

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2024

Remarks at a Campaign Reception in San Francisco, California
February 21, 2024

The President. Please. Thank you.

Jerry, for the longest time after being elected, I'd hear "Hail to the Chief" played, and I'd turn around and wonder: Where the hell was he? [*Laughter*]

Look, I want to thank Gordon and I want to thank George for that introduction and cohosting us tonight.

And a special thanks to—and it was said twice tonight, but she can tell you I've been saying this for the last 4 years: the single best Speaker of the House of Representatives in American history. Nancy and Paul, your entire family are some of our dearest friends to Jill, me, and my family. And, Nance, thank you for everything.

Thank you for—and, Jerry, I—it's so good to see you. Of all I was asked about—I guess about 8 months ago, I was doing an interview and asked who was the most talented person I've ever dealt with. And I think the most talented person at the moment I ever dealt with was you. No, I mean that sincerely. Because you had—you always had a vision that was clear and precise. And any rate, and thanks for what you continue to do on the environment. [*Inaudible*]

And Mike and Anna, thank you for all the legislation I'm getting credit for. [*Laughter*] Well, you know, I may have introduced it, but you got it done. You got it done for us.

And—look, and thanks to all of you for your support.

Folks, please continue to eat. I'm used to not being taken seriously. [*Laughter*] No, really, don't—let's keep this as informal as can be.

The fact is that I'm getting pretty old, but I did not know Aristotle. I was only kidding. [*Laughter*]

Look, folks, I think it's fair to say we've been through one of the toughest periods in our Nation's history. And I like to think about the future that it's going to take to finish the job we started. I think we got off to a pretty good start, but there's a long way to go.

And "finish the job" means beating Big Pharma again. You know, if any of you have a prescription and you get in Air Force One—I can fly anywhere in the world. And I can fly you to Toronto, to Paris, to London, to—and you're going to pay 40- to 60-percent less for that same exact drug made by the same exact company.

And so it's just—we've been fighting Big Pharma for a long, long time. Any of you—all know somebody who needs insulin for—diabetes or other purposes. And you know, they're paying up to 400 to 500 bucks a month. Now they're not going to pay more than \$35 a month.

It's all about giving people an even chance.

Audience member. Woo!

The President. No, I—no, I mean it. I'm not looking for applause. I'm looking for making the case that what we—there's so much we can do.

You know, and we—originally when I got it passed with the help of the people in this room, it affected everybody. But then the Republicans turned it back, and we had to reauthorize it and only for the elderly.

But I want to make a point. You know, not only does it lower prices for the elderly, those on Medicare and Medicaid, but it does something else. It saves the United States of America \$260 billion [\$160 billion; White House correction] over the next 10 years—\$260 billion [\$160 billion] in the legislation we passed, including limiting—the price that any senior has to pay to \$2,000 a year for all the drugs they consume.

And you—many of you know, because you're philanthropists who work on cancer: Some of these drugs are \$10-, \$12-, \$14,000 a year. But it not only saves the patient and access to the patient, but it saves the deficit—it reduces the deficit. It doesn't increase it.

Lower drug prices for dozens of other—prescriptions are coming up in the bill we passed. But it also saves taxpayers these exorbitant amounts they have to pay in taxes as well.

Today, our MAGA friends are again promising to get rid of the Affordable Care Act that lowered—that—it's the only thing that protects a lot of low-income people with a preexisting condition. There's no other way they can get insurance. And we're going to "finish the job," meaning protecting and expanding the Affordable Care Act.

It means protecting and strengthening Social Security and Medicare. Republicans want to put it on a chopping block. You may remember the last State of the Union I gave with that encounter with our friends on the—the Republicans on the floor, who I—one of the thing I got them to do spontaneously was get them to commit they weren't going to try to lower it last—remember? Remember that? *[Laughter]* They were all booing.

Well, guess what? Trump wants to do away with most of the historic action we've taken on climate. I've been out here, met with a climate group and some of the—in California overall, but around the country, and many of you are involved in philanthropies that deal with global warming. It is the only truly existential threat to humanity. We have to gain control of it.

And "finish the job" means that the Inflation Reduction Act get every—every single—every single element of it has to work for clean energy here in America. And that's what we're doing. We're investing more in climate change than any country ever has in the history of the world and ever been introduced—ever had occurred.

So "finish the job" means making housing affordable—more affordable and more accessible. And it's made programs on tax fairness by making sure the biggest corporations begin to pay their fair share.

You know, all the stuff we passed, as you recall, we're give—we're given credit by the Presidential historians now. Guess what? We did it and still reduced the deficit by over a trillion—\$7 trillion [\$1 trillion; White House correction]. Because guess what? The fact of the matter is, it saved money. It didn't cost money.

