

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2024

Remarks on Efforts To Protect the United States Steel and Shipbuilding Industries in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

April 17, 2024

The President. Hello, Pittsburgh. Please have a seat.

Robert, thank you for that introduction and for sharing your story about being a third-generation steelworker and a Marine Corps veteran. Where are you? Over this side? *[Laughter]* There you are.

Well, I want to—thank you for the—your new president, by the way. Dave McCall has been a friend of mine and a friend of a former president. We miss him, but it's great to have you, Dave. You've been a good friend. And we're both longtime friends—*[applause]*. We're both longtime friends of Tom's as well. We miss him dearly.

Dave, you're doing a great job in his footsteps, and it's just going to get better, in my view.

There's an expression that comes to mind: "You go home with them that brung you to the dance." And you brought me to the dance. No joke.

The mayor and I are buddies. I told the mayor—and I mean it sincerely—the first outfit ever to endorse me as a 29-year-old kid running in a tough year for United States Senate, making me the second youngest man ever elected to the Senate, was a guy named Hughie Carcella. And back in those days, the steel—we had a big steelworkers—we had a lot of steelworkers in Claymont, Delaware, where I was from, because they worked in Worth Steel Company.

And I'll never forget coming to me and saying, "We're going to get you help." And I came out to Pittsburgh and you—and the steelworkers endorsed me. And it changed everything.

Nixon won my State—*[applause]*—Nixon won my State of Delaware with 60 percent of the vote, and I won with an astounding 3,100 majority—*[laughter]*—3,100 majority. And it's thanks to you. I really mean it.

I'm Pittsburgh and—because of—and I really mean it: My love for Pittsburgh goes back to my Scranton days. My Grandfather Finnegan always talked about Pittsburgh.

Any rate, to make a long story short, the bottom line, for all kidding aside, is I'm President because of you guys. I really am. And I'm proud, as was mentioned earlier—I'm proud to be the most pro-union President in American history, for real.

Where I was raised, it ain't labor; it's unions—unions. I had an uncle. He'd say, "Joey, you are union from belt buckle to shoe sole." *[Laughter]*

Well, I want to thank some folks who had my back and—had to stay back in Washington and couldn't be here today. Representatives Summer Lee and—you know, I—she—by the way, there are votes going on—and Chris DeLuzio. And Senator Bobby Casey is one of my closest friends, as his dad was. And John Fetterman, who I want to stay on his side no matter what. *[Laughter]*

And thank you to all the State and local leaders here, including the mayor of Pittsburgh, Ed Gainey. Ed, you're the best buddy. You've really stepped up.

And a great leader, JoJo Burgess, an Army veteran from a steelworking family. He was my guest at the State of the Union just a couple of years ago. He came back home to Washington,

Pennsylvania, and decided to run for mayor, and he won. And he's still working as a steelworker. But that's America.

Look, folks, it was—I was—almost exactly 5 years ago that I began my campaign for President right here in Pittsburgh, where I announced. I said one of the reasons I was running was to rebuild the backbone of America, the middle class. And it was already mentioned—it's been mentioned a thousand times, thankfully, since then—that the backbone of America has a steel spine. It really does have a steel spine.

You heard me say it before: Wall Street didn't build America; the middle class didn't build—built America, and you guys built the middle class. Unions built it. And that's why I'm here today to announce a series of actions that I stand by you, the American steelworker.

Look, first, U.S. Steel has been an iconic American company for more than a century. And it should remain a totally American company: American owned, American operated, by American union steelworkers, the best in the world. And it's—that's going to happen. I promise you.

Second, American steelworkers can outwork, outcompete as long as they have fair competition. But for too long, the Chinese Government has poured state money into Chinese steel companies, pushing them to make so much steel—as much as possible—subsidized by the Chinese Government.

Because Chinese steel companies produce a lot more steel than China needs, it ends up dumping the extra steel into the global markets at unfairly low prices. And the prices are unfairly low because China's steel companies don't need to worry about making a profit, because the Chinese Government is subsidizing them so heavily.

They're not competing, they're cheating. They're cheating. And we've seen the damage here in America. You know, back in the early 2000s, the Chinese steel began flooding the market—flooding the market with—in steel towns all across Pennsylvania and Ohio, who were hit very hard.

