

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2024

Remarks at the National Governors Association Winter Meeting
February 23, 2024

The President. Thank you. Please sit down. Thank you. *[Applause]* If I were smart, I'd leave right now. *[Laughter]*

Folks, thank you very much. Governor Cox, Governor Polis, all the Governors for being here.

I know you just heard—did Jill already speak—my wife?

Audience member. Yes.

The President. Well, what the hell am I doing here then? *[Laughter]* You're—*[laughter]*—Jill enjoys traveling to your States and—to advance priorities like education and workforce development.

And thanks to Kamala for her leadership and her incredible partnership across the board.

And to the members of our Cabinet, including former Governor—and we have two former Governors here—are they both here today?—Governor Raimondo and—where is my Secretary of Agriculture? Is he here? Well, he's going to be here tomorrow—Tom Vilsack is going to be here tomorrow.

My Republican friends, I've got bad news for you: I actually like working with you. *[Laughter]* And it reminds me of the days I was in the Senate, you know, things—we'd argue like hell, and then we'd get things done.

Second Anniversary of Russia's Assault Against Ukraine

And—but look, before I begin, I want to say a few words about an important anniversary that we mark tomorrow.

Two years ago, shortly before dawn, Russian troops marched across the border into Ukraine. And Putin believed he could easily bend the will and break the resolve of the free people of Ukraine, that he could roll into Ukraine and he would roll over them.

Two years later, he remains wrong. He didn't do that. He wasn't able to do that. Kyiv is still standing. Ukraine is still free. And the people of Ukraine remain unbowed and unbroken in the face of Putin's vigorous onslaught.

This is due to their sheer bravery and their sacrifice, but it's also due to us. Remember, the United States pulled together a coalition of more than 50 nations—50 nations—to support Ukraine. We unified and expanded NATO. We can't walk away now. And that's what Putin is betting on. He's betting on we're going to walk away.

That's why I'll be speaking to the G-7 folks—some of the heads of the European Union and NATO today. That's why I'm announcing more than 500 new sanctions in response to Putin's brutal war of conquest, in response to Alexei Navalny's death.

Because make no mistake: Putin is responsible for Alexei's death. Yesterday I met with Alexei's wife and daughter in California, where his daughter attends college. Alexei was an incredibly courageous man, and his family is courageous as well.

I assured them his legacy will continue to live around the world. And we, in the United States, are going to continue to ensure that Putin pays the price for his aggression abroad and repression at home.

But let me be clear: The House of Representatives must pass the bipartisan national security bill. The bill provides urgent funding for Ukraine, and it passed overwhelmingly in the Senate. And there's no question—none, none—if the Speaker called for a vote in the House, it would pass easily today. Instead, they went on vacation. I mean, it's just—any—well—[laughter].

Look, folks, all kidding aside, history is watching. The clock is ticking. Brave Ukrainian soldiers and civilians are dying. Russia—Russia—is taking Ukrainian territory for the first in many months. But, here in America, the Speaker gave the House a 2-week vacation.

They have to come back. They have to come back and get this done, because failure to support Ukraine in this critical moment will never be forgotten in history. It will be measured, and it will have impact for decades to come.

And I want to thank all you Governors here for—and I urge you, if you agree with me—and many of you do—to urge your congressional representatives to force this bill to be brought up. America can be—to prove America can be relied on. America stands up for freedom. And we never bow to anyone, particularly Putin.

National Governors Association Winter Meeting

Look, folks, now on another important work we're doing.

I want to thank you all for delivering historic results for the American people. You've been incredible partners. Governors know the measure of success isn't how many partisan points we score. It's, did we fix the problem? Did we fix the problem?

We disagree on how to fix the problem many times. We're all here for one reason: to fix the problems, to get things done for families, for communities, for the country.

That's why I kept my commitment to be a President for all Americans, whether you voted for me or not. In fact, we've invested more, in all we passed, in red States than we have in blue States. That's a fact. Billions of dollars more of what we've passed is invested in red States than blue States.

I came to office when the pandemic was raging and the economy was reeling. But we've turned things around with your help. The American Rescue Plan provided \$350 billion to State and local governments. And many of you—many of you—put that money up for cops on the beat, bringing down violent crime across the Nation, which we've done; to bring a half a million teachers and other school personnel back into the classrooms; to prevent foreclosures and evictions and keep 8 million families in their homes.