But they're at it again. And the way we paid for it—we did a terrible thing: We raised the corporate tax to 15 percent. *[Laughter]* Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. *[Laughter]* And by the way, that helped pay for the historic investments and reduced the deficit.

But we're not done. The Trump tax cut that was not paid—not a penny of which was paid for of \$2 trillion overwhelmingly benefited those in the top quarter-percent, overwhelmingly—and super wealthy and the biggest corporations. It exploded the deficit.

You know, "finishing the job" means to get to—let the trust—the Trump tax cut, which expires this year, let it expire and provide a minimum tax for corporations. Not—*[inaudible]*—I'm not talking about the old 60-percent stuff. Twenty-eight percent—twenty-eight percent would mean a gigantic change and give middle class, hard-working folks a big effort—a big advantage.

In addition to that, we're in a situation where—you know, we now have—which is not a bad—I'm a capitalist, although I—for 36 years, I was listed as the poorest man in Congress. [Laughter] Not a joke. I got a phone call, Jer, when I was campaigning for Pat Leahy in the mid-nineties.

And I got a call—I called every night, as you all when you're away and your kid is at home. I called Jill, who was teaching school—my wife. And I said, "How are you doing?" And she said, "Fine." [Laughter] Okay, well, I'm in trouble. I said, "What's the matter?" "Nothing."

I said, "Jill, what's the matter?" She said, "Did you read today's paper?"—meaning the Wilmington News Journal. And I said, "They don't have it up here, honey." And she said: "Well, top of the fold, 'Biden, Poorest Man in Congress.' Is that true?" [Laughter] I swear to God, true story.

But any rate, the point is that we now have—which—I'm a capitalist. I'm all for people making as much money as they can fairly. But just—just pay your fair share.

Closing loophole—right now, there are a thousand billionaires in America. It was 780 before the—before the recession. It was a recession, but before the—we got in the—in the problem of the——

Audience member. The pandemic?

The President. ——dealing with the pandemic. And—but there are now a thousand of them. They pay—you know what the average Federal rate they pay? Eight-point-two percent tax—Federal taxes. If they just paid at 28 percent, it would generate another \$400 billion in tax revenue over the next 10 years—\$400 billion, 28 percent.

Most of you would trade that—wouldn't you?—28 percent.

And guess what? We'd be able to lift up long-term priorities like childcare, long-term care for the elderly at home—keeping them home, which I might add also generates economic growth and income. It's good for families, but it's also really good for the economy.

Trump and his MAGA friends are determined to take away our fundamental freedoms. "Finish the job" means passing the John Lewis Voting Right Act. I did what I could by Executive order, but we need a national legislation to be passed.

Trump brags about having overturned *Roe v. Wade*, taking away a woman's freedom to choose. Now reports show him supporting a national ban. He doesn't—not just the Supreme Court and let the States choose. He wants to pass national legislation out of the Congress, which he has—would have the right to do if he could get the votes, to eliminate the right to choose. I think he's now said up to 16 weeks. He keeps changing it.

Well, I made it clear: If MAGA Republicans tried a national ban on the right to choose, I'm going to veto it. And if you reelect Kamala and me and we take back the House, we're going to change the law so we have *Roe v. Wade* reinstalled in every single State in America. We have the power to do that.

No, no, I'm serious. We can do that if we—so not only thank you for helping me, but help the local officials, help Congresspersons, help Senators.

Look, I kept my promises, you know, to—I said I'd appoint the first Black woman to the Supreme Court of the United States of America. Well, I did. And by the way, Ketanji Brown Jackson, she's smarter than the rest of these guys. [Laughter] She—and by the way, she is truly impressive. Mark my words. She's going to go down in history not just as the first Black woman, but one of the brightest and most informed.

And by the way, I didn't realize this. I kept appointing women to the appellate courts of the—of the circuit courts of appeal Federally. I've appointed more women to the Federal appeals court and minorities than every other President in history combined—combined.

And we—"finish the job" means getting more judges on the bench—more judges. We're up—we're providing—we're up to 174 [177; White House correction]. And because one of the things we have to focus on is these local issues. We've got to focus on making sure we have the judges on those—on the—on the circuit courts, on the—on the appellate courts, on—judges that we can appoint nationally and locally.

Now, look, folks, all this progress matters to American people and positions us to win in 2024.

And that brings me to my second point. I'm not going to go much longer. You know, we have a choice to make. And to make a contrast, which I think is crystal clear: I'm often quoted as saying, "Don't compare me to the Almighty. Compare me to the alternative." Well, this alternative is a different breed of cat.

Representative Nancy Pelosi. Don't say that about cats. [*Laughter*]

The President. No, I'm—I know you know I'm—serious.