Between those years, 2000 and 2010, more than 14,000 steelworkers [and ironworkers; White House correction] in Pennsylvania and Ohio lost their jobs—14,000. Let me ask you: Are we going to let that happen again?

Audience members. No!

The President. I promise you that I'm not going to let that happen again.

Look, right now my U.S. Trade Representative is investigating trade practices by the Chinese Government regarding steel and aluminum. If that investigation confirms these anti-competitive trade practices, then I'm calling on her to consider tripling the tariff rates for both steel imports and aluminum imports from China.

And we know that Chinese steel and aluminum are being imported into America through Mexico that avoids the tariff. And just yesterday I had a delegation down in Mexico meeting with AMLO, the Mexican President, to address this issue. Mexico and the United States are going to work together to solve it, I promise you. I promise you.

My administration is also taking a real hard look at the Chinese Government's industrial practices when it comes to global shipbuilding, which is critical to our economy. We depend on a fleet of commercial shipping vessels that carry American products around the world.

Shipbuilding is critical to our national security, including the strength of the United States Navy. That's why my administration takes it very seriously that U.S. Steelworkers, along with four other unions, have asked us to investigate whether the Chinese Government is using anticompetitive practice to artificially lower prices in the shipbuilding industry.

We've heard you.

And if the Chinese Government is doing that and the unfair tactics to undermine free and fair trade competition in the shipping industry, I will take action. I—that investigation is going on.

Taken together, these are strategic and targeted actions that are going to protect American workers and ensure fair competition.

Meanwhile, my predecessor and the MAGA Republicans want across-the-board tariffs on all imports from all countries. That could badly hurt American consumers. It's estimated it would cost the average American family an average of \$1,500 a year if they succeeded in doing that.

Trump simply doesn't get it.

For years, I've heard my—many of my Republican and even Democratic friends say that China is on the rise and America has been falling behind. You may have noticed, the last 2 years, I've been the only one disagreeing with that.

I've always believed we've [they've; White House correction] got it all wrong. America is rising. And we have the best economy in the world, which we do.

And since I've come to office, our GDP is up, our trade deficit with China is down to the lowest level in over a decade, and we're standing up against the Chinese Government unfair economic practice and industrial overcapacity.

And we are the strongest economic—economy in the world.

In addition—and by the way, China has got more—I always say to my colleagues—when I meet other world leaders, I say: "Would you trade places with China? Would you trade places with their problems?" They've got a population that is more people in retirement than working. They're not—they're not importing any—they're not bringing—they're xenophobic—nobody coming—else coming in. They've got real problems.

I'm not looking for a fight with China. I'm looking for competition, but fair competition.

In addition, we're standing up for peace and stability across the Taiwan Straits. I've revitalized our partnerships in—and our alliances in the Pacific with India, Australia, South Korea, the Philippines, and other Pacific Island nations.

I've made sure that we have the most advanced technologies that we've developed and invented, and they can't be sent to China or undermine our—because it will undermine our national security. When I spoke with Xi Jinping, he said, "Why?" I said, "Because you use it for all the wrong reasons, so you're not going to get those advanced computer chips."

Finally, for all this tough talk on China, it never occurred to my predecessor to do any of that.

The bottom line is that I want fair competition with China, not conflict, and we're in a stronger position to win the economic competition of the 21st century against China or anyone else because we're investing in America and American workers again, finally.

You know, there's a law, back in the thirties, that passed when we—about whether unions could exist. There's a provision that no—very few people—very few Presidents ever paid attention to. If a President is sent money from the Congress to do something for the public, he must use American products and must use American workers, unless you couldn't find them. Well, guess what? A lot of them didn't find them, except me. [Laughter] No, I mean it. Not a joke.

Everything we build, we build with American product and with American workers, period. And it doesn't violate any trade agreement.

Thanks to my bipartisan infrastructure law, we announced over 51,000 new infrastructure projects all across America—so far—we're just getting started—including roads, bridges, ports, airports, clean water systems, high-speed affordable internet, all across America.

You may remember, my predecessor promised "Infrastructure Week" after week after week—[*laughter*]—for 4 years and never built a damn thing. Nothing. [*Applause*] No, I'm serious: Nothing.

And by the way, these projects are going to be using American-made materials, like American steel and American concrete, creating good-paying American jobs—union jobs.