The bipartisan infrastructure law made the most significant investment on our Nation's infrastructure in history since—well—[applause]. Eisenhower's interstate highway bill maybe do—did it as much.

But over 46,000 projects already—46,000—and we're just getting started; it's just the beginning—modernizing roads, bridges, railroads, ports, airports, public transit, clean water, high-speed internet—affordable high-speed internet everywhere.

I've stood with Governor Evers and Walz and as—rebuilding the Blatnik Bridge. [Laughter] By the way, as you know, over a billion dollars—and it's important—from Wisconsin to Minnesota. Governor Beshear and Governor DeWine—we're building a bridge called the Brent Spence Bridge between Kentucky and Ohio.

By the way, tens of thousands of trucks and commerce cross those bridges every day. And we're finally getting it done.

We're building the Nation's first high-speed rail line in California and Nevada. And I want to thank Governor Newsom for his leadership in that.

And by the way, I'm not sure how many people leave L.A., can do it in 2 hours to get there, are—whether they're going to come back or not to—[laughter]—Las Vegas. But all kidding aside, we're making the biggest investment ever in climate—climate change—ever.

I visited your States working together to respond and build and boost resilience on—to extreme weather. Spent an awful lot of time and I make—I'm not complaining about it; I'm just pointing it out—an awful lot of time with a lot of you Governors over the last 3 years, dealing with the impacts of bad weather.

I've flown over your States, particularly in the Southwest and the West and the Northwest for—I don't know how many times—in helicopters, looking at timber burned to the ground. More—we've lost more timber, we've lost more forests than the entire State of Maryland makes up in land, in square miles.

We're building cleaner, more reliable power grid; promoting clean energy and advanced manufacturing industries of the future made in America—made in America.

You know, one of the things that I didn't know—maybe you knew, but I've been around a long time in the Congress. I didn't know when they passed the legislation relating to the right of labor to organize in the thirties that there's a provision that said if the President provides—if the Congress gives the President money to invest in America, to build things in America, to spend money in America—to spend money for America, they should do two things: One, they should hire Americans to do it, and, two, they should use American products.

Well, guess what? Didn't happen in Democrat or Republican administrations for the longest time. And so guess what happened? We no longer—you know, we were no longer just closing just factories in your States. But what was happening the last 20 years in all of our States, including my State of Delaware? People were—businesses decide labor is cheaper overseas, so we export the factory and import the product.

Well, we're building factories here in America now, not overseas. So far, my "Invest in America" agenda has attracted \$650 billion—\$650 billion—in private investments, bringing factories, jobs back home to your States and—and restoring a sense of pride.

How many times do you see people in your States had that factory where for—maybe it only employed 500 to 2,000 people? And for generations, people—family after family—showed up and worked in that factory. And all of a sudden, it's gone. It's overseas. But now they're coming back. They're coming back. And, with it, pride is coming back.

For example, I was with Governor Hochul in Syracuse, New York. You know, Micron is investing up to \$100 billion to build chip factories—[applause]—an area the size of 40 football fields.

Well, across the country, over the next 20 years, we're going to create 50,000 jobs across the semiconductor supply chain—50,000 jobs. And by the way, if you work in one of their fabs, you know how much you make? You don't need a college degree: \$110- to \$112,000 a year.

Folks, look, we've ignited a manufacturing boom with your help: a semiconductor boom, a battery boom, a jobs boom. All along the way, with your help, we've cut Federal—we've cut the deficit as well. We cut the deficit by doing all this by \$1 trillion so far, the biggest reduction in

history in deficit reduction. I've signed legislation that's going to cut the Federal deficit by another \$1 trillion over the next decade.

It's clear we have the strongest economy in the world. And that's not hyperbole. We have the strongest economy in the world today. Nearly 15 million new jobs created, a record. Growth is strong. Wages are strong, rising faster than prices. Inflation is down. More to do.

And folks are starting to feel it. Positive consumer sentiment surged 30 percent in the last 3 months, the biggest jump in 30 years.

We've got more to do. I'm not suggesting it's done yet.

