

Remarks at the National Prayer Breakfast
February 1, 2024

Frank, thank you for that introduction.

And, Reverend Black, I've spent a lot of time with you in the United States Senate—36 years. But you were only there 21. But I miss your sermons, because that's how I viewed your opening prayers every month—every day.

Frank, thanks for the introduction and for your service on behalf of the people of Northwest Indiana. A few years ago, I visited Frank's hometown, Hammond, Indiana, with our dear friend and great Hoosier Joe Donnelly, who is doing an incredible job as our Ambassador to the Holy See, walking his faith in service of his nation as well—as we all are called to do.

So, Frank, thank you for leading this year's prayer breakfast, and Congressman Tracey Mann of Kansas as well.

Thank you, Speaker Johnson. It's an honor to be with you today and Majority [Minority; White House correction] Leader Jeffries. And Senators Gillibrand and Blackburn, thank you both.

The chair of the National Prayer Breakfast and Foundation, Senator Heidi Heitkamp. Heidi, I hadn't seen you in a while. It's so good to see you again, kid. *[Laughter]* It really is.

Members of the administration—Secretary Buttigieg, NASA Administrator Bill Nelson and his wife Grace, who helped make this event what it is today.

Members of Congress and their families, including one of the home-State Senators—my home-State Senators, Chris Coons, who, by the way—he not only got a law degree, the same time he got a law degree, he got a divinity degree at Yale University, which makes me always wonder about him. I don't know. *[Laughter]* But, all kidding aside, he's a great man. And his wife Annie is with him today. They're both dear friends.

Chaplain Black, we've known each other a long time. And, on my last day in the Senate Chamber, you offered a prayer: that in our labor may we illuminate the darkness of doubt, may we distinguish between truth and falsehood, and may we see possibilities that are now hidden. Your wisdom then and now, this morning, are deeply moving.

To the incredible Andrea—*[laughter]*. I think—by the way, I am an unadulterated fan of Bocelli. He will tell you. And you know that to be the case. He—God, he can—anyway—*[laughter]*. He's incredible, I think.

Jill and I had the honor to host him for Christmas at the White House in our first year in office. And you performed with your son and daughter as if you were a choir of herald angels. And, in a difficult time for our family, after we lost our son Beau, you expressed in a song what we felt in our hearts.

From your song, "Fall on Me," it goes like this. It says: "Fall on me with open arms. Fall on me from where you are. Fall on me with all your light." Andrea, well, you're a gift. You were a gift to my family at that moment, and you continue to be.

I've attended many prayer breakfasts over the years. And Jill and I have been humbled by the prayers of so many when we needed them badly. It means everything to us.

And we're all blessed to live in a nation where we can practice our many faiths and practice them freely and where we can come together and lift up our Nation and each other—each other—in our own prayers, especially in tough times.

Our prayers continue to be with the families of the three American servicemen [servicemembers; White House correction] killed and attacked in the FOB in Jordan: Sergeant William Rivers, Specialist Breonna Moffett, and Specialist Kennedy Sanders. I spoke with each of these families separately, and Jill and I will be, tomorrow, at Dover Air Force Base to receive the dignified transfer of their bodies.

They've raised [risked; White House correction] their lives in harm's way. They risked it all. And we'll never forget the [their; White house correction] sacrifices and service to our country that the [and that of the; White House correction] dozens of servicemembers who were wounded and are recovering now.

I also see the trauma, the. And I understand that the pain and passion felt by so many here in America and around the world. We value and pray for the lives taken and for the families left behind, for all those who are living in dire circumstances: innocent men, women, and children held hostage or under bombardment or displaced, not knowing where their next meal will come from or if it will come at all.

Not only do we pray for peace, we are actively working for peace, security, dignity for the Israeli people and the Palestinian people. I'm engaged in this day and night and working—as many of you in this room are—to find the means to bring our hostages home, to ease the humanitarian crisis, and to bring peace to Gaza and Israel—an enduring peace with two States for two peoples—just as we worked for peace, security, and dignity for the Ukrainian people as they show incredible resolve and resilience against Putin's aggression. We must continue to help them.

The challenge of our times reminds us of our responsibility as a nation to help each other [deliver; White House correction] just and lasting peace—deliver it abroad and here at home. That's why we're fighting against the rise of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia here in the United States and all forms of hate, including those against Arab Americans and South Asian Americans.

