

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2024

Remarks at a Greek Independence Day Celebration

April 4, 2024

Well, Your Eminence, thank you very much.

I should start by saying the only reason I'm able to stand here is because of the Greek community. That's not hyperbole.

I won my election as a 29-year-old Senator—I know I'm only about 40 now, but—*[laughter]*—a 29-year-old Senator by 3,100 votes—as my sister Valerie, who's here, will tell you—managed my campaign.

And as we were—you always look, in Delaware, from—you work politically from south to north. And I was coming up from Delmar, Delaware, checking all the polling stations on election day in that November in '72. And I got across what they call the Canal—the Delaware and Chesapeake Canal. Well—it's just the C&D Canal, the Chesapeake and Delaware—we call it the other way around.

And I was losing. And I got into Wilmington, and one of the—please move all that back, by the way.

One of the things that I learned early on was that I had a very close relationship with the Greek American community—for real—in the heart and—I mean, real—and the church there as well. And I think, if there were—I forget the exact number of votes, but I think every Greek American in Delaware voted for me because they—*[laughter]*. No, no, no—*[applause]*.

By the way, as some of the Delawareans would tell you, that's where I acquired a nickname I'm very proud of: I am Joe "Bidenopoulos." *[Laughter]* That's the nickname I got.

So, Your Eminence, thank you for that introduction and for reminding us of the core values that unite Greece and America and so many other people around the world.

Welcome to the White House, everybody. This is your house, and you're one of the reasons why, as I said, I'm here and why this house is here.

Today we celebrate 203 years of Greek independence—203 years. And we celebrate the ties of friendship and family between Greece and the United States that stretch back even longer than that.

Archbishop, the folks in this room embody those ties. We have proud Greek Americans here in the worlds of science, journalism, academia, finance, as well as small-business owners, religious leaders, public servants from all across America.

And together—together—you truly embody the breadth of the contributions that the Greek American community delivers every day for their country in communities all across the country and all across the Nation.

I want to make—I want to welcome Eleni, who is here. She is the Lieutenant Governor of California. But before that, she was an Ambassador in the Biden-Obama—the O-Biden—*[Laughter]*—the Obama-Biden administration. *[Laughter]* And she to—anybody who could take care of Hungary in those days can handle anything. *[Laughter]* But you've been a great friend for many years, and I thank you.

And welcome to the Ambassadors from Greece and Cyprus, who are here. Raise your hands, guys. I don't know where you are out there. There you are. Thank you, thank you.

As well as the United States Ambassador to Greece, an old friend of mine—I asked him to be the Ambassador, and I hope he forgives me, but he's doing a great job—George Tsunis. George Tsunis, where are you? There you are, George.

And if you'll allow me to name a few additional friends here today. Now, look, I went to University of Delaware—everybody tells me the great schools they went to. All my kids went to Penn and Georgetown and all these other—they—didn't go to the really great school. I went to the University of Delaware. *[Laughter]* And the president of the University of Delaware happens to be a Greek American standing right in front of me here.

The president of the University of Delaware, Dennis Assanis, and Eleni, who is really the president, I think, his wife. *[Laughter]* Mr. President, you're making me very proud and the university very proud.

And look, I see some old friends out there: Andy and Mike Manatos. Guys, you go back a long way with me. You're one of the reasons why I'm here, for real. This is not hyperbole. I'm not exaggerating any of this. It's the reason why I got here.

And by the way, it's though he's not here today—although he's not here today, I just got off the phone with an old friend of mine, celebrating his birthday—elsewhere with his grandchildren, my friend, Father Alex. He sends all his love. And he is my friend—from the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America.

And by the way, I have a—and he and I have traveled the country and the world together, including in Greece. And on more than one occasion, I visited His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, who was a great, great friend and a great, great man.

Remember he was having a little trouble being held in another country? We made it clear that if he wasn't taken care of quickly, we may have a problem with—the United States.

And 2 years ago, I was very proud to give Father Alex, by the way, the Medal—the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

You know, my friends, to be very blunt about it, my sister and I, all year, look forward to this reception. And some of you know, the fact is that we're in a situation where I have found lifelong friends in this audience, mentors in this country [community; White House correction]. I've found inspiration in the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, which has been a clarion voice for social justice for decades.

You know, I'm an Irish American. I know that shocks you all. *[Laughter]* But we have—I've felt a deep kinship with the Greek American community. So many grandparents, so many great-grandparents started out in America just—with just the clothes on their back, like my ancestors did, and went on to build good lives for themselves and, even more importantly, good futures for their families.

