

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2024

Remarks at the Brookland Baptist Church Banquet and Conference Center in West Columbia, South Carolina

January 28, 2024

The President. Well, thank you very much, Rev. Thank you all so much. Please, sit down, if you have a seat. [*Laughter*]

I once said that—I said, "Sit down"—"That Biden doesn't know what he's doing; there's no chairs." [*Laughter*]

But thank you——

Audience member. [*Inaudible*]

The President. Well—[*laughter*].

Audience members. Four more years! Four more years! Four more years!

The President. Thank you very, very much. Thank you.

By the way, I want you to know, for the first time in American history, the Divine Nine has an office in the White House. I know where the power is. I know where the power is.

It's—well, let me say—I want to say very much thank you to Robin. Robin and my wife Jill, became prayer partners—for real. And I think they became even more than that. They became good friends. Where—where are you, Robin? There you are.

And thank you, thank you, thank you.

And I know you know—know this guy—this guy named Clyburn, you know him here? [*Laughter*] I am President of the United States of America for one reason—not a joke—Jim Clyburn. We hit rock bottom—and all of you. He came down, and he said we're going to win South Carolina, and we won in the primary in every single county. Well, Jim, thank you very, very much. Thank you.

And, by the way, you know, I know—I see—I know talent when I see it, and I—soon as he—his term as mayor came up, I stole him. You know this guy right here—Benjamin—Steve Benjamin.

Well, look, folks, you know, I came, basically, to say—start off say, "Thank you." You've had my back. You've had my back. And I believe—I hope I've had yours. And—[*applause*].

You know, when I ran for President in 2020, what made me do it was there—remember that situation down in Charlottesville, Virginia, with those folks coming out of the fields carrying torches and Nazi flags? I mean, for real—Nazi banners and White supremacists, and they were—and they were marching in the night. And a young woman was killed. A young woman who was a witness was killed. I spoke to her mom.

And the guy I'm running against this time was asked—the sitting President—he said, what—he said—was asked, "What did you think?" He said, "There were very good people on both sides."

Some things are not debatable. No, I mean it.

And when I ran, I realized I got criticized for saying that one of the main reasons I was running was—and I meant it sincerely—to restore the soul of America—no, I mean it—and to bring us back together.

Look, folks, one of the things we don't talk a lot about—but I've been talking a lot about, and I think most people are observing it—Black, White, Hispanic, no matter what—is that, you know, our democracy is at stake. No, it really is at stake for the first time in a long time.

Jim knows and read a lot and spoken a lot about de Tocqueville, who wrote about America early on and why America was so strong. And he didn't say it was strong because of our military. He—I'll get—I'll get right to it: He said it was strong because of our churches, because of our faith. No, I mean it. I'm—I'm sincere.

He talked about how our voices—that, you know, we're unyielding, and we were a people who believed in integrity, believed in decency. My dad used to have an expression. He'd say, at the dinner table—my dad was a hard-working guy, never got a chance to go to college, but my dad was a really decent, honorable man, a well-read man. And the dinner table was a place where we—we had conversation and, incidentally, ate—*[laughter]*—before my dad would go back to work. He'd come home and then go back to work.

And he'd say: "Joey, a job is about a lot more than a paycheck. It's about a person's dignity. It's about respect." This—I swear to God, this is what he would say, my word as a Biden: "It's about 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.'"

But it's only okay if our system is adhered to; if we abide by our democratic principles; if we, in fact, don't try to undermine the very Constitution. And the fellow I'm running against has—has made no bones about it: He thinks we should be able to rip it apart—not—not a joke. He talked about being able to even ignore the Constitution.

By the way, I love his one thing that he should be able to use his special forces to kill somebody if he thought it was a problem. *[Laughter]* In my church, we say, "Bless me, Father, for I have sinned."

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

What the—*[laughter]*.

But all kidding aside, there's a great deal at stake. I'm not going to take a lot of your time. But you know, the Bible teaches that we shall know the truth, and the truth shall set us free. Well, I think we do know the truth. We do know the truth. We do know what the choice is here. It's pretty stark. And it's about dignity, respect; it's about whether we believe—

You know, we're the—I'll get right to it. We're the most unique nation in the world. Now, everybody says those kinds of things about their country, but every other country is organized based on ethnicity, based on geography, based on religion. But we're the only Nation in the world based on an idea—literally, an idea—an idea contained in our Constitution that says, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights"—life, liberty, et cetera.

