

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2024

Remarks at the National League of Cities Congressional City Conference

March 11, 2024

Hello, hello, hello.

Well, thank you, Mr. Mayor, although I didn't realize that guy is Ph.D. He's a—this guy is a pretty smart guy. *[Laughter]*

Please, have a seat, if you have one. *[Laughter]* It's so great to see you all.

The mayor mentioned I started off at the county council. That's where I learned early on that if you want to get something done locally, send it directly to the local officials. *[Laughter]* Don't have to go through—you don't have to pass go. You don't have to go to State legislatures to compete for the money.

Folks, I only ran for the Senate because local government was too hard. *[Laughter]* You all think I'm kidding. *[Laughter]* They know where you live; they think you can solve every problem, even if you don't have the authority to do it; and they hold you accountable for everything. So, God love you, as my mother would say. *[Laughter]*

Thank you, all, for being here. And congratulations to the National League of Cities—100 years. Now, I want to make it clear: I've been a strong supporter here, but I wasn't at the first meeting. *[Laughter]* I wasn't, swear to God. I've been around a while, but—*[laughter]*.

You first came together on a college campus in Kansas at a time of transformation in America. Cities and towns were growing fast, our economy was changing and was pushed to transparency and reform and efficiency—a big push. And you helped one another deliver for—that folks—for folks ever since that time.

Because—I mean, look, think about it. All kidding aside. People come to you first in your communities. They knock on your door. They expect you to be able to—you know, asking: "Is my neighborhood safe? Will—can—will the bus be on time? Are you going to have it running so I can get to work on time? Are my kids going to have the good fortune of being able to stay in their hometown and make a living?"

You do what matters. You do what matters to people. You know, my dad used to say: "A job is about a lot more than a paycheck. It's about your—it's about your dignity. It's about your ability to look your kid in the eye and say, 'Everything is going to be okay.'" And they look to you first.

That's why I've filled my administration with so many former local officials, like Councilman Tom Perez, who you just heard through—hear speak in a minute. And he runs the show for me in the White House. Former Mayor Steve Benjamin. Secretaries Buttigieg, Fudge, Vilsack.

We know what you all do and what a measure of success isn't how many partisan points you score. It's a basic thing we've all got involved in the first place for: Can you fix the problem? Can we fix the problem? Can we be responsive?

We're here for one reason: to deliver to families and communities for the country. We've been a—you've been essential partners in delivering historic results for the American people.

When I ran—I know it sounded silly—I said I promised to be a President for all Americans, whether they voted for me or not. And we're making that real progress in red communities and

blue communities. In fact, there are more investments going to red communities than blue communities.

It's about politics in many people's minds, but not mine. It's about investing in all of America and all Americans so everyone has a fair shot—and leaving nobody behind.

When I came to office, the pandemic was raging. Our economy was reeling. Communities everywhere faced devastating budget cuts. But we turned things around.

Three years ago today, I signed the American Rescue Plan. Instead of just helping a few big cities, we—it provided \$350 billion to State and local governments for you to decide how it will be spent, money that went directly to every single town in America so you could decide how best to spend it without having to go through the statehouse or a Governor.

We trusted you, and that trust has been well placed because you've done a hell of a job. You used those funds to vaccinate your communities, to keep essential services going, put cops on the beat. You put teachers in the classroom. You kept small businesses on their feet and families in their homes.

Then, I proposed and signed the most significant investment in our Nation's infrastructure in generations. Forty-seven thousand new projects announced so far across communities, modernizing American roads, bridges, ports, airports, public transit, and more; creating jobs now and jobs for the next decade.

We went through—remember we had "Infrastructure Week" for 4 years? *[Laughter]* And now you're going to have "Infrastructure Week" for 10 years. The only difference being there's going to something every week.

Look, I've stood with mayors out where you're rebuilding. The Blatnik Bridge in Wisconsin and Minnesota, a billion-dollar operation. The Brent Spence Bridge in Kentucky and Ohio. By the way, not only changing the economy for those communities and all up and down the coast—up and down the country, but it's doing something else: It's generating good—really good jobs, and it's bringing communities back together.

I'm working with many of you in replacing every poisonous lead pipe in America for every child can drink clean water without risking brain damage.

In January, I was in Raleigh, North Carolina, where we're investing \$3 billion to connect the entire State for affordable high-speed internet to end—by the end of the decade. And we're doing it in all 50 States. It's critical for children to be able to do their homework, small businesses to be able to sell their products, folks to have access to telemedicine when they're driving—without driving to see their doctors if they live in the countryside.