And so many of the values I grew up with, the values my Greek American friends grew up with as well, like treating everyone with dignity. My dad used to say: "You know, Joey, a job is about a lot more than a paycheck. It's about your dignity. It's about respect. It's about being able to look your kid in the eye and say, 'Honey, it's going to be okay.'"

Like treating everyone with dignity, no matter who they are; working hard, dreaming big, never forgetting where you come from, and always holding on to the pride: pride in your family, in your community, your heritage, and, above all, pride in the great country we share together. That pride is felt by so many immigrant communities all across America. And we celebrate that today.

Today is about friendship. Aristotle said, "A friend is a single soul dwelling in two bodies." "A friend is a single soul dwelling in two bodies." And that's what we are: We're friends. To me, that captures the relationship between Greece and the United States. I believe the soul is the breath, the life, the essence of who we are. And the soul is what makes us "us," in my view.

America is the only country on Earth built on an idea. Every other country is based on ethnicity, geography, religion, and other attributes. But America is based on a simple idea, for real.

We're not based on geography, we're based on an idea: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men and women are created equal, endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights," et cetera—you know, that we're all entitled to be treated with decency and dignity, respect throughout our lives. And democracy must always be defended because it's the vehicle that allows it all to happen—makes all this possible.

And you all know where that idea came from—democracy, where it was born: in Greece, a millennia ago, where some of the greatest thinkers in the world's history conceived the notion of "We the People." That's where it came from. "We the People"—"demos" in democracy—can and should control our own destiny.

In my view, it's the precious gift the Greeks—Greece has given the world. And that gift can give rise to our Nation—and gave rise to it. America's Founding Fathers studied ancient Greek thinkers and leaders. Our revolution in 1776 was inspired—literally, not figuratively—inspired by their ideas. I know we always say this, but I wonder whether we really fully, totally appreciate what it was.

Forty-five years after that, Greek patriots fought for their own independence, galvanized by America's quest for liberty. And that's why the anniversary of Greece's—Greeks' independence is a special day in America as well. Our nations are connected. We have shared values, shared aspirations, and shared belief in all that is possible.

I was once asked by Xi Jinping in—I traveled 17,000 miles with him in Tibetan—I was on the Tibetan Plateau. And he looked at me, and he said to me, "Can you define America?" And I could say the same thing if he asked me to define Greece. I said, "Yes, one word"—and I mean this sincerely; it's recorded. I said, "One word: possibilities." "Possibilities."

We believe anything is possible. When "We the People" come together for the common good, the bonds between us are rooted in our history. But they're very much alive today. In this very room, together, we're keeping those bonds alive.

The people of Greece, the people of the United States did not just inherit democracy. We have to be its defenders. It has to be, every generation, championed. We must be its champion. And that's as important today as it's ever been, and that's not hyperbole.

So I want to thank you all for being here to celebrate liberty. And I want to thank you for your commitment, making it real, in our time, the ideals that sparked our two nations' struggle for independence more than 200 years ago.

And may both Greece and the United States continue to lift high the lamp of democracy so we can always serve as the beacon of hope to the world.

So, folks, happy Greek Independence Day. And welcome to your house.

Thank you, thank you, thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:29 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Archbishop Elpidophoros, primate, and Alexander Karloutsos, former vicar general,

Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America; Lt. Gov. Eleni Kounalakis of California; Greece's Ambassador to the U.S. Katerina Nassika; Cyprus's Ambassador to the U.S. Evangelos Savva; former Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Legislation Andrew E. Manatos and his son Mike; Ecumenical Patriarch and Archbishop of Constantinople Bartholomew; and President Xi Jinping of China. He also referred to his sister Valerie Biden Owens. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on April 5.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Greek Independence Day celebration.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Assanis, Dennis N.; Assanis, Eleni; Bartholomew, Archbishop; Elpidophoros, Archbishop; Karloutsos, Alexander; Kounalakis, Eleni; Manatos, Andrew E.; Manatos, Mike; Nassika, Katerina; Obama, Barack; Owens, Valerie Biden; Savva, Evangelos; Tsunis, George; Xi Jinping.

Subjects: California, Lieutenant Governor; China, President; Cyprus, Ambassador to the U.S.; Greece, Ambassador to the U.S.; Greece, relations with U.S.; Greece, U.S. Ambassador; Greek Independence Day.

DCPD Number: DCPD202400263.