America has filed a record 16 million new business applications—the Vice President talked about it—across the country since we came to office. And with your help, every one—every one—of those filings is an act of hope. Think about it. It's an act of hope, investing all they have—this—they believe they can do something.

And we're just getting started. We're going to keep fighting to lower the costs for families on everything from prescription drugs to housing. For example, we capped insulin for seniors on Medicare at \$35 a month instead of as much as \$400 a month. Well, let's make that \$35 available to everyone in your States—everyone.

That and other actions lowering prescription drug costs are not only good for the people; they save the taxpayers billions and billions of dollars. The action on prescription drugs thus far has already reduced the deficit by another \$160 billion. You hear me? \$160 billion. Because Medicare is not paying out 400 bucks; they're paying out 35 bucks. Taxpayers are being saved money as well.

And by the way, they're still making a profit—[laughter]—in some cases, of 300 percent.

Because we don't have to pay these exorbitant prices, we're also lowering housing costs to boost supply. Today, with your help, a record 1.7 million housing units are under construction nationwide. We know we need more. And I've sent Congress an ambitious plan to do more. I appreciate your help to get it passed. We're partners in this work. And you've been leading the way before us, many of you.

There's one other piece of unfinished business I want to talk about: the border. My first day in office as President, the first bill I sent, I sent up a comprehensive plan to fix the immigration system.

And I think I've—you all have, at your table, if I'm not mistaken—because I don't want to take the time to go into all the detail—a fact sheet on the bipartisan border deal. And it's entitled "Fact Sheet: Impact of Bipartisan Border Deal on Funding Border Operations." And it lays out all the things that it does, that compromise.

We introduced a comprehensive plan to fix the system. It included funding for high-tech border security, legal pathways for "Dreamers," addressed the root causes of why so many people are fleeing the southern—to the southern border to avoid violence, corruption, political instability, and natural disasters.

Folks, Congress has had a long, proud history of—bipartisan history on immigration reform and abiding by our international treaty obligations, which we've signed, relating to immigration. These reforms made America a nation of laws, a nation of immigrants, and the strongest economy in the world.

But something changed. Over time, our laws and our resources haven't kept up with our immigration system, and it's broken. And our politics has failed to fix it.

That's why, months ago, I instructed my team to begin a series of negotiations in a bipartisan group of Senators, Democrats and—led by a very conservative Republican, who did a hell of a job, to fix our immigration system. I provided each of you, as I said, a fact sheet with the details of that bipartisan deal.

The bipartisan agreement represents the most fair and humane reforms in a long time. I didn't get everything I wanted in it. It also includes the toughest set of reforms to secure the border ever in history.

The Border Patrol chief himself said, "We need more people. We need more agents on the line." Our bipartisan bill got the Border Patrol the agents they need. It funds and hires 1,500 more agents and officers—1,500; 100 more immigration judges; 4,300 more asylum officers to get asylum decisions in months instead of years.

Right now you can come—they come through the border on asylum, they don't—not able to see an asylum officer. They get a bracelet, and they get put in the country, and they get—come—say: "Come back in 7 years. Come back in 7 years when we're able to hear your case."

It provides more cutting-edge inspection machines to detect and stop fentanyl getting across the border. It funds what many of you Governors need: to help shelter migrants. As a win for the future of the American people and a win for your States.

But then, as we all know, petty politics intervened. The Speaker of the House has refused to vote on the bill, even though, again, there's significant support.

Everybody—every Republican I've talked—talk to your Republican colleagues. There are the votes in that—on that floor to pass that bill. All of a sudden, people started to go silent. But they're in a tough spot.

Tell that to the Border Patrol, that we can't get this done. They support this bipartisan bill. Tell that to the Chamber of Commerce—the National Chamber of Commerce, who supports that proposal. Tell that to the Wall Street Journal editorial page, which supports this.

There are Governors in this room who support it. Strong minorities oppose it, but a significant majority in the House and Senate support it. Folks, doing nothing is not an option. Compromise is part of the process.

I didn't get everything I wanted in that deal. We didn't deal with "Dreamers." We didn't do a number of things I think we should do. But you know it's a positive step, a significant step. You know that. You deal with this every day. Some of you deal with it every single day. You have real skin in the game.