We've also—we've already saved 23 million families \$75 a month on internet bills. Congress needs to reauthorize that program now, by the way. I need your help.

We're also taking the most significant action to fight climate change ever. You know, I mentioned when we talked—well, I won't—don't get me started on all that. *[Laughter]* I feel pretty passionate about it.

Look, I visited many of your towns as we work together to respond, rebuild, and increase reliance and—resilience. But the resilience is the important part. We can't build back to what it was; we've got to build back better in everything we're doing. For real. The climate is already changing things.

Resilience to extreme weather. Revitalization of fenceline communities smothered by the legacy of pollution. We're also promoting clean energy, advanced manufacturing, and other industries—the future—a future that's made in America.

You know, there used to be a—there's a law that I didn't even realize and my—most didn't realize, that—back in the thirties, when they were talking about whether the unions could exist and so on and so forth. There was a lot of legislation in the Roosevelt administration.

One law that got passed was, any money sent to the President to spend on a Federal project should be spent with American products and American workers. Well, here's what happened: A lot of folks—both parties—didn't pay much attention to that. But not anymore. We build American, we buy American, and we are American.

Folks, thanks, in part, to the CHIPS and Science Act, the United States is investing more money in research and development than ever before. During the pandemic, a shortage of semiconductor chips about the size of the tip of your little finger drove prices up for everything from cell phones to automobiles. Well, instead of having to import semiconductors—which America invented, I might add—private companies are now investing billions of dollars to build new chip factories here in America.

And we're creating tens of thousands of jobs. Many of them pay over \$100,000 a year and do not require a college degree.

Folks, in all, my policies have attracted \$650 billion in private sector investments from companies that are building—bringing jobs back to America, back to communities where they belong.

For the longest time, both parties sent jobs overseas because the labor was cheaper and imported the products. Now, we're sending product overseas and importing—and we're bringing the jobs back here.

Look, folks, in thousands of cities and towns, we're seeing a great comeback story. Nearly 15 million new jobs created so far. That's a record. Growth is strong. Wages are rising. Inflation is down. Individuals have—had filed to start an additional 16 million new businesses since I took office. Each application to do that is an act of hope.

And along the way, we reduced the Federal deficit, I might add. It hasn't gone up. It's gone down under us. We cut it by a trillion dollars already—another trillion over the next decade. And that's my goal: to cut by \$3 trillion by making the wealthy and big corporations finally begin to pay their fair share.

Folks, look, I'm a capitalist. If you can make a billion bucks, wonderful. Just pay your fair share, man, not 8.2 percent. If you paid 25 percent, we'd have \$500 billion more over the next 10 years to cut the deficit, to provide childcare, to do all the things we need to do. But there's more to do.

Look, for example, I know the cost of housing is critical to families nationwide. If inflation keeps coming down, mortgage rates are going to continue to come down as well. But I'm not waiting.

For those seeking to buy their first home or trade up for a little more space, I've proposed a tax cut that will provide \$400 a month for the next 2 years, because every family—every family—deserves a place to call home and a place to have your American Dreams come true.

Look, millions of renters are also out there in trouble. We're also cracking down on those landlords who break the antitrust laws by price-fixing those rents. Landlords should be competing to give folks the best deal, not conspiring to charge them higher rent.

We also cut redtape so more builders can get Federal financing, which is already helping construct a record 1.7 million new housing units nationwide—because of you.

And the Federal budget that I'm releasing today has a plan for 2 million more affordable homes, including housing—a housing innovation fund to help communities like yours build housing, renovate housing, and convert empty office space and hotels into housing. Housing for renters, for owners, middle class families, and folks struggling just to get by.

Look, and we realize many of you are dealing with homeless encampments in your cities and towns. Well, we're providing \$8 billion to allow you to provide alternatives, to move unhoused people off the street, getting them into homes. The bottom line is, we have to build, build, build. That's how we bring housing costs down for good.

Folks, at the same time, Americans deserve the freedom to be safe from crime. And America is safer today than when I took office. Starting with the American Rescue Plan, I made the biggest investment in public safety effort. And you used it well.

You, all of you, have done a tremendous job in your communities putting those resources to work, using Federal money to hire more officers for effective, accountable community policing; expanding violence intervention programs that help prevent crime.

Folks, you don't always hear about it, but today's violent crime rates are down nationwide in nearly every major category, to one of the lowest levels in over 50 years. But there's more to do, but we're making American progress—serious progress.

