

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2024

Remarks at a Campaign Event and Question-and-Answer Session in Scranton, Pennsylvania

April 16, 2024

The President. Guys, you come up here. Come on. Come on. Good to see you, buddy.

Audience member. Yes, you too.

The President. Come on.

With the Bells and the Bidens, like all of you—my dad used to have an expression. He'd say, "Family is the beginning, the middle, and the end"—"the beginning, the middle, and the end."

[At this point, the President addressed Eloise Giroux, daughter of Megan Bell Giroux, who introduced the President, and granddaughter of Tommy Bell, a childhood friend of the President.]

And you need Secret Service guarding you. *[Laughter]*

But, folks, look, first of all, I want to thank the Carpenters Union. They've been with me for my entire career. They've been loyal to me, and I think I've been loyal to them.

Now, one of the things that she hadn't told you is Tommy is—along with Larry—Larry, stand up. This is Larry Orr. Larry is another one of the—he lived right across the gates in Marywood—and another guy named Charlie Roth, the four of us were inseparable.

When things changed for my dad up in Scranton and lost his job, we moved back to Delaware, where he was from. And when he originally—that's where he came from—Delaware—to Scranton.

And I'd come home though for every holiday, almost all summer. And when I fell in love when I was in law school—I actually wasn't even in law school, I was in college. I went on spring break. I had made \$85 of—from a tax return. *[Laughter]* And—oh, you think I'm kidding; I'm not. *[Laughter]*

And my dad didn't own, but he ran an automobile dealership. And so I had a car, and I put five guys in the car. They all chipped in to pay the way down. We went to Lauderdale.

Now, the problem is—I'm going to lose a lot of credibility with all of you—*[laughter]*—but I'm the only Scrantonian and the only Irishman you've ever met that's never had a drink in his life, because too many people have too many drinks in their life, in my opinion. *[Laughter]* And so we got down to Fort Lauderdale, and all everybody was doing is drunk most of the time. And I found out that there was a possibility of being able to get on a plane for 20 bucks—\$22 round trip to go to Nassau. *[Laughter]*

So I thought, "Well, there may be some nice girls in Nassau." *[Laughter]* The only reason we all came down—any rate.

So I got on the plane, and I had two guys with me. We had just finished spring football practice at the University of Delaware. And I had been named as the likely starting safety that year and—next year. And so we started off, and a guy named—his nickname was—he was Mike McCrann. We called him "Crash" McCrann. He looked like Rock Hudson and acted like it. *[Laughter]* And a guy named Fred Sears, who ran one of the biggest banks in Delaware later.

And so we walked into—we went to the British Colonial hotel. We—actually, we found a bunch of guys from Michigan. We slept on the floor of their place. And we went to go to the

beach. Turns out, all the beaches in Nassau—public beaches, there's none of the college girls. They're—you know, they're all locals, and there's not many people.

So we walked down to the beach this particular day—the first day we got there—and the British Colonial hotel had this chain-link fence that ran from the street all the way down into the water so you couldn't cross into the hotel area. And so we wondered what the heck we were going to do.

Turns out they—a bunch of folks going in and throwing their towels saying "British Colonial hotel" on it over the—barbed wire—not barbed wire—chain-link fence. So I had an idea. We each grabbed a towel, put it around us, and we walked in the front door—[*laughter*—no, I'm serious; true story—of the British Colonial hotel.

And we walked in, and we acted like—and you walked in, and you had the registration on the left and down the—but straight ahead—like, from here, half again the distance from the back wall—was the glass looking out on the swimming pool and then beyond the swimming pool and onto the ocean.

And so we just walked in like we belonged there and walked right out. [*Laughter*] And I'm standing there, and we're all looking around, and I saw this beautiful young woman. I said, "I'm going to go talk to her." And old Crash McCrann, I nicknamed—he was a fullback—I said, "No, I am." I said—and Fred Sears, my buddy, flipped a coin. I won. [*Laughter*]

And so I walked up, sat down on the end of the bench of the—and the sun was coming from—toward the water. And it was later—and toward the water. And I sat on the end of the chaise lounge, and I said: "My name is Joe Biden. I'm from the University of Delaware." And she said, "My name is Neilia Hunter. I'm from Syracuse." And I said hi, and we started to talk and just talking.