Why? As I said—I've already said it, but since the thirties, the law has said we could do that. And that's exactly what I'm doing. And we're buying American. We are selling American. It's all about America. We buy America.

And past administrations, including my predecessor, failed to uphold that "Buy American" provision. Not anymore. That's over. We—American products and American workers.

Look, folks, you know, I signed the Inflation Reduction Act, the most significant law taking on climate change ever anywhere in the world—anywhere in the world. We didn't get anybody to vote for it, other than my Democratic friends. Okay?

Well, guess what? That includes billions of dollars in investments in industries of the future, including clean American steel. It's clean because the way we produce it here emits much less carbon than the steel made in China.

Last month, my administration announced the largest investment ever in clean manufacturing in American history—in all of American history. It included up to \$1.5 billion in six clean steel projects across America—\$1.5 billion. It's going to create and support thousands of union jobs, including at Butler Works and Lyndora—over in Lyndora, Pennsylvania.

My predecessor and his Republican friends in Congress want to repeal that law that would cut those jobs. And it would cut the jobs if you repeal the law. I'm serious.

The—I know when I say these things, you wonder can that—could they be—possibly be that stupid? [*Laughter*] I shouldn't say it that way. [*Laughter*] But I'm serious. Think about it. Just check it out. That's what they want to do. But that's not all.

My predecessor rolled back protections for American workers. He opposed the increase overall Federal minimum wage. He put union busters on the National Labor Relations Board.

Audience members. Boo!

The President. For real. Well, you know he did. Think of what the Board looked like before I became President. Not a joke. Not a joke.

Meanwhile, since I was sworn in as President, because of you, look at what we've achieved together. Through my American Rescue Plan, I enacted the Butch Lewis Act, the most significant law—[*applause*]—the most significant law for union workers and retirees in 50 years.

Think of what would happen if we didn't get that passed. And none of them wanted to help me. But we got it done. It protected the hard-earned pensions of more than 120,000 steelworkers. Folks, you've had my back, and I promise I have your back.

We made that happen while my predecessor never lifted a finger to help.

I also increased the Federal minimum wage for Federal contracts. The people I've appointed to the National Labor Relations Board actually care about American workers.

So far, we've created 15 million—as mentioned earlier—new jobs, a record in a term of a President, 492,000 new jobs so far in Pennsylvania alone. Under my predecessor, who is busy right now—[*laughter*—Pennsylvania lost 275,000 jobs. I mean, let's just look at the facts.

On my watch, unemployment hasn't been this low for this long in 50 years. That's 50 years. Wages are rising. American manufacturing is booming. We've created up close to 800,000 new manufacturing jobs since I became President, including 28,000 manufacturing jobs right here in Pennsylvania.

We've attracted \$680 billion—let me say it again—\$680 billion in private-sector investment in advanced manufacturing and clean energy here in America, including \$4 billion just here in the State of Pennsylvania so far.

Folks, instead of importing foreign products and exporting American jobs, we're exporting American products and creating American jobs. Think about—think of all the time—think of the last years where they'd go—American—corporate America wanted to go find the cheapest labor in the world, send the jobs overseas, and then import the product home. Not anymore.

Together, we're doing what's always worked best for this country. We're investing in all of America, in all Americans.

And we're building an economy from the middle out—not—and the bottom up, not the top down. Because when we do that, the poor have a ladder up, and the middle class do well, and the wealthy still do very well. We all do well. [*Applause*] No, for real.

Look, let me close with this. I just came from my hometown, Scranton, Pennsylvania, a place like Pittsburgh that sort of climbs into your heart and never leaves you. [*Laughter*] And it really doesn't.

My mom didn't live in Scranton since she was—1954, but when you'd ask Mom where is she from, she'd say, "Scranton." "Scranton." [*Laughter*] Well, where you learn basic—a basic value set, like you do here.

Money doesn't determine your worth, I would always be told. Everyone is entitled to be treated with dignity and respect. My dad used to say: "A job is about a lot more than a paycheck—worth a lot more than a paycheck, pal. It's about your dignity. It's about respect. It's about being treated with respect."

And he'd say—he'd always—and I give you my word. These are phrases he'd always use. He'd say, "You know, not only being able to give—have respect, but being able to look your kid in the eye and say, 'Honey, it's going to be okay,' and mean it—mean it."

