

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2024

Remarks on the Care Economy

April 9, 2024

The President. Hello, hello, hello. As my mother would say, "God love you all."

Crystal, thank you for sharing your story. It's a—and a simple truth.

Folks, you know, there's no better place for me to—last year at this day, I declared Caregiver and Caretaker—Caregivers Month. And it's—and I couldn't think of no better place to celebrate it today than here at this station. *[Applause]*

No, no, I'll tell you why. For 36 years, I commuted from the State of Delaware to here every single day the Senate was in session. And over a million—a lot of times. The reason I did is—I think I understand a little bit what many of you have gone through and what you're trying to help with.

You know, when I got elected, I was 26—29 years old. I wasn't old enough to be sworn in. While I was down here hiring staff, before I was sworn in, I got a call saying my wife and daughter were dead and my two boys were badly injured. And so, you know, I wasn't going to come down, but I had a—thank God, I had a family and a lot of friends and older men—Members like me, 45, 50—*[laughter]*—who helped me out.

But all—but all kidding aside, I didn't have them—I was just—I just had started a law practice. I didn't have any money. I mean, I made a living, but I didn't have any money. And what I tried to do is figure out how I was going to raise my boys.

Audience members. Woo!

The President. No, I'm serious.

And I tell you what, I really wondered: Why did I commute every single day? Over a million miles roundtrip over the time I was in the United States Senate. And the reason I did: I couldn't afford a house down here without selling my house at home, and I couldn't afford caregiving. It was the God's truth. No possibility. None whatsoever.

But I—lucky I had a family. My mother, my father, my sister, my brother all moved in, helped me take care of my kids. But then we ended up with Mom getting sick and Dad getting sick, and they—we took care of them—the so-called sandwich generation.

Look, you care workers represent the best of who we are as Americans. *[Applause]* No, you really do. We look out for one another in America. We leave nobody behind—nobody behind.

And you've said—all the heroes in the lives you was—talk about. Well, you're our hero. You're the heroes to so many individuals. You really are. And you represent so many people who do it—and do it out of love and concern, not because of the pay, because they're not getting the pay they need. It matters. *[Laughter]*

As your President, I'm here with a simple message. I give you my word: I have your back. *[Applause]* I have your back.

I also to thank the family of Ady Barkan, whose widow Rachael and her son here—Carl—are here, just backstage. I just met with them. Their family embodies why care matters. It's critical to the dignity of care, the dignity of all—all—caregivers and workers.

My dad used to say, "A job—Joey"—I give you my word as a—[inaudible]. "A job is about a lot more than a paycheck. It's about your dignity. It's about respect." [Applause] No, it really is. "It's about being able to look your kid in the eye and say, 'Honey, it's going to be okay.'"

Care workers and caregivers are critical to our families and to the entire economy. That's why as a candidate, as President, I was determined to turn things around. We've made progress, but there's so more that we have to do—so much more.

If we want the best economy in the world, we have to have the best caregiving economy in the world. [Applause] We really do. They are not inconsistent. They are consistent. But the cost of care is too high and pay for care workers is much too low.

Take childcare. A typical family spends \$11,000 a year on childcare per child—per child. If you live in a big city, that can be \$17,000 for each child, more than their college tuition if, God willing, you're able to get there. And a lot of parents do the math and realize they can't afford to go to work, because childcare can sometimes literally cost more than they earn—more than they earn.

You know, take homecare. The cost of long-term care for aging loved ones and people with disabilities rose 40 percent in the last decade. Medicaid offers help, but it can't meet the demand. You know, there are 700,000 seniors waiting in line—700,000 waiting in line—and people with disabilities are stuck on Medicaid homecare waiting lists for as long as 10 years if they survive to be qualified—it's amazing. Think about it.

Family members like ours and yours often spend their own retirement savings to pay for the care of the loved ones. Others leave their jobs to care for them. And millions are part of the so-called sandwich generation, taking care of both your kids and your aging parents at the same time, at least that's been the experience of the Biden family. It's overwhelming.

Take paid leave. We're the only—[applause]. We're the only advanced economy in the world not to guarantee paid leave. We're going to change that. That means to help a loved one, many folks have to leave work to [or; White House correction] find out later that they've been fired.

In the United States of America, no one—no one—should choose between caring for a parent who's raised them, a child who depends on them, or a paycheck that they need. That's not why it should be—the way it should be. [Applause] No, I'm serious. You wonder whether I feel strongly about this, I do.

Look, more often than not, from childcare to eldercare to the lack of paid leave, it's women who bear the brunt—[applause]—women who bear the brunt. We saw that during the pandemic when 2 million women left their jobs to help take care of their families. It hurts our whole economy to lose so much talent in the workplace. And it keeps women from earning the equal pay they deserve because they say, "Well, you haven't been here."

Look, a fact: Care workers are predominately women as well—women of color and immigrants who are overworked, overlooked, and underpaid. It's not enough just to praise them for all they're doing, we have to pay them.

To invest in our care economy, as soon as I came into office, I signed the American Rescue Plan. Not a single Republican voted for it, I might add—not one. It made our Nation's biggest investment in childcare ever. For example, it kept 225,000 childcare workers—well, childcare working centers open, giving parents an opportunity—

Audience member. [Inaudible]

The President. —to get back to work.

Audience member. [Inaudible]

The President. Well, I tell you what—you want to come make a speech or shush up? Okay? [Laughter] I'm not messing around with him. He looks like he could take me.

AFSCME!

Look, it expanded the childcare tax credit, cutting child poverty in America in half. That's what it did. We cut it in half.