And I watched this yacht pull up in front. I'm not—this is not a joke. Well, to me, it was a yacht. It was, like, 40, 45 feet. [*Laughter*] And I see this guy with a white hat on, white, you know, uniform—not uniform—pants and the shoes and the whole deal. And he gets in a little dingy, and he rows to shore.

And I'm just—I'm talking to her like—like you're she, and I'm looking up. And I watch the guy pull up, and he pulls a—the dingy up onto the beach. And he starts walking toward us. And I'm just watching him. And he walks straight to us, and he looks down at Neilia, and he says, "Neilia, are we on for dinner tonight?" [*Laughter*] I thought, "Oh, man." [*Laughter*]

But what happened was he—she looked, and she said, "Oh, I'm sorry"—it was the Wickwire family, a major highway contractor in New York—in Skaneateles, New York, in the State of New York. And what—they were neighbors.

And she said, "No." She said, "I—Joe and I are going to go to dinner." [*Laughter*] And so, with that, he left, and she was mortified. She said, "I'm so sorry, but I didn't want to." I said, "Why don't we?" I had a total of \$42 left. [*Laughter*] But then, you could buy a McDonald's hamburger for 19 cents or something. [*Laughter*]

So she said, "Well, I know a place we can go." And she's a very classy lady. She picked a place she thought we—I could afford. And so we walked into this particular restaurant and sat down. I ordered a hamburger because I didn't have any money, and she—the classy woman she was, she ordered the same thing, like whatever it was.

But anyway, we—and I was smitten by her. I really was. And you know, sometimes, there's love at first sight. This really was. I was—my—I was just taken by her. And she was really quiet, and she was lovely.

And one thing led to another, and she said—the bill came. And the bill was \$48. [Laughter] And I had \$23. And I could feel under the table—I could feel this.

[The President rested his hand on an audience member's knee.]

And I put my hand down, and she put 40 bucks in my hand. [Laughter] Her father was fairly wealthy. He was a Navy cook and an Auburn—if you know Auburn, New York, he had a large diner in Auburn, which was very profitable, and he also had the contracts to do Syracuse University.

Anyway, he was a fairly wealthy guy. And so I took it, and I paid. I said, "I'm so embarrassed." She said, "Oh, it happens to my father all the time." [Laughter]

So we're walking back to the hotel she was staying at, and I swear to God, I hadn't kissed her, I hadn't done—we hadn't done a single thing together. And there was a chain and—that—post and chain dividing—stopping the parking lot from coming out of the—and so, like a horse's tail, I was going to show—I jumped over the chain. [Laughter] And I caught my ankle and fell. [Laughter] Totally mortified.

She said: "Oh, that's okay. That's—are you okay?" I said, "Yes." And I got up, and I looked at her, and I know—and this wasn't a joke—I looked at her. I said, "You know, I think I'm going to marry you." I give you my word. And she looked at me, and we hadn't even kissed one another, and she said, "I think so."

From that time on, I quit the football team that year—that was spring practice—the next year, and I started commuting every single weekend.

My dad ran an automobile agency, and I made money by getting—there was a place called Manheim Auto Auction, where they—and I would drive to Manheim. And back in those days at Delaware, you could not—you could not have a car on campus. And so a lot of the guys I was with, they were happy to get a chance to drive a relatively new car. They paid \$10 for every car we delivered back to Delaware.

So I'd get a van, take 10 guys up, get 100 bucks; I'd keep \$50. [Laughter] No. And that's how I'd go back and forth every single weekend—every single weekend.

And—but sometimes, it just happens. Sometimes, it just happens. And so no man deserves one great love, let alone two. When she was killed in that accident with my daughter as well, my two boys weren't expected to make it. And they were only just 3 and just 4 years old.

And what happened was that I got put on that 10-most-eligible-bachelors list in America. [Laughter] You've got it man. I thought it was a pretty cool thing. [Laughter]

But I used to send more things to the Secret Service because I'd get women sending me pictures that I was afraid I'd get set up for. [Laughter] And unlike the guy running, I didn't take advantage of any of it. [Laughter] Any rate, to make a long story short, all kidding aside, I would just give them to the Secret Service.

