

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2024

Remarks at the Gridiron Club Dinner

March 16, 2024

The President. Thank you, thank you, thank you. I think I should sit down. *[Laughter]*

Good evening.

Audience members. Good evening.

The President. It's great to be here at the Gridiron dinner, though it's 6 hours past my bedtime. *[Laughter]*

What I love about the Gridiron are the opportunities for young people, like Dan Balz and Al Hunt. *[Laughter]* But it was tough to see Mitch McConnell announce he's stepping down as GOP leader. I hate to see a friend give up in his prime. *[Laughter]*

Look, it's been a long night, so I'll keep my remarks just a few minutes less than my State of the Union. *[Laughter]* Kamala will stand up 83 times, because even the press has to admit: I crushed it. *[Laughter]* Granted, your expectations were so low, I just had to show up and remember who the President is. *[Laughter]* That's the press, always underestimating me.

But Kamala and I and the members of the administration here tonight are proud—proud of our accomplishments on behalf of the American people: record job growth, wages rising, rigging the Super Bowl for Taylor Swift. *[Laughter]*

There have been some bright spots in the media. I heard Wordle website is actually doing news now. You get that? *[Laughter]* The New York Times—anyway—*[laughter]*.

We know not everyone is feeling the progress we're making. We're committed to helping the little guy. Ron DeSantis, though, won't take our calls. *[Laughter]*

Our big plan to cancel student debt doesn't apply to everyone. Just yesterday, a defeated-looking man came up to me and said: "I'm being crushed by debt. I'm completely wiped out." I said, "Sorry, Donald, I can't help you." *[Laughter]*

But we're lucky to have great partners, including Governor Whitmer of Michigan. She did a great job tonight. Gretchen and I both joined the picket line of UAW workers.

A strong union can make a corporation quiver, at least that's what Jeff Bezos has been telling me at dinner. *[Laughter]* Jeff is a big supporter of journalism. He's the richest man in the world, and that's even with owning the Washington Post. *[Laughter]*

Believe it or not, Republican Governor Cox of Utah is a good friend. He also did a great job tonight—a really great job tonight. He's smart, he's civil, he's willing to stand up to extremists—or, as we call that, he's a good Democrat. *[Laughter]* God bless you, man. I hope I don't get you in too much trouble. *[Laughter]*

I heard House Republicans were going to do a skit tonight, but they couldn't get a speaker. *[Laughter]*

And the biggest joke of the night: an impeachment inquiry. Imagine believing something so baseless that has a zero chance of succeeding. But Republicans would rather fail at impeachment than succeed at anything else. *[Laughter]*

They want a secure border, but they block it. We had the strongest border bill ever that we've come up with. They take credit for one of the biggest infrastructure laws, but voted against it. And I'm the one confused? *[Laughter]*

Hell, my good friend, the Taoiseach of Ireland, is here tonight to celebrate St. Patrick's Day tomorrow. He took one look at Congress, and he asked for another Guinness. *[Laughter]*

Of course, the big news this week is, two candidates clinched their parties' nomination for President. One candidate is too old and mentally unfit to be President. The other is me. *[Laughter]*

Look, I'm running against the same guy that I beat in 2020. But don't tell him. He thinks he's running against Barack Obama. *[Laughter]* That's what he said.

And another big difference between us: I know what I value most. I'm Jill Biden's husband, and I know her name. *[Laughter]*

In the coming months, Kamala and I will be making the case how Americans are better off than 4 years ago, how we got so much through the pandemic, turned around the economy, reestablished America's leadership in the world. All without encouraging the American people to inject bleach. *[Laughter]* All without destroying the economy, embarrassing us around the world, or itching for insurrection.

Look, I wish these were jokes, but they're not. As I said in my State of the Union Address, we live in an unprecedented moment in democracy—and an unprecedented moment for history. Democracy and freedom are literally under attack.

Putin is on the march in Europe. My predecessor bows down to him and says to him, "Do whatever the hell you want." A former American President actually said that.

