drug costs significantly for all Americans.

You know, I was at a town meeting in Northern Virginia, and I was holding a meeting—this is 2 years ago; I've been fighting Big Pharma for a long time. You know, if you buy—if you go to whoever you—your provider of—any drug you have to take—any prescription drug and you decide you're going to buy it here in Milwaukee or you're going to go buy it in Toronto, Canada, or Paris, France, or Budapest, guess what? You're going to pay two to three times as much for the prescription—same company, same American manufacturer, same thing—because Medicare pays for it for most—in most cases.

And guess what? We're not a—we're just—if you're at the VA and you get the prescription drug, they negotiate the price with the pharmaceutical company.

Well, they passed laws that earlier—[inaudible]—I've been fighting it for over 35 years—to say, you can't negotiate—Medicare can't negotiate their drug prices for—and by the way, that's how they make an—enormous amounts of money.

And by the way, every one of my Republican colleagues voted against this one. And now they're trying to cut Medicare, trying to cut Medicaid and Social Security. Your own Senator Johnson called Social Security a, quote, "Ponzi scheme." Are you kidding me? You know, from the time you get your first paycheck, you pay into Social Security, your whole life.

These are the same Republicans who enacted tax cuts that overwhelmingly benefit the wealthy to the tune of \$2 trillion additional deficit.

There are also something else that's happening. There are some in this country who are waging a full-on attack on Black economic opportunity. They're denying economic opportunity when it comes to higher education, starting a business, keeping businesses open. That's what—that's how you generate economic opportunity. You educate people.

And, folks, by the way, I went to the Supreme Court my—to eliminate student debt that was out there. And guess what? The Supreme Court ruled against it. But I still got 136 million people's debt relieved.

Because guess what? The interest they're paying on that debt is something that prevents them from buying a home, starting a business—all those things.

You know, that's on top of easing Black history and banning books—erasing Black history and banning books. Did you ever think you'd live in a country—no, all kidding aside—growing up where we're banning books?

Audience member. No!

The President. Book banning in grade schools and high schools? I think it's unconscionable.

These attacks hurt all Americans because investing in Black economic prosperity lifts everybody up.

You know, we always believed diversity is our strength as a nation. Well, I don't believe, as the President—former President said again yesterday, that immigrants are "polluting"—"polluting"—our blood. The economy and our Nation are stronger when we're tapped into the full range of talents in this Nation.

My administration is going to continue to fight for these—fight these attacks because everyone deserves a fair shot. Just a shot.

Let me close with this. You know, for all we've done, the real heroes of this story are you, the American people. Not a joke. Not a joke. Hard-working people like Rashawn of Hero Plumbing here in Milwaukee.

In the thousands of towns all across America, we see thousands of stories of revival and renewal, hope and optimism because people aren't giving up. Pride in your work, in your family, in your town. Pride in this Nation. That's what I see, no matter where I go in this country.

That's why—I mean this from the bottom of my heart—I've never been more optimistic about America's prospects and America's future than I am today. We just have to remember who we are. We are the United States of America. And there is nothing—there is nothing beyond our capacity if we work together—if we work together.

That's—and by the way, as I said, we're the only country in the world that out of every crisis, we've come out stronger than we went in. Remember. Remember who we are.

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

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

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:45 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to Rashawn Spivey, founder and owner, Hero Plumbing, LLC; County Executive David Crowley of Milwaukee County, WI; Vice President Kamala D. Harris; and former President Donald J. Trump.

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