This is a calling to stand against hate, to remember the very idea of America: We're all created equal. We're unique in the world—the only Nation based on an idea—"We hold these truths to be self-evident"—because we're all created equal and deserve to be treated equally throughout our lives.

We've never as a nation fully lived up to that, but we've never walked away from it either. It's a covenant we have with one another that holds this Nation together. And, quite frankly, I knew it before I became President because I did a lot of foreign policy under—in the previous administration with Barack. But we're the beacon to the world. The entire world looks to us. That's not hyperbole.

This is an idea. This idea was made real before the soul became flesh, before this dream became a fact. It was prayed for, it was hoped for, it was believed in. That's the story of America.

Let me close with this. It's fitting today marks the first time the National Prayer Breakfast is being held here in Statuary—Statutory [Statuary; White House correction] Hall. This is where the House of Representatives met for 50 years leading up to the Civil War. It's where a Congressman from Illinois, Abraham Lincoln, sat at desk number 191 before becoming President who served our Union and saved it.

History remembers President Lincoln's first Inaugural Address counseling us to heed, quote, "the better angels of our nature." "The better angels of our nature." We'd do well to remember what he said just a few moments before he concluded the same address. At a moment of deep

division in our Nation, President Lincoln said, "We are not enemies." He said, "We are not enemies, but friends." "We must not be enemies," he went on to say.

I've long believed we have to look at each other even in our most challenging times not as enemies, but as fellow Americans. Scripture tells us, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness." I believe that's our collective calling today.

Here we are in this room, among the statue of heroes who have shaped our history. And here we know faith is a living spirit that awakens our passions to come down from the pedestal and act to serve.

That's why over the door of the Rotunda is a scripture [sculpture; White House correction] depicting Clio, the muse of history. In her hands is an open book in which she records the events taking place here. In the citadel of democracy, she is a silent witness to the American story of war and peace, insurrection and stability.

As we gather this morning, what will Clio write for the future about what we did in our time? What will she write about us? My prayer, my hope is, we continue to believe our best days are ahead of us; that as a nation we continue to believe in honesty, decency, dignity, and respect. We see each other not as enemies, but as fellow human beings, each made in the image of God, each precious in his sight.

We leave no one behind. We believe everyone deserves a fair shot. We give hate no safe harbor. Together, we believe in America. That's my prayer: to remember who we are. We're the United States of America, and there is nothing—and I mean this sincerely—nothing beyond our capacity if we act together.

We're the only Nation in the world that's come out of every crisis stronger than we went in when we act together.

My prayer for all of you—in my church, we've taken the 22d Psalm and turned it into a hymn. And it says: "And he will raise you up on eagle's wings and bear you on the breath of dawn and make you to shine like the Sun. Until we meet again, may God hold you in the palm of his hand."

That's sincerely my prayer to all of you. We have really tough, tough differences. We really go at one another. But remember—let's remember who the hell we—hell we are. We're the United States of America. It's all about dignity and respect. So let's practice it.

Thank you for having me. It's good to be back.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:04 a.m. in Statuary Hall at the U.S. Capitol. In his remarks, he referred to Senate Chaplain and National Prayer Breakfast keynote speaker Barry C. Black; Rep. Frank J. Mrvan; musician Andrea Bocelli, his son Matteo, and daughter Virginia; President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin of Russia; and former President Barak Obama.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : National Prayer Breakfast.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Biden, Jill T.; Black, Barry C.; Blackburn, Marsha Wedgeworth; Bocelli, Andrea; Bocelli, Matteo; Bocelli, Virginia; Buttigieg, Peter P.M.; Coons, Annie; Coons, Christopher A.; Donnelly, Joe; Gillibrand, Kristen E.; Heitkamp, Mary Katherine "Heidi"; Jeffries, Hakeem S.; Johnson, J. Michael; Mann, Tracey; Mrvan, Frank J.; Nelson, C. William, II; Obama, Barack; Putin, Vladimir Vladimirovich; William, Grace.

Subjects: Anti-Semitism; Gaza, conflict with Israel; Gaza, humanitarian situation; Hate-based violence, efforts to combat; Holy See (Vatican City), U.S. Ambassador; House Minority Leader; Islamophobia and other religious discrimination, efforts to combat; Israel, military operations in Gaza; Jordan, attack on U.S. servicemembers; National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA); National Prayer Breakfast; Russia, President; Secretary of Transportation; Speaker of the House of Representatives; U.S. servicemembers, deaths in Jordan; U.S. servicemembers, service and dedication.

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