Joining us tonight is the Prime Minister of Estonia and the Ukrainian Ambassador to the United States. I say to Putin and told him in person we will not—we will not—bow down. They will not bow down, and I will not bow down. Period.

Here at home, our basic freedom is under assault: the freedom to vote, the freedom to choose, and so much more.

The lies about the 2020 election, the plots to overturn it, to embrace the January 6 insurrectionists pose the gravest threat to our democracy since the American Civil War.

In 2020, they failed. But you all know the threat remains, a poison coursing through the veins of our democracy. Disinformation everywhere. There's a toxic cycle of anger and conspiracy. Massive, massive changes in the media industry, with pursue, with pursue, with pursue. Pursuing what? Pursuing heat and pursuing—instead of light.

All the while, the other guy calls you, the free press—well, he calls you the enemy of the people, even as many of you risk your lives to do your job and sometimes even give your lives to do your jobs.

I made clear we're doing everything we can to bring Evan and Austin home and all Americans wrongly detained around the world. And we'll not give up.

Folks, every single one of us has a role to play in making sure American democracy endures. This year, you, the free press, have a bigger role than ever.

Let me state the obvious. You're not the enemy of the people. You are a pillar of any free society. And I may not always agree with your coverage or admire it, but I do admire your courage.

Good journalism holds a mirror up to a country for us to reflect the good, the bad, the truth about who we are.

This is not hyperbole: We need you. We need you. Democracy is at risk, and the American people need to know. In fractured times, they need a context and a perspective. They need substance to match the enormity of the task. As a result, the choices you make really matter. And each story you make makes democracy stronger.

I know it's possible because I know the American story. We're a great nation. We're good people, defined by core values of honesty, decency, dignity, light over darkness, courage over fear, and truth over lies.

These are also the bedrock principles of good journalism.

So tonight I'd like to toast the free press and toast to the American people and the enduring causes of democracy and freedom.

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

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:32 p.m. at the Grand Hyatt Washington hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Vice President Kamala D. Harris; Dan Balz, chief correspondent, Washington Post; Albert R. Hunt, former opinion columnist and executive editor, Bloomberg News; musician Taylor Swift; Gov. Ronald D. DeSantis of Florida; former Presidents Donald J. Trump and Barack Obama; Jeffrey P. Bezos, president, chief executive officer, and chairman of the board, Amazon.com, and owner, Washington Post; Prime Minister Leo Varadkar of Ireland; President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin of Russia; Prime Minister Kaja Kallas of Estonia; Ukraine's Ambassador to the U.S. Oksana Markarova; Evan Gershkovich, a Wall Street Journal reporter who was arrested by Russian authorities on March 29, 2023; and Austin B. Tice, a reporter for McClatchy Newspapers who was abducted outside Damascus, Syria, on August 14, 2012. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on March 17. Audio was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Gridiron Cub dinner.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Balz, Dan; Bezos, Jeffrey P.; Biden, Jill T.; Cox, Spencer J.; DeSantis, Ronald D.; Gershkovich, Evan; Harris, Kamala D.; Hunt, Albert R.; Kallas, Kaja; Markarova, Oksana; McConnell, A. Mitchell; Obama, Barack; Putin, Vladimir Vladimirovich; Swift, Taylor; Tice, Austin B.; Trump, Donald J.; Varadkar, Leo; Whitmer, Gretchen E.

Subjects: 2021 civil unrest and violence at U.S. Capitol; Abortion; Border security; COVID-19 pandemic; Economic improvement; Estonia, Prime Minister; Florida, Governor; Gridiron Club and Foundation Washington, DC; House of Representatives impeachment inquiry; Infrastructure improvements; Ireland, Prime Minister; Labor movement and organized labor; Michigan, Governor; Press freedom; Russia, President; Senate minority leader; State of the Union Address; Ukraine, Ambassador to U.S.; Utah, Governor; Vice President; Voting rights, protection efforts.

DCPD Number: DCPD202400204.