Look, there's another piece of unfinished business: the border—the Federal border we keep talking about. In November, my team began serious negotiations with a bipartisan group of Senators led by a serious conservative Republican Senator as well as Democrats. The result was a compromise bill with the toughest border security reforms this country has ever seen.

That bipartisan deal would hire 1,500 more border security agents and officers; 1,000—100 more immigration judges to help tackle a backlog of 2 million cases that are just waiting to be heard; 4,300 more asylum officers and new policies so they can resolve cases in 6 months instead of 6 years; 100 more high-tech drug detection machines to significantly increase our ability to stop fentanyl from being smuggled into America. And by the way, no one questions those numbers.

This bill would save lives and bring order to the border. It has the funds that many of our cities badly need as well. It would also give me, as President, new emergency authority—or any other President—to temporarily shut down the border when the number of immigrants is overwhelming and to regain control of the border.

The Border Patrol union endorsed it. The Federal Chamber of—the national Chamber of Commerce endorsed it. And I believe, given an opportunity, the House and Senate have the votes to pass it if they just bring it to the floor and vote on it. But up to now, politics has intervened.

Folks, we have to end the games. We have to deal. This deal is about a win for America, your cities and towns. You all face the issue every single day. So it matters to you, your community, to tell your Members in Congress to show up, show a little spine, and pass the bipartisan border security bill.

They tell me I'm your last speaker. I've already kept you too long, but here's a go. Let me close with this. Last week, I delivered my State of the Union Address, where I said—where I stated what I believed to be the empirical truth: The state of the Union is strong and getting stronger. That's what I see.

As I travel the country, folks often tell me how, back in 2020, they were down. They'd lost their business. They'd lost faith in the system.

And then, the laws we passed, the work we've done together got them back on their feet, creating new jobs, new businesses, a new cycle of hope. We've got a long way to go in terms of—and by the way, public confidence in the economy is coming back.

So, when you see shovels in the ground, people going to work, I hope you feel what we do and you feel it with a sense of pride. Pride in your hometowns. Pride in making a comeback. Pride in America. Pride in knowing we can get big things done when we work together.

Folks, as I said, I've been around a few days—[laughter]—but I've never been more optimistic about our future. I mean that sincerely. We just have to remember who in God's name we are. We are the United States of America, for God's sake. There is nothing—nothing beyond our capacity—and I mean nothing beyond our capacity when we work together, like you all do. So let's work together.

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

Thank you, thank you, thank you. Really, thank you. You've been great. You know how to do the job.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:56 a.m. at the Marriott Marquis Washington, DC, hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor David M. Sander of Rancho Cordova, CA, in his capacity as president of the National League of Cities; Director of the Office of Intergovernmental Affairs Thomas E. Perez, in his former capacity as a councilmember of Montgomery County, MD; Office of Public Engagement Director Stephen K. Benjamin, in his former capacity as mayor of Columbia, SC; Secretary of Transportation Peter P.M. Buttigieg, in his former capacity as mayor of South Bend, IN; Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Marcia L. Fudge, in her former capacity as mayor of Warrensville Heights, OH; Secretary of Agriculture Thomas J. Vilsack, in his former capacity as Governor of Iowa; and Sens. James P. Lankford, Christopher S. Murphy, and Kyrsten L. Sinema.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : National League of Cities Congressional City Conference.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Benjamin, Stephen K.; Buttigieg, Peter P.M.; Fudge, Marcia L.; Lankford, James P.; Murphy, Christopher S.; Perez, Thomas E.; Sander, David M.; Sinema, Kyrsten L.; Vilsack, Thomas J.

Subjects: Asylum claims process, improvement efforts; Border security; Broadband and wireless technologies; Childcare, access and affordability; Cities, National League of"; Climate change; Climate resilience, improvement efforts; Community policing programs, improvement efforts; Community violence-interruption programs; COVID-19 pandemic; COVID-19 vaccines; Drinking water, safety improvement efforts; Economic improvement; Economic stimulus legislation; Environmental justice; Federal deficit and debt; Homelessness, prevention and reduction efforts; Housing, affordability and access; Illegal drugs, interdiction efforts; Immigration reform; Inflation; Infrastructure improvements; Job creation and growth; Lead service lines, replacement efforts; Manufacturing industry, domestic investment; Office of Intergovernmental Affairs; Office of Public Engagement; Renewable energy sources and technologies; Secretary of Agriculture; Secretary of Housing and Urban Development; Secretary of Transportation; Semiconductor manufacturing; Small businesses, promotion efforts; State and local law enforcement, Federal support; State of the Union Address; Tax Code reform; Teachers.

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