So I decided I couldn't—I really couldn't date anybody because every time I'd go out with somebody—I had more yentas in Delaware than you can imagine—very nice to me. And so I just gave up.

And I get a call from my youngest brother. He said, "Joe, I've got just the girl for you." And he was at the University of Delaware at the time, as this girl was. She used to be 9 years younger than me. Now she's 25 years younger, but—[laughter].

So he said: "You'll love her. She doesn't like politics." [Laughter] And I met her, and this third date I went out with her, I realized I was going to marry her. No man deserves one great love, let alone two. So I've been an incredibly fortunate guy—incredibly fortunate.

And that's why I kept coming back up to Scranton, because what would happen is, I would drive up on—after I paid my guys their money, I'd drive up on Friday—through Scranton, up 81, up into Syracuse, next to Skaneateles Lake—and then go back. And I'd always stop at my Uncle Jack's house on the way back in Scranton.

And you know, everybody's from Scranton, but no one ever leaves Scranton. [Laughter] It's in their—but any rate, I don't know why the hell I told you that. [Laughter] Except you reminded me.

Megan Bell Giroux. It was my fault. I told—[inaudible].

The President. No, no, but you know, look, folks, I've ran for—I can't tell you how much I appreciate what you've done. It's a pretty basic thing for me.

You may remember when I announced for President, I said I was running for three reasons, initially. I said, one is to restore the soul of America. We lost a sense of decency that was in the way we campaign and what people say and how they talk to one another.

And the second thing, I said I wanted to rebuild the middle class because when the middle class works, everyone works—everyone does better.

I said, thirdly, I want to unite the country. And I was, understandably, by the national press, viewed as I was—they'd give me credit for being a fairly significant United States Senator and able to cross the aisle and get a lot done, but they thought I was extremely naive.

I don't know how we can lead the world when we can't unite ourselves. I really mean it. I mean, so we've got a lot of work to do.

And then I decided—my son Beau ended up going—volunteering to go to Iraq. He was the attorney general of the State of Delaware. And he came back—he—his—I was in, I think, 36, 38 times in Iraq and Afghanistan as a Senator and as a Vice President. And he came back—he—his hooch—that's where he slept—was only about 400 yards from a major burn pit. And the burn pit is about the size of a football field—probably 80 yards long, 30, 40 yards wide—burning everything from human waste to oil and the rest.

And just like the 9/11 firemen got—my son came back after a year with glioblastoma—stage 4 glioblastoma. And I lost him. And I didn't—I wasn't going to run again. I really wasn't. Not a—I give you my word, I had no intention of running again.

And then along came what happened down in Charlottesville. And I talked to the mother who lost that daughter who was killed by these—coming out of a field, in the United States of America, in the year two thousand and—I guess it was '16, '17, '18, in that range, but a little later—carrying torches, Ku Klux Klan, Nazi banners—I mean, literally Nazi swastikas, and marching through the streets.

And my future opponent, my present opponent—they asked him what he thought of it. He said there were "very good people on both sides." And I'm going to say something that may sound outrageous to you, but I thought—I thought—he's the antithesis of everything I believe, and I thought I could beat him. And that's why I ran.

And so what's at stake now, folks, is our democracy. It's not hyperbole. You may remember, when I got the nomination, the first thing I did, I made a speech at the—in Convention Hall—excuse me, in Philadelphia. And I made a speech on democracy. And a lot of people said, "What's he doing that for?" Because it is at stake. We've never had this kind of a campaign before.

And so, for me, it's not about whether or not you're left, right, or center—although it matters to my philosophy of government—but it matters about whether or not you're going to abide by the basic rules, you're going to have a sense of decency.

You—I've never thought I'd see a time when I'm going through a neighborhood or a rural town that's in the west and see big signs that—have a Trump sign in the middle that says "F—Biden" and having a little kid standing with his middle finger, 7 years old, 8 years old. Oh, I promise, it happens all the time. It's not who we are.

So the point I'm making is this: We are—think of—it this way: If the United States wasn't leading the world, who could step up to do it? No, not a joke. What other country? What other country?

