

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2024

Remarks in Milwaukee, Wisconsin

March 13, 2024

The President. Hello, hello, hello.

[*At this point, the President turned to address audience members seated behind him on the stage.*]

Good to see you all. Gov, as my father would say, "Excuse my back." I apologize.
[*Laughter*]

Hello, Milwaukee!

Thank you, Ray, for that introduction and for sharing your family's story with so many of us.

Your grandfather served our Nation in uniform, and he started a family business only to see it demolished and the community disconnected because of a new highway. But he never gave up and neither have you, nor have the people of this community, and I want to thank you.

Governor Evers, my good friend—thank you, Gov, you're the best. And I want to thank you for your partnership across the board for getting us through COVID, rebuilding the economy, and so much more.

And the same goes for a great Senator, Tammy Baldwin, and your incredible Congresswoman, Gwen Moore. Is your son here?

Representative Gwendolynne S. Moore. [*Inaudible*]

The President. All right. Well, she represents her hometown with such incredibly integrity and tenacity.

Mayor Johnson, you're one of the most impressive young mayors I've met, and I've met all of them, I think. [*Laughter*] No, I really mean it. Thank you. I don't know where you're sitting. There you are. Stand up, Mr. Mayor.

I tell—I warn anybody: Don't run for mayor. They know where you live, and they think you can solve all your [their; White House correction] problems. [*Laughter*]

Thank you for your passport to the city and your leadership in this project I'm here to talk about.

Look, to communities everywhere and at this Boys and Girls Club—and, by the way, I've been a gigantic supporter of Boys and—it's the biggest in the country. But when I was a Senator, I provided a lot of money where—during the crime sprees were going on—for Boys and Girls Clubs. What you do is you build confidence, you build spirit, you build a sense of belonging. And it really matters.

And this project is for you, a future you really deserve.

Look, the story of Bronzeville here in Milwaukee is one that we see all across the country.

Our Interstate Highway System, laid out in the fifties, was a groundbreaking connection. Our Nation, coast to coast—that was the purpose of it. But it transformed the way people live, work, and travel.

But instead of connecting communities, it divided them. These highways actually tore them apart.

I come from a city—Wilmington, Delaware—where if you're ever—the same thing happened. We're in a situation where I-95 is four lanes going through a community that was all African American, and it just split it. And it's now about 50, 60, maybe 70 yards wide. And I'm President, and I can't get that done yet. Why'd you guys get it first? I don't know. *[Laughter]*

No, but all kidding aside. The same thing happened here and many cities across the country.

There were also cities all across America where highways used to be and they—along—you know, redlining—along with redlining, they disconnected entire communities from opportunities, sometimes in an effort to reinforce segregation.

That's what happened here in Milwaukee.

More than a hundred years ago, Bronzeville was the home of a thriving hub of Black culture and commerce: homes and apartments owned by Black families; Black small businesses, from hotels to jazz clubs to restaurants like Ray's grandfather's.

In the middle of the 20th century, tens of thousands of Black Americans migrated from the South to Milwaukee and other cities in the North to get good-paying manufacturing jobs.

But by the sixties, the so-called urban renewal swept this country. The construction of I-94 and I-43 tore down roughly 17,000 homes and 1,000 businesses, ripping through neighborhoods and nearby roads.

Here on Sixth Street, the road was widened, displacing residents and businesses, all so the people outside the neighborhood could get downtown.

Today, Sixth Street is a wide road without a protected bike path, bike lanes, or bus lanes, with limited access to the green space. Speeding and reckless driving, resulting in a crashes five times that of the city's average. All of this locking people—locking people out of opportunities and leaving them more isolated from the social and economic life of the rest of the city.

Congresswoman Moore told me: When she was a child, she lived a short walk from the public library, a safe place to read and learn, where librarians who were giving cake—the librarian would give cake to children when they showed up to read. That's true, isn't it?

Rep. Moore. That's true. *[Laughter]*

The President. But then the new plans disrupted the walk and made the library inaccessible.

Sadly, too many communities across America have faced a loss of wealth, prosperity, and possibilities that still reverberate today.

Imagine all those homes and mom-and-pop stores that could have been passed and passed down from family to family, and financial security and generational wealth would have resulted. Imagine what they contributed then and what they could've contributed all these years and what that would have meant for all of Milwaukee and all the communities across the country.

For generations, Black, Brown, and Native American, Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians communities weren't fully included in our democracy or our economy. But—yet, by pure courage, heart, and grit, they never gave up. They pursued the full promise of America.

