

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2024

Remarks to the National Action Network Convention and an Exchange With Reporters

April 12, 2024

[The President joined the event, which was held at the Sheraton New York Times Square Hotel in New York City, by videoconference from the South Court Auditorium of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building.]

The President. Thank you, Rev. Thanks for that introduction. Look, we've known each other for a long time. I'm grateful not only for your leadership and partnership, but quite frankly, more importantly for your friendship.

And thanks to all of you, members of our Nation's most important civil rights organization. You know, for more than 30 years, the National Action Network has been on the frontlines in the work to redeem the soul of America. We've been on the same page, and the work is as important as it's ever been.

You know, during your convention, you heard from members of the most diverse administration in history—our administration—starting with our Vice President, Kamala Harris, who is doing an incredible job, in my view. And so is Steve Benjamin, who is with us—he is with you guys tonight right now.

Together, we've kept our promises to make some of the most significant investments in the Black American community ever. Promise kept to get through the pandemic and make sure the Black community was not left behind and everyone was taken care of; put checks in pockets and cut Black child poverty in half.

A promise kept to rebuild all of America, reconnecting Black communities that had been cut in half by interstate highway systems with jobs and opportunity as well, to ensure that every community has access to clean water and high-speed internet.

A promise kept to protect and expand Obamacare, saving Black families \$800 a year on their premiums. A promise kept to beat Big Pharma by giving Medicare the power to negotiate lower prescription drug prices, literally saving countless lives in underserved communities.

For example, members of the Black community who need insulin now are only—for—because of their diabetes, now only have to pay \$35 a month for insulin instead of \$400 a month. And there's much more to come, by the way.

A promise kept to invest an historic \$7 billion in HBCUs, to relieve student debt for more than 4 thousand—4 million people so far, including a significant number of Black borrowers, including, just today I announced another 277,000 Americans—a significant number of Black borrowers—are also having their debt forgiven.

A promise kept to advance justice: the first Black woman on the Supreme Court and more Black women confirmed for the Federal circuit court of appeals than all previous Presidents combined—every single one; the most important Executive order on police reform to ban chokeholds, greatly restrict no-knock warrants, advance effective and accountable community policing.

A promise kept to sign the most significant gun safety law in decades. The first law making lynching a Federal hate crime. Keeping my promise that no one should be in Federal prison for merely possessing marijuana.

A promise kept to advance environmental justice and to make the most significant investments in climate ever in all of our history. That's delivering clean energy and jobs all across America.

The results are real. We've reduced Black unemployment rate to its record low. More Black Americans have health insurance than ever before. More Black businesses are starting up than we've seen in the last 25 years.

In fact, despite attacks on our support for Brown and Black small businesses, we're investing in them as key ways to build generational wealth in communities. Today I'm proud to announce that last year we awarded \$76 billion in Federal contracts to small, disadvantaged businesses to level the playing field and close the racial wealth gap.

I also want to thank my dear friend, HUD Secretary Marcia Fudge, for an amazing career in public service, for leading the charge in making housing more affordable, for proposing a \$10,000 tax first-time home—\$10,000 tax credit for first-time homebuyers to building more rental units to bring rents down than ever before.

We've launched a major effort to root out bias in home appraisal process so homes in Black communities are no longer undervalued compared to the same home in a white community. Thus far, we've eliminated that gap by 40 percent, and we're going to continue until it's even.

Put it all together, Black wealth is up 60 percent—up 60 percent—and the racial wealth gap has closed the most in 20 years. You know, I would argue this is transformational change. But we know there's much more work to do. There are real threats we face.

There are more extreme voices out there who simply don't want to see people of color in the future of our country. They want to turn back the clock—voter suppression; election suppression; ripping away reproductive freedom; getting affirmative action—gutting it and attacking diversity across American life; banning books—this is 2024—banning books, attempting to erase history; embracing political violence, like what happened on January the 6th.