Overall, my administration increased funding for nearly 50 percent for—of—by 50 percent for childcare. And in the coming weeks, we plan to release new rules to strengthen staffing standards in nursing homes, to get homecare workers a bigger share of Medicaid payments.

But I want to—but that's not going to be enough. I want to do more, and we can do more. My budget for next year makes key commitments to children, seniors, and people with disabilities, and to caregivers who look after their loved ones.

First, for working families with small children, we're going to guarantee affordable, quality childcare. Most families—under our plan, most families will pay less than \$10 a day per child, saving millions of folks as much as \$7,000 a year. That's a lot of breathing room for a—young families who need it badly.

We'll also restore the expanded childcare tax credit, lifting millions of children out of poverty. And by the way, this helps the economy. It doesn't hurt the—it helps the economy. You know, our Republican friends let that expire. Well, we've got to expire a couple of them, politically—[laughter]—in order to get this passed. Together, we're going to bring it back.

Second, seniors and people with disabilities, we're going to expand Medicaid homecare services and reduce that 700,000-person backlog. That will mean more folks can live and work in their own communities with dignity and independence. More homecare workers will start getting a better pay and benefits and dignity they deserve.

And by the way, if anybody is listening besides all of us, we agree on this: This is really—I'm—we're deadly earnest. This is not—it's not a joke. This matters.

Third, for everyone caring for a loved one, my budget would finally, finally create a national paid family and medical leave program—finally—[applause]—up to 12 weeks to care for a newborn, a sick one—a sick loved one, or yourself without losing your income.

Look, it's past time America caught up with the rest of the world on paid leave.

And, folks, all this helps families, and it grows the economy. It grows the economy. And we can afford to do it. To put another way, we can't afford not to do it.

Look, I'm a capitalist. But I want to make sure that—you know, if you make a million bucks, great. Just start paying your fair share in taxes.

But let me ask you: Does anyone here think this Tax Code is fair? Raise your hand.

Audience members. No!

The President. I don't either. [Laughter] The last administration enacted a \$2 trillion tax cut——

Audience members. Boo!

The President. ——overwhelmingly benefiting the very wealthy and the biggest corporations and exploded the Federal deficit more than any other President has. We've cut the deficit, by the way.

It added more to the national debt than any Presidential term in history. And it's due to expire next year. And guess what? I hope to be President because it expires, it's going to stay expired—[*applause*—stay expired.

Our administration has already cut the deficit by \$1 trillion. And I'm going to cut it even more this decade by making big corporations and the very wealthy begin to pay their fair share. Under my plan, nobody earning less than \$400,000 a year will pay an extra penny in taxes. I don't—I hope that—[*inaudible*].

As I've made it clear, we're not trying to beat people—there are—but there are a thousand billionaires in America—from 750 to 1,000 since the pandemic. You know what the average tax rate those billionaires pay? Eight-point-two percent.

Audience members. Boo!

The President. No, I'm serious. Anybody want to trade that tax rate?

Audience members. Yes!

The President. Well, look, that's far less than the vast majority of Americans pay. No billionaire should pay a lower tax rate than a teacher, a firefighter, or a care worker.

And that's why I proposed a minimum tax for billionaires of 25 percent. It's not even the highest rate—just 25 percent. And guess what? It's more fair. But it also—guess what it would do over 10 years? It would raise \$500 billion—[*applause*—\$500 billion. And it wouldn't hurt anybody.

I'm a capitalist. If you make a billion bucks, wonderful. Pay your fair share.

Imagine what we can do—imagine what we can do for America. Look, folks, imagine a future with affordable childcare, homecare, eldercare, paid leave.

But, folks, our Republican friends have a different vision. Republicans in the House of Representatives—and by the way, Rosa DeLauro—she was here, I was told—she's a hell of a champion for all this.

They just released their budget—the Republicans—that cuts caregiving programs by a third—the ones that exist, cuts them by a third. For example, it would mean 260,000 fewer kids in childcare.

My predecessor and his MAGA friends want to—I love the phrase—the language they use—they want to "terminate" the Affordable Care Act. [*Laughter*]

Audience members. Boo!

The President. "Terminate." Well, guess what? Killing millions of Americans—taking them off of health care insurance and stripping others of services like homecare.

Folks—and by the way, you know how many times they've tried to take out Obamacare and the Affordable Health Care Act? Forty-nine times they've tried. They can keep trying, but they're not going to get it done.

And look, when it comes to Social Security and Medicare, my predecessor recently said, quote, "There's a lot you can do in terms of cutting." God love him.

Right on cue, House Republicans released their budget that would raise the retirement age in Social Security—the budget they submitted for next year—and slash Medicare, while they cut taxes for the very wealthy again.

I've got a better idea. I'll protect Social Security and Medicare and make the very wealthy pay their fair share to make it work.

Look, let me conclude where I started, by thanking all of you. As Crystal said, you're all—and I mean this sincerely—you're all somebody's hero.

That's what I see in our Nation's caregivers: heroes. We need you. Not a joke. We need you.

And together, I know we can do this. I've never been more optimistic about our future. We just have to remember who we are. We're the United States of America. There's nothing beyond our capacity—nothing—if we do it together.

So let's stay at work—get to work, keep working. And God bless you all, and may God bless our troops.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:01 p.m. in the main hall at Union Station. In his remarks, he referred to Atlanta, GA, resident Crystal G. Crawford, who introduced the President; Rachael King, wife, and Carl Barkan, son, of health care activist Ady Barkan, who died of complications from ALS on November 1, 2023; Rep. Rosa L. DeLauro; and former President Donald J. Trump. He also referred to his sister Valerie Biden Owens and brother James B. Biden.

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