Today we're recognizing that history to make new history. I'm here to announce the first-of-its-kind investment, 3.3 billion—\$3.3 billion and 132 projects in 42 States that are going to help right historic wrongs—*[applause]*—and, in the process, delivering environmental justice by reconnecting disadvantaged communities and neighborhoods to new opportunities for future—future prosperity and many possibilities.

These investments advance my Justice40 Initiative to deliver at least 40 percent—40 percent—of all the benefits from clean transit, clean energy, and climate investments to disadvantaged communities. That's a commitment I made and we're keeping.

Here in Milwaukee, it will mean \$36 million in new Federal funding to rebuild Sixth Street. It will mean wider sidewalks for children walking to school, safer bike lanes for residents and visitors, dedicated bus lanes to get work—to get to work faster, new—trees to provide shade, and modern infrastructure to prevent sewage from flowing into the Milwaukee River and the—Lake Michigan.

These are life-changing improvements. They're also going to make it easier for historic Black communities in the North and Latino communities in the South to access jobs, school, and entertainment, opportunities in the city and central hub, from watching the Milwaukee Bucks play to attending Milwaukee Area Technical College.

And if I didn't mention the Technical College, I'd go home and sleep alone, because my wife is a full-time teacher at a community college. *[Laughter]* You all think I'm kidding. I'm not. *[Laughter]*

And we're going to ensure that good-paying construction jobs created in this project go to members of the community, benefiting the very same project.

And with the help of your congressional delegation, especially Senator Tammy Baldwin, who worked so hard for these funds, we're making sure that the construction materials for this project are made in America.

And if I can digress—digress for one second. Look, you know, I—I've been very involved for a while. I know I don't—I look like I just arrived, but I'm—*[laughter]*.

But all kidding aside, I didn't realize, even though I was deeply involved initially in the civil rights movement—it got me involved to run for the first place. I didn't realize that back in—when they—in Roosevelt's term, when they were going through the fights whether unions could organize, they added a provision to the law that not many Presidents paid attention to.

And it says that if the Congress appropriates money for the President to spend on a public project or any project, that he must use an American worker, and he must use American material.

Folks, very few—very few—lived by that. Very few Presidents did that. But not anymore. That's why we're creating jobs.

Look, folks, you have lived and felt the decisions made decades ago. Today—today—we're making decisions to transform your lives decades to come, and we're doing it all across America.

Let's be clear: This groundbreaking investment comes from two historic laws that I signed with the support of Tammy and Gwen: my bipartisan infrastructure law, the most significant law modernizing our roads, bridges, and so much more in generations—the most consequential investment; and another law, the Inflation Reduction Act, which is the most significant investment in fighting climate change and advancing the environment ever in history anywhere in the world. That's not hyperbole.

And they're already making a difference.

Look, let me give you just one example. Back in December, I was in Milwaukee and met with a plumber named Rashawn, who owns——

Audience member. Yes.

The President. Is he here?

Audience member. [Inaudible] [Laughter]

The President. All right—who owns his own small business, Hero Plumbing, that's removing hundreds of pipes—lead pipes—so children and families in this community can turn on the faucet, clean water comes out without the risk of brain damage.

Well, it was supposed to take the city 60 years to eliminate all these pipes, to do this work. Because of the infrastructure law I signed, we're now getting it done—all of it done, every lead pipe in this city, we're—within 10 years, gone.

I was proud to have Rashawn as a guest at the State of the Union Address last week.

And, folks, we're on our way to delivering clean water to every American. We're on the way to delivering affordable high-speed internet to every American at low cost.

The communities too often left behind, we're rebuilding. We're rebuilding the roads. We're filling in the cracks in the sidewalks. We're creating spaces to live and work and play safely and to breathe clean air and to shop at a nearby grocery, stocked with fresh and healthy food.

We're taking on housing discrimination, increasing access to homeownership, and building more homes and apartments to bring the cost of rent down—[inaudible].

Everything we're doing is connecting people with opportunity, not disconnecting people from opportunity. And we're seeing progress.

Through my American Rescue Plan, we put \$1,400 checks in people's pockets to get them through the pandemic. We invested nearly \$80 million in Wisconsin for the State Small Business Credit Initiative, helping countless small businesses grow. In Milwaukee, small business applications are up 70 percent compared to before the pandemic.

Small businesses make up half of our economy. We always talk to big corporations. It's true, they're gigantic. But if you add up all the small business in America, they make up half of all the gross domestic product, providing good-paying jobs and opportunities. And they're—and everyone who applies for a small business—a new loan—it's an act of hope.