I've known every major world leader for the last 35 years. I know them all by their first names—not a joke—not because I'm important; because of the nature of my job when I was Foreign Relations Committee and a senior Senator.

And you know, the rest of the world looks to us. I walk in a room—no matter whether it's the G-7 or the G-20, whatever it is—and they all look to me—not me, Joe Biden; America—because they know we are the essential nation. And you know, Madeleine Albright wrote about us being the essential—she was absolutely right, absolutely right.

And we have a chance. We have an incredible chance to change the direction of the world without using American forces. We have an enormous chance.

So I said before I ran, I was going to write a book on inflection points in American history, where the things that happen in a very short period of time can determine what the next four, five, six decades look like. We have a chance. We have a chance to change the dynamic in a way that we haven't had before. The postwar era is over. It's over. What's going to follow?

So I—when I started the book—and I decided to run instead. I started the book, I talked about how technology has changed the direction in the world. Were it not for Gutenberg inventing the printing press, there would be no unity in Europe. They wouldn't have been able to communicate with one another at the period of time. All the way to the—it's a silly example—Nixon would probably be President but for a televised debate where he perspired a great deal.

And—[laughter]—no, I—no, I'm not joking. I'm thinking these things matter. Even to now, look what's happening on TikTok. Look what's happening. What are the source of information? These press people are all honest and decent, and they take real risks. And not a lot—and they don't all like me. But they—[laughter]—no, I'm serious. This is—they're entitled to that. But they take real risks.

But, folks, think about it. Where do people get their news these days? I mean, all the data shows hardly anybody watches the nightly news, in relative terms. Who reads the New York Times and the Wall Street Journal and the—and so on? I mean, what percentage of people? So where did they get their news? And it's so much—so easy to just flat-out lie and not know what's true.

So we've got a lot at stake here—a lot at stake. But for me, it gets down to a basic thing. My dad used to say—for real; my word—he'd say: "Joey, a job is about a lot more than—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,' and mean it—and mean it."

That's what this is all about. The vast majority of the American people just want an even chance, just a shot. Just a shot. And it breaks down into everything from taxes to philosophy.

But with your help, I've been able to get a lot done that no one thought could get done. We've been able to get a lot done. But there's so much more we have to do, but we can do it. But we have to win.

And it gets down to old-fashioned politics, gets down to knocking on doors, gets down to telling stories about why you're for who you're for. It gets down to being able to have—pick these people to put yard signs up. It matters.

Last point I'll make—and I'm talking too long, and I apologize. [*Laughter*] The last point I'll make is, we have over 100—is it 120 or 160? What's it up to now? Individual contributors?

Aide. Oh, 1.6—[*inaudible*].

The President. One-point-six million individual contributors; 550,000 more than before—than—since we started, new contributors. You know what the—of—97 percent of those contributors contributed less than \$200—97 percent.

There's a real groundswell going on because of you. It matters. It matters. And people are contributing \$5, \$10, \$30, \$50. And it's having a real impact and real effect. We have opened more campaign offices because of you all than he—doesn't—hasn't opened any that I'm aware of. I'm not being facetious. I'm not being facetious.

We're also in a situation where we're in a position that we're generating a paid staff. That's significant. And we're growing in every State. I've been to—every single—every single of the toss-up States so far.

And guess what? If you knock anybody who knows anything about polling, it's awful hard to poll these days. Because—no, I'm serious. But guess what? Even in the polls that are being used now, we're ahead in—35 polls, but—by the way—it's just about continuing to push.

And, again, one simple proposition: How do we give hard-working Americans an even shot, an even chance—an even chance to make it? Just that. Nothing more than that. And how do we move people together again?

And I think we can do it. I'm confident that we're going to be able to do it. And I feel very good about where we are because of all of you. But thank you for what you're doing. Again, I didn't mean to tell you so much. [*Laughter*] But thank you, thank you, thank you.

Pennsylvania General Election Campaign Director Amy Friedman. Well, Mr. President, I think we have a few folks eager to ask you questions, if we may.

The President. Sure.

Ms. Friedman. Absolutely. Sam.

Sam Kuchwara. Mr. President, what made you run for President?