Look, everyone—everyone deserves a fair shot—just a fair shot. And we're going to leave no one behind.

Folks, that's my view of the economy—from Scranton, from Pittsburgh, from the thousands of working and middle class neighborhoods all across America. It's a future we are building together.

As I said, I always think of my dad. I really mean it. My dad, during the war, he didn't get to go to college. He got a—he was from—as they say in Baltimore——

[At this point, the President imitated a Baltimore accent.]

Baltimore—[laughter]. He was from—he was from Baltimore, and then his father, then, worked for American Oil Company and moved to Wilmington and then to Scranton to open up business—to open up stations.

And—but he always would come home, and he'd go back and close the business. He didn't own it; he was a—managed a dealership. And he'd say, "A job is a lot more than a paycheck." And it really is. It's about treating people with dignity. It's about treating them with respect. And look, it's going to be okay. It's going to be okay.

Folks, because of you, the American worker, I've never been more optimistic about America's future. And I mean it. I really, truly am.

When my son died, I decided I was—he had spent a year in Iraq, and he—unfortunately, his hooch was next to a burn pit. And he went one of the most fit guys in his regiment, and then he came home with stage 4 glioblastoma. They're more brain injuries for folks fighting in Iraq than any other place in the world.

Remember what happened to all those firemen in 9/11? Same thing happened because these burn pits are just awful. They put everything from human waste to—anyway—and I—and so I wasn't going to run. But what happened was, when he passed, you remember that—right after that—well, you don't remember him passing in 2015. And I wasn't going to run. I was going to write a book about inflection points in American history, where the actions we take in a short period of time determine what happens in the next five or six decades. Well, that's one of the places we're at right now.

And when those folks came walking out of those fields—down in Charlottesville, Virginia—carrying Nazi banners, singing the same garbage that they sang in Hitler's streets in Germany in the thirties, carrying torches, accompanied by the Ku Klux Klan, and a young woman was killed, I decided that I had to run. I had to run. Our democracy is at stake, and it really is.

But you know what changes it? When you make the economy grow. When you stand up and ordinary people have an even shot and they're not at all susceptible to the garbage that's fed from these guys. And it's pure garbage.

I'm supposed to stop. I shouldn't keep going. [Laughter]

Well, folks, look, look, we've got to just remember who we are. And I can't—well, when I left Scranton today, I wanted to go to the war memorial that has the names of all the Scrantonians who died in World War II etched into a granite wall, because I wanted to see where my uncle—"Uncle Bosie," Ambrose J. Finnegan—where his name was etched.

Back at—when D-Day occurred and—on Sunday, the next day, my mother's four brothers all went down to the recruiting station and joined the military. Every one of them volunteered.

And my uncle—they called him Uncle—Ambrose—instead of "Brosie," they called him "Bosie." My Uncle Bosie was a hell of an athlete, they tell me, when he was a kid. And he became an Army Air Corps, before the Air Force came along. He flew those single-engine planes as reconnaissance over war zones.

And he got shot down in New Guinea, and they never found the body because there used to be—there were a lot of cannibals, for real, in that part of New Guinea.

And then my son volunteered to go to Iraq for a year. And he came back with stage 4 glioblastoma. And they—and they gave—like many of you, risked your lives and you know people who gave their lives for the country. They're heroes.

But one of the things that I—as I was doing that today, I was reminded of what my opponent said in Paris not too long ago. They asked him if he would go visit American gravesites. He said, "No," he wouldn't do it, because they were all "suckers" and "losers."

I'm not making that up. His staff who was with him acknowledge it today. "Suckers" and "losers." That man doesn't deserve to have been the Commander in Chief for my son, my uncle.

So, folks, we've got a lot of work to do, but I'm confident we can do it. And I mean it. I've never been more optimistic about our possibilities as a nation.

So let's go out and get—[inaudible].

We're the United States of America. There's nothing beyond our capacity—nothing.

Thank you, thank you, thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:29 p.m. at the United Steelworkers headquarters. In his remarks, he referred to Rob Hutchison, member of United Steelworkers Local 1219, U.S. Steel's Edgar Thomson Works in Braddock, PA; David McCall, international president, United Steelworkers; President Andrés Manuel López Obrador of Mexico; and President Xi Jinping of China.

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