Look, folks, all kidding aside. You know, Jerry is a lot younger than me, but you know—[*laughter*]—but the truth is, I've been a Senator since 1972. I got elected in '72. And the prospect of—here—here's what's going on: I've served with real racists. I served with Strom Thurmond. I served with all these guys that—that have set terrible records on race.

But guess what? These guys are worse. These guys are worse. These guys do not believe in basic democratic principles.

You know, at least in the old days, you'd have Ted Kennedy in Judiciary Committee going at—at Jim Eastland. And then, he'd go down in the Senate dining room, and they'd have—they'd have—have lunch together.

So I got a phone call from Strom Thurmond's wife when he was a hundred years old, dying at Walter Reed Hospital, saying "Joe"—I said, "How's Leader—how—how's Strom?" And she said, "Well, he's on God's time now, Joe."

And I [she; White House correction] said, "I'm standing here at the nurse's station with a doctor—his doctor." And she named the doctor. I don't remember the name. "And he said he asked us to come out and call you. Will you do his eulogy?" And I thought, "Holy God." I did his eulogy. I started off by saying to my grandfather, Grandpa Finnegan, "Forgive me for what I'm about to do." [*Laughter*]

But I told the truth. Because by the time Strom left—he did terrible things. But by the time he left, he had more African Americans on his staff than any other member of the United States Congress. He voted to reauthorize the Voting Rights Act. He finally—a lot of it broke through—a lot of it broke through.

I'm not making it more than it was, but my point is, at least you could work with some of these guys.

Time and again, Republicans show what the party of chaos and a party of division. I don't think any of you in this room—and you're all sophisticated as hell about American politics. Look at what they're doing.

The bipartisan immigration and border bill gets passed after far—almost 5 weeks of negotiation—Democrat and Republican. It was a tough, tough deal. And I said I would support

the outcome. Didn't have all that I wanted in it, but it makes—there were some real problems. They're short about two—about 3,000 workers down there, from Border Patrol to a whole range—the judges and the rest.

Well, you know, we—so we—get a bill. And we—Democrats and Republicans pass it. And then Trump gets on the phone, I'm told. I didn't hear any of it. He gets on the phone, and he says—he tells the House Members that if you vote for this, I'm coming after you. I don't know that he actually used the word "retribution," but you're going to be a problem.

They changed their mind. Why? Because he said, "It will help Biden—it will help Biden if you do this. If you help him solve the border problem, it's going to cause me—so don't do it."

I don't remember that happening before. I don't remember that happening before.

And look at what they're doing on national security. The so-called supplemental bill, the one that has money for Israel, for Taiwan, for the—not for—dealing with what's going on in Ukraine, et cetera—and Israel.

Well, guess what? You saw Trump. You know, he is—he is incredible. He stands there and he tells them—what he says is outrageous.

He says that NATO—first of all, he doesn't like NATO. He wanted to pull out of it completely. He has no notion of its importance. It's—kept the world safe, in terms of world war, since—for 70 years.

And he says to—he said: If, in fact, NATO members don't pay their dues exactly what they say they're going to pay when they pay it, he welcomed—you saw it on television—he welcomed Putin to invade that country, and we would do nothing.

Bottom line: The Republican Party—and I never thought I'd say this before, because I've tried to work across the aisle—the Republican Party has to decide: Who do they serve? Do they serve Donald Trump or do they serve the American people? Are they here to solve problems or just weaponize these things into political attacks?

I know the answer. I'm here to serve the American people with what I do, just like all of you do when you serve. When we make clear—when we make that clear, we win.

Look at 2020, 2022, and 2023. I was told when I made that speech running in 2020 at—the Independence Hall about democracy being at stake—the press looked and said: "Well, what the hell is he talking about? What—making this up." Well, 63 percent of the American people thought I was—it was true. They got it. We were supposed to get our rear-end kicked. We won by 7 million votes—and we won.

Well, guess what? We're in a same situation now. The American people know our democracy is literally at stake—not hyperbole.

I have spent a lot of time in foreign policy—my whole career. I was chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee. And one of the reasons why Barack asked me to be Vice President because of my background in foreign policy and knowing these world leaders. I know them all, and I've known them—that doesn't make me—I just meant I've been around a while. I know them all.

Well, guess what we did? Before Kissinger died, I got a phone call—about 10 days before he passed away: Would I call? And I called him. And here's what he said, Jer. He said, "Not since Napoleon has Europe not looked over its shoulder at Russia and worried about its prospects until you guys came along. You united NATO. You expanded NATO. And it's changed the world. It's changed the world."

Imagine what happens if this guy gets elected and steps out of NATO. Imagine what that does.

My first meeting with Putin after getting elected, he told me what he wanted to do and he made a lot of demands. Anyway, I said, "You want to"—he kept asking. I said: "You want the Findalization [Finlandization; White House correction] of NATO. I'm telling you, you're going get the NATOization of Finland if you keep this up." We expanded NATO with Finland and Sweden. No, I don't need—but—my point is—my point is that we have a—we're at one of those inflection points, as I said, where what we do in the next year or two is going to determine the fate of this country for the better part of the next four or five decades, just like the postwar era determined what the decade—next—the decades would be.