These extremists are determined to erase the progress we've made. But together, we are determined to make history, not erase it—make history, not erase it.

Let me close with this, Rev. You know, we face a moment of choosing at a time when our very democracy is at stake. And that's not an exaggeration. Our democracy is at stake.

One vision is propelled by anger, hate, revenge, and retribution. The other vision—our vision, your vision—of perseverance, progress, hope, and optimism, and everything the National Action Network stands for and embodies.

Here's the future we can build together. I see an America where we defend democracy, we don't diminish it. I see an America where, with your help, I sign the Freedom to Vote Act and the John Lewis Voting Rights Act into law, where I sign the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act into law, where we make *Roe v. Wade* the law of the land again. And we can do that.

I see a future where we give hate no safe harbor and call out the poison of White supremacy.

I see an America where the economy grows from the middle out and the bottom up, not the top down, and where the wealthy finally begin to pay their fair share of taxes, where working people finally have a fair shot, with childcare, eldercare, paid leave. We're one of the only nations in the world that doesn't have paid leave.

I see a future where we save the planet from the climate crisis and our country from gun violence. You know, my administration just yesterday expanded—2 days ago expanded background checks. But that's not enough. We'll ban assault weapons and high-capacity magazines. We did it once; we've got to do it again. We must get it done.

And, folks, I know we can do this. I've never been more optimistic about our future.

You know, we just have to remember who we are. We're the United States of America. We've come out of every crisis stronger than we've gone into it. And there's nothing—nothing—beyond our capacity when we act together.

So let's keep acting together. I'm looking to you for help. I'm looking to you for your leadership, and I hope you look to me for the same.

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

Thank you very much.

[At this point, the President addressed reporters gathered in the South Court Auditorium as follows.]

Iran/Israel

Q. Mr. President, what's your message to Iran?

Q. How imminent is an Iranian attack on Israel?

The President. I don't want to say.

Q. How imminent do you think an attack on Israel is from Iran, Mr. President?

The President. I don't want to get into secure information, but my expectation is sooner than later.

Thank you.

[Several reporters began asking questions at once.]

Q. Mr. President, what is your message to Iran right now?

Iran

Q. Mr. President, what is your message to Iran in this moment?

The President. "Don't."

Thank you.

Q. Or else what?

Q. Are American personnel and assets at risk, Mr. President?

Q. Will the U.S. respond?

Q. Are you sending more American troops—*[inaudible]*?

[Several reporters asked questions at once.]

Israel-U.S. Defense Relationship

Q. Mr. President, are American troops at risk as well?

The President. We are devoted to the defense of Israel. We will support Israel. We will defend—help defend Israel. And Iran will not succeed.

Thank you very much.

Q. What would trigger a direct U.S. response, sir?

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:52 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to Rev. Alfred C. Sharpton, Jr., president and founder, National Action Network; Director of the Office of Public Engagement Stephen K. Benjamin; and Supreme Court Associate Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : National Action Network Convention; Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters, Washington, DC.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Benjamin, Stephen K.; Fudge, Marcia L.; Harris, Kamala D.; Jackson, Ketanji Brown; Sharpton, Alfred C., Jr.

Subjects: Civil rights movement; COVID–19 pandemic; Economic improvement; Environmental justice; Federal student loans, partial forgiveness; Gun control efforts; Gun violence, prevention efforts ; Health insurance, access and availability; Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs); Housing, affordability and access; Insulin cost controls; Iran, regional involvement; Israel, defense relationship with U.S; Job creation and growth; Marijuana, decriminalization efforts; Medicare and Medicaid programs; National Action Network, convention; Office of Public Engagement; Policing best practices, improvement efforts; Prescription drug costs, reduction efforts; Secretary of Housing and Urban Development; Small businesses, promotion efforts; Supreme Court Associate Justice; Unemployment rate; Vice President; Voting rights, protection efforts.

DCPD Number: DCPD202400290.