And the share of Black and Latino Americans employed in Milwaukee in 2022 was the highest in more than a decade. And, folks, wages are rising faster than prices.

And now we have among the lowest inflation rates of any country in America [the world; White House correction], and still—we're still fighting to lower it even further. We're fighting to lower health care costs, education costs to give just a little more breathing room, as my dad would say, to ordinary families like the one I grew up in.

But let's be clear: My predecessor and his ally—and his allies in Congress, including your Senator, Ron Johnson, who voted——

Audience members. Boo!

The President. Well, he voted against the infrastructure law that funds this project. They want to undo everything I just talked about.

My predecessor talked about "Infrastructure Week" for 4 years. He didn't get a single thing done—not one.

Ron Johnson and every Republican in Congress voted against the Inflation Reduction Act, which is helping fund these projects, and he wants to repeal it.

Look, folks, with your help, we cut Black and Latino child poverty in half because of the child tax credit through my American Rescue Plan.

Led by your Senator, Ron Johnson, every single Republican in Congress voted against that as well—every single one.

I signed a law to beat Big Pharma by giving Medicare the power to price prescription drugs and lower drug prices for seniors significantly. Every Republican voted against it as well.

And, by the way, guess what? It lowered the Federal deficit by \$160 billion.

It didn't just save money for seniors—it didn't just save money for seniors; it meant Medicare didn't have to pay out those exorbitant costs. For example, those of you—everybody knows somebody who needs insulin for diabetes. Well, guess what? Just lowering the price to \$35—it only costs 10 bucks to make, by the way—instead of 400 bucks a month saved the Government all that money.

And now they're trying to cut Medicare and Medicaid and Social Security. Wisconsin's very own Senator, Ron Johnson, called Social Security—now, get this one; I'm amazed—he called Social Security a "Ponzi scheme."

No, I'm serious. Think about it. Did you ever think you'd hear anybody say that? A Ponzi scheme? Give me a break. *[Laughter]*

You know, just this week Donald Trump said cuts to Social Security and Medicare are on the table. When asked if he'd change his position, he said, quote: "There's a lot we can do in terms of cutting. Tremendous amount of things we can do," end of quote.

I want to assure you, I will never allow it to happen. I won't cut Social Security. I will not cut Medicare.

Instead of cutting Social Security and Medicare to give tax breaks to the superwealthy, I'm going to protect and strengthen Social Security and Medicare to make the wealthy begin to pay their fair share.

Look, folks, let me close with this. Four years ago this week, I came to office. Our country was hit by the worst pandemic and economic crisis in a century. Remember the fear and anxiety everybody felt? Record job losses, a raging virus that would take more than 1 million American lives. And for every life lost, there expect—there was estimated eight close family behind—eight—children, mother, father, uncles, aunts. A mental health crisis of isolation and loneliness.

A President, my predecessor, who failed the most basic duty any President owes to the American people: the duty to care—just to care. And in my view, that's unforgivable.

I came to office determined to uphold the duty that gets us through one of the toughest periods in our Nation's history. And we have.

And now we're building a future of America full of possibilities: building an economy from the middle out and the bottom up, not the top down—that top-down stuff, not a whole lot landed on my dad's kitchen table growing up; investing in all America and all Americans to make sure everyone has a fair shot, where we leave nobody behind.

Look, our plan is working, and America is coming back. That's America. That's what this project is all about—the projects for jobs and justice, prosperity, and unlimited possibilities.

And that's why, I swear to God, I've never been more optimistic about America's future than I am today. Not because I'm President; because we're at one of those inflection points in history. We really are.

Things are going to change, no matter who's President, in a big way. They're either going to change much for the better or much worse.

All we have to do, folks, is remember who in God's name we are. We're the United States of America. No—[*applause*—we're the only major country in the world that's come out of every crisis stronger than we went in—stronger than we went in.

There's nothing beyond our capacity. I mean it sincerely. Think about it. There's nothing beyond America's capacity if we do it together. And that's what we're going to do.

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

Thank you so much. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:36 p.m. at the Pieper-Hillside Boys and Girls Club. In his remarks, he referred to Raynetta "Ray" Hill, executive director, Historic King Drive Business Improvement District No. 8; Wisconsin State Rep. Supreme Moore Omokunde, son of Rep. Gwendolynne S. Moore; Mayor Cavalier Johnson of Milwaukee, WI; Rashawn Spivey, founder and owner, Hero Plumbing, LLC; and former President Donald J. Trump. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on March 14.

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