And so, look, let me get to the final point. We can't take anything for granted. Trump and his MAGA friends are dividing us, not uniting us. If you notice, they have no platform. You ever see a party that doesn't have any platform going—no platform going into an election? None.

They're dragging us back to the past, not leading us to the future; refusing to accept the results of a legitimate election; seeking, as Trump says, to "terminate" elements of the Constitution. He talks about eliminating elements of the Constitution because of his Presidential power to do so.

He's—embraces political violence. When was the last President since—the Civil War that's embraced violence? He talks about it. This is the guy who calls the January 6 insurrectionists "patriots" and says he's going to for—he's going to pardon them. Pardon them.

The first meeting I was in Europe as—the G-7, after I got elected. And I sat down, and we were talking about—I was with Macron, and I said, "America is back." There were six other heads of state. And he said, "For how long?"

And with that, the chair—the Chancellor of Germany looked at me and said, "Mr. President, what would you do if you picked up the paper tomorrow and the headline in the London Times was 'A thousand people crash into Parliament, break down the doors to the House, and, in fact, stopped the—recognition of a new Prime Minister'?"

Imagine what we'd think. Well, the rest of the world looks at us, wondering, "What the hell is going on?"

Every major meeting I go to internationally—and I've gone—I've got go to fewer now because I got to spend more time home here. But every one—Anna, I'm not exaggerating—as I walk out of the meetings, a head of state will find an excuse to come up close to me and grab my arm and say, "You've got to win." Not because I'm so special. "You've got to win because my democracy is at stake if the other guy wins." Nine heads of state have done that with me. Nine.

And this guy calls—immigrants—we have a problem with immigration. We need an orderly process. It's out of control. We can fix it. The first bill I ever introduced was a bill on immigration—on—the border, calling for more agents, more rational ways to deal with this issue.

But what's he call—he calls them "vermin" who are "poisoning the blood of our country"—his terms. They're threatening our democracy, according to him.

A Muslim ban—can't come to the United States.

We have to make it clear to America: We still believe, in America, in honesty, decency, some respect for one another. We believe everybody deserves—the vast majority of Americans still believes everybody deserves a fair shot. It leaves nobody behind. Just gives—you give them a shot.

My dad, who never got to go to college because of the war, but he got into Johns Hopkins and never was able to go. My dad used to always say: "Joey, a job is about a lot more than a paycheck. It's about your dignity. It's about respect. It's about decency. It's about being able to look your kid in the eye and say, 'Honey, it's going to be okay,' and mean it—and mean it."

Well, folks, we're all been trained to give hate no harbor in America. We made progress in 3 years than most Presidents have taken 8 years to do because of the help I've had in the Congress, but it all can be wiped out in this election.

So we have to stay focused on what we have to do to win. We have to get out the vote. We must keep the White House, we must keep the Senate, and we have to get back the House.

And when we do that, we're going to be able to do something few generations have been able to do, and historians will write it—I won't be around to see it, but you—you guys will see it—that this generation of Americans saved democracy—saved democracy.

That's what this is—all at stake. I don't think that's hyperbole. I don't think it's exaggeration: save democracy.

We just have to—we just have to remind ourselves who we are, for God's sake. We're the United States of America—the United States of America. There's not a damn thing we can't do if we do it together.

Think about it. We're the only nation in the history of the world that has come out of every crisis stronger than we went in. That's who we are. That's who we've been, for damn sake. I really mean it.

And it angers me so much the way these guys are working these days. So, with the grace of God, the good will of the neighbors, and the crick not rising, as my grandfather would say, we got a shot.

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

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:52 p.m. at the residence of Gordon Getty. In his remarks, he referred to former Gov. Edmund G. "Jerry" Brown, Jr., of California; George M. Marcus, founder and chairman, Marcus and Millichap Co.; Paul F. Pelosi, Sr., husband of Rep. Pelosi; Reps. Michael C. Thompson and Anna G. Eshoo; former President Donald J. Trump; former Sen. Patrick J. Leahy; President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin of Russia; former President Barak Obama; President Emmanuel Macron of France; and Chancellor Olaf Scholz of Germany. He also referred to H.R. 815. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on February 22. Audio was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

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Medicare and Medicaid programs; National Security Act, 2024; North Atlantic Treaty Organization; Prescription drug costs, reduction efforts; Russia, President; Social Security program; Supreme Court Associate Justice; Tax Code reform; U.S. Supreme Court opinion overturning 1973 decision in Roe v. Wade; Vice President; Voting rights, protection efforts.

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