We've never fully lived up to it, but we've never walked away from it. Every generation, we get closer; until now, it's at stake. It literally is at stake.

And, folks, it's important, not just for the African American community, but for every community in this country. It's about who we are. It's about what—think about it—how the world looks at us.

I've been doing foreign policy for a long, long time. I was a chairman of those committees and the like. And that's why Barack asked me be on his ticket. And I know every one of those heads of state, and I've known them for a while. And every meeting I go to internationally, I—as they're walking out—this is the God's truth; I can say this in front of the press—virtually every one of them pull me aside and say: "You've got to win. We can't let that happen again. You can't let that happen again. You can't let that happen again."

Folks, this is about a—the campaign is a lot bigger than me, you, and all of us. It's about who we are as a country.

And, by the way, you know, what we—we're—the thing about us is we believe in those basic principles. We don't always practice them as a nation, but we—we do believe in honesty and decency. We do believe that people should be treated with respect. We don't live up to it. We don't live up to it all the time, but we don't walk away from it.

And you know, a question I have—and I want to cut through all these notes I have here to get to the end because I don't want to keep you.

Look, one of the things in my church—I spent an awful lot of time in African American churches—Black churches. I come from a State that, like South Carolina, had the shame of being a slave State—Delaware. Although it fought on the side of the North, it was a slave State. We have all the vestiges of what that—all—still living that down. That's why I got involved in public life.

And what I used to do, I used to go to 7—I'm a practicing Catholic, and I used to go to 7:30 Mass at St. Joe's, and then I'd go to Reverend Beaman's church at 10:30, be—and we'd prepare for going out and marching and doing the things we were going to do. And it really taught me that—I'm not trying to be overly religious here, but I think the elements of our faith really matter as to what we believe, what we do.

And you know, as I said, the Bible teaches us that we shall know the truth, and the truth shall set us free. And we've got to focus on it. We've got to focus on it.

And we—in my church, we've taken the 21st Psalm, and we've turned it into a refrain in one of the hymns we sing. You know the Psalm. And it's my—this is my wish for all of you. The Psalm goes, "May he raise you up on eagle's wings and bear you on the breath of dawn and make the sun to shine on you and hold you in the palm of his hand."

That's my prayer for you. Because you are and every other religious organization in this country is about saving people, about caring about people. It's hard to do, but we know we should do it. And my prayer for you is that we're able to do that.

And one last thing. I want to point out that we had a tough day last night in the Middle East. We lost three brave souls in an attack on one of our bases. And I'd ask you for a moment of silence for all three of those fallen soldiers.

[The President observed a moment of silence.]

And we shall respond.

God bless you all. Thank you for allowing me to be here. And I wish I didn't have to go.
[Laughter]

Thank you all so very, very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:28 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to Charles B. Jackson, Sr., senior pastor, Brookland Baptist Church, and his wife Robin; Rep. James E. Clyburn; Office of Public Engagement Director Stephen K. Benjamin, in his former capacity as mayor of Columbia,

SC; Susan Bro, mother of Heather D. Heyer, who was killed during the vehicular attack in Charlottesville, VA, on August 12, 2017; former Presidents Donald J. Trump and Barack Obama; Silvester S. Beaman, Chair, President's Advisory Council on African Diaspora Engagement, in his former capacity as pastor of the Bethel AME Church in Wilmington, DE; and Sgt. William J. Rivers, USA, Spc. Kennedy L. Sanders, USA, and Spc. Breonna A. Moffett, USA, Army Reserve soldiers who were killed in a drone attack while on assignment in support of Operation Inherent Resolve in northeastern Jordan near the Syria border on January 28. A portion of these remarks could not be verified because the audio was incomplete.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Brookland Baptist Church Banquet and Conference Center in West Columbia, SC.

Locations: West Columbia, SC.

Names: Beaman, Silvester S.; Benjamin, Stephen K.; Biden, Jill T.; Bro, Susan; Clyburn, James E.; Jackson, Charles B., Sr.; Jackson, Robin; Moffett, Breonna A.; Obama, Barack; Rivers, William J.; Sanders, Kennedy L.; Trump, Donald J.

Subjects: 2024 Presidential election; Jordan, death of U.S. servicemembers; Office of Public Engagement; Slavery, U.S. (historical); South Carolina, Brookland Baptist Church Banquet and Conference Center in West Columbia; South Carolina, President's visit; Virginia, 2017 civil unrest and violence in Charlottesville.

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