The President. A simple proposition, and I was—I asked that question—I just came from my old home where I was raised in Scranton. A simple proposition that—just simply, people just want a shot. They just want an even shot and just to be able to realize the possibility that what they care about will matter with what will happen.

What made me run for President: In fact, when I moved from Scranton—my dad was born in Baltimore. They say—

[*The President imitated a Baltimore accent.*]

Baltimore—[*laughter*]—in Baltimore. And his dad was with the American Oil Company. And they opened up the American Oil Company, used to—AMOCO, it became. And the

Blaustein family owned it. He opened up York, Pennsylvania, then he opened up Scranton. And they moved to Scranton when my dad was a junior in high school.

And you know, it's—and so, I was born in Scranton, and then we moved back to Delaware. When we moved back to Delaware, one thing that I hadn't seen in Scranton—there were very few African Americans in Scranton when I was here in Lackawanna County—very few. But in Delaware, we have the eighth largest Black population as a percent of population of any State in the Nation.

And in addition to that, we're one of those border States that couldn't—that—it was a slave State that fought on the side of the North because it couldn't figure how to get to the South. [Laughter] No, I'm serious. So was Maryland. So was Tennessee. Anyway—and so I remember when we moved to Delaware, we lived on—in what later became section 8 housing. It was a long way—but very, very modest apartment complex was being built in Claymont with about 400 apartments.

And I remember that they'd drive—Mom would drive us up to school in the morning because it was too dangerous to—it was a—the Philadelphia Pike was an—access highway. It wasn't I-95, which is now the way to get there. But she was worried of us crossing the streets.

So I was in third grade. My sister was in first grade. And they'd drop us in the parking lot. And we used to watch—and I couldn't understand why this little Catholic school I went to, Holy Rosary—why this bus would go by when we pulled in the parking lot that had what was referred to then as—all full of "Colored" children. There were no Whites in it. And even though the major school—public school, Claymont High School, was a right-hand turn three blocks up.

I remember asking my mother why they couldn't come—why'd that bus go all the way downtown? And she said, "Because they're not allowed to go to school with White kids." "Not allowed to go to school with White kids."

And that had an enormous impression on me. And it got me engaged in the civil rights movement. I wasn't in any great shape, but I was a public—I became a public defender after getting a job with a fancy law firm.

My city of Wilmington, Delaware, was the only city in America occupied by the military for 10 months, with the National Guard standing on the corner with drawn bayonets for 10 months when Dr. King was assassinated because of the riots that occurred.

And so I got involved trying to change the Democratic Party and turn it into more—the conservative party on race was the Democratic Party in Delaware. And the Republican Party, which was the party of DuPont, was very, very restrictive on economic issues, but it was more open.

So I joined a group of senior members of the—Democratic Party to try to reform the Democratic Party and move it to more of a Northeastern Democratic Party. The Governor of Delaware could choose to be part of the Southern Governors' Conference or the Northeast. And the Democrats often chose to be part of the Southern Governors' Conference.

In the southern part of the State there is a canal that goes across the top of my State, the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal that cuts—bisects the State. And when you just go below that canal—and I'm not—this is not a criticism—

[*The President imitated a regional accent.*]

They talk at you like this. Eastern Shore of Maryland. Very southern in the way they talk and the way they move and everything.

And so I got involved in trying to change the party. And one thing led to another, and I remember they came to me and said they wanted me to run, the local folks. Trying to get people to run—just show up as Democrats in areas they—that they weren't able to win.

And so I got a call—I was a public defender part-time in a—and I had a law practice. I was starting alone. And with that, I remember a group of people from Elsmere, Delaware—the Democratic organization—came to see me, wanted me to run for the State Senate. And I said, "I can't do that because I'm just starting a law firm, and I can't go to Dover."

And they came back about 3 days later and said, "Well, why don't you run for the county council?" I said, "I can't do that." And they said, "Come here." And they walked me to my window in my office, and it looked across—and they said, "They meet there twice a week at night." [Laughter]

So they wanted me to run in a district no Democrat had ever run. And I said: "Well, at least I can do my job. I can go out and run. Make—demonstrate that we're running." And the problem is, I asked my sister who has graduated with honors from Delaware, who's smarter than me and ran my campaign. And she won a campaign where a Democrat had never won.