So, if this matters to you, if this matters to your State, tell your Members of Congress who are standing in the way: Show a little spine, pass the bipartisan security bill, notwithstanding you may reap the wrath of one or more of your colleagues.

Look, it's the strongest border deal our country has ever seen. It also includes the most fair and humane reforms for legal immigration in a long time. Let's get it done.

And by the way, speak to your agricultural communities, and tell them—ask them if they need temporary workers. Why are we making the kinds of progress we're making economically when the rest of the world is in a standstill on agriculture, basically?

Look, let's keep working to fix the entire system. I hope you all can help.

Let me close with this. I appreciate Governor Cox's effort to make it a—make the mission of the NGA to get those of us who disagree with one another to listen to one another, to treat one another with a sense of dignity and respect.

That's what you guys do and women do more than most. That's essential on the part of America. That's how we get things done. That's how democracy works when it works. It needs to be able to have that kind of exchange.

And when folks in your State look around and see more factories coming in, more shovels in the ground, more people going to work, more access to affordable internet, I hope they feel the pride: the pride in their hometowns making a comeback, the pride in America.

Folks, I know some people think I am a little too optimistic. I'm an incredible optimistic. But I hear—I'm more optimistic about this Nation's future than I've ever been. We just have to remember who in the hell we are. I mean this sincerely, from the bottom of my heart. We're the United States of America, for God's sake. Nothing, nothing, nothing is beyond our capacity.

When have we ever set a national goal we failed? When? When have we ever come out of a—not come out of a crisis stronger than we went into the crisis? Nothing is beyond our capacity if we work together. So let's keep working together. Because you're the best hope we have: the Governors.

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

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:23 a.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Spencer J. Cox of Utah, in his capacity as chair, and Gov. Jared S. Polis of Colorado, in his capacity as vice chair, of the National Governors Association; Vice President Kamala D. Harris; Secretary of Commerce Gina M. Raimondo, in her former capacity as Governor of Rhode Island; Secretary of Agriculture Thomas J. Vilsack, in his former capacity as Governor of Iowa; President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin of Russia; Yulia and Dasha Navalnaya, wife and daughter, respectively, of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny, who died in a Russian prison on February 16; Speaker of the House of Representatives J. Michael Johnson; Gov. Gavin C. Newsom of California; Sens. Christopher S. Murphy, Kyrsten L. Sinema, and James P. Lankford; and U.S. Border Patrol Chief Jason D. Owens. He also referred to H.R. 815.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : National Governors Association winter meeting.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Beshear, Andrew G.; Biden, Jill T.; Cox, Spencer J.; DeWine, R. Michael; Evers, Anthony S.; Harris, Kamala D.; Hochul, Kathleen C.; Johnson, J. Michael; Lankford, James P.; Murphy, Christopher S.; Navalnaya, Dasha; Navalnaya, Yulia; Newsom, Gavin C.; Owens, Jason D.; Polis, Jared S.; Putin, Vladimir Vladimirovich; Raimondo, Gina M.; Sinema, Kyrsten L.; Vilsack, Thomas J.; Walz, Timothy J.

Subjects: Bipartisanship; Border Patrol, U.S.; Border security; Broadband and wireless technologies; California, Governor; Climate change; Colorado, Governor; Economic improvement; Economic stimulus legislation; European Union; Federal deficit and debt; Governors Association, National; Group of Seven (G-7) nations; Housing, affordability and access; Immigration reform; Inflation; Infrastructure improvements; Insulin cost controls; Job creation and growth; Kentucky, Governor; Manufacturing industry, domestic investment; Minnesota, Governor; National Security Act, 2024; New York, Governor; North Atlantic Treaty Organization; Ohio, Governor; Opioid epidemic, efforts to combat; Prescription drug costs, reduction efforts; Rail infrastructure, improvement efforts; Russia, conflict in Ukraine; Russia, death of opposition leader Alexei Navalny; Russia, President; Russia, U.S. and international sanctions; Secretary of Agriculture; Secretary of Commerce; Semiconductor manufacturing; Speaker of the House of Representatives; Ukraine, Russian invasion and airstrikes; Ukraine, U.S.

assistance; Utah, Governor; Vice President; Wildfires, damage and recovery efforts; Wisconsin, Governor.

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