And all of a sudden, I was in the county council. And—but the Democrats—the Republicans saw something in me I didn't see, for—it's the God's truth. They saw in me that I was going to do something beyond that.

I was elected to a 4-year term. And what they did was, they reapportioned me to a 2-year term. So it was either up or out. And I was happy with that. I was prepared to leave and do my practice and work in the party.

And one thing led to another, and I won't bore you with the detail, but one day I showed up at an off-year convention, and I was in—I was in the motel after—the local motel getting changed after the afternoon session, go back to the evening session.

And I'd come down with some young activists—they were a little older than me, but still young activists—who were involved in trying to reform the party. And I was in one of those 8-by-10 bathrooms—you know they have a shower, a toilet, and a sink. And I got a towel on me and shaving cream, and I hear, "Bam, bam, bam," at my door really loudly. And I wonder, "What the hell is that?"

I thought it was this guy Bob Cunningham, who had a radio show, and couple of other guys. So I say, "Okay, okay, guys."

And I walked to the door and opened it up and standing there was the former Governor of the State of Delaware, Elbert N. Carvel, a big guy, about 6'5".

[The President imitated a regional accent.]

Talked at you like this. [Laughter] And the State representative who got defeated 4 years earlier as a Democratic State—who was retired—and one of the—from the family that had more so—more Senators appointed than any other family in American history, the Tunnells—and a former retired justice and the State chairman.

And they said—and I'm standing in a towel with shaving cream on my face. [Laughter] And with that, they looked at me and said—they come in and said: "We're coming—we just had dinner. We want to talk to you."

And I walked in, and I said, "Okay, gentlemen." And I ran to the bathroom thinking I could put something on. [Laughter] All I could do is take off the shaving cream. I had on a towel. I walked out—two headboards nailed to one side of the wall, the desk to the other side.

And I'm—they're—he's sitting on the end of the bed. And I'm sitting down, and they said, "Joe, we just had dinner, and we think you should run for the Senate." I said: "Run? Man, I'm not old enough." And the former Justice looked at me he said, "Joe, you obviously didn't do well in constitutional law." [Laughter] "You don't have to be—you have to be 30 to be sworn in, but you can be elected at any age. You'll be—17 days after, you'll be eligible.

One thing then, I don't know about you, but all of us who have some teacher or some professor we really had faith in. Well, my political philosophy professor at Delaware—which was between—Newark, Delaware—between Dover and my home—was one of those guys.

And I called him, and I said, "Can I stop by and see you?" And I remember seeing him and asking him my—a question: What he thinks I should do. He said, "Joe, remember what Plato said." I go, "What the hell did Plato say?" [Laughter] Seriously, it's an absolutely true story. He said, "Joe, the penalty good people pay for not being involved in politics is being governed by people worse than themselves." [Laughter] And I was opposed to the Vietnam war.

Anyway, one thing led to another. I ended up running not with any enthusiasm as I started. But we had the same kind of thing of—just a lot of young people and people who hadn't been deeply involved.

Just—there was a—we had a picnic for our volunteers at the end of the summer. And there was ads on the radio: "Do not take I-95 South. Biden is having a picnic. There was no accident." [Laughter] No, I'm serious. [Laughter]

Nixon won by 60 percent of the vote. We won by a rousing 3,100 votes. But my point is, it wasn't planned. I love reading these biographies of me that: "Biden knew he was going to run for President. He knew it was going to happen."

But look, folks, it matters, it matters what we do. You wouldn't be here. You wouldn't be here doing it—forget me. I mean, you wouldn't be here if you didn't think a lot was at stake. And we have enormous opportunities—enormous opportunities.

But I know that probably over-answers your question, but—[laughter].

Ms. Friedman. Amazing. Mr. President, thank you so, so much. Hasn't this been amazing?

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:29 p.m. at the Carpenters and Joiners Local 445 Training Center. In his remarks, he referred to former President Donald J. Trump; and Susan Bro, mother of Heather D. Heyer, who was killed in a vehicular attack in Charlottesville, VA, on August 12, 2017. He also referred to his brother Francis W. Biden and sister Valerie Biden Owens. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on April 17.

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