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Remarks at the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Construction and Maintenance Conference
April 19, 2024

The President. Hello! Hello, hello, hello! It's good to be home.

Thank you, thank you, thank you. As my mother would say, "God love you." Please have a seat if you have one. I don't want—[*laughter*]—want you all to have to stand for me. [*Laughter*]

Audience member. Four more years, Joe!

The President. Well, I tell you what, man——

Audience members. Four more years! Four more years! Four more years!

The President. The reason I got the first 4 years is the IBEW, and that's no malarkey. You guys stood up first.

Kenny, thanks for that introduction. I tell you what, I caught the tail end of the little film there. Pretty impressive. He's now a movie star. [*Laughter*]

Look, most of all, I want to thank Kenny and all of you for your partnership and your friendship. Union workers, IBEW, I'm President, and that's not—no malarkey, because of you. That's no joke. I wouldn't be standing here had you not stepped up when you did in 2020.

I was home in Scranton, Pennsylvania, where I was raised, and I visited a—the place I used to live in, et cetera. And I tell you what, my grandfather Ambrose Finnegan, he'd be proud as hell I'm listed as the most pro-union President in history. He'd—[*applause*].

I had an uncle named Ed Finnegan. He'd say, "Joey, you are union from belt buckle to shoe sole." [*Laughter*] Well, I tell you what, it's because you built the country. You're proof of what I've always known.

And I mean this sincerely. I've been saying it for a long time, and it's finally getting through—not to you, but to everybody. Wall Street didn't build America. The middle class built America. And unions—unions—built the middle class. And that's no—you built the middle class. There would be no middle class without you.

Folks, you've been hosting this conference for a long time. But it's fair to say in the last 4 years, there's been more excitement and energy than ever—of all the work you're doing. I know because I see you all across America as I go across the country.

Thanks to the bipartisan infrastructure law, 51,000 new infrastructure projects have been announced so far, and we're just beginning—roads, bridges, ports, airports, clean water systems, affordable high-speed internet—all across America, installed by IBEW workers.

I said when you guys endorsed me: "When I think of climate, I think of unions. I think of jobs. Jobs." Improved power grids, new offshore wind turbines put up by the IBEW workers; a national network of 500,000 electric vehicle stations are going to be built by IBEW workers.

And let's hear it for Davis-Bacon requirements. They guarantee these projects will pay a prevailing wage. Project labor agreements that make sure they hire highly skilled workers who have a voice on the job. And by the way, these projects are using American-made materials, creating even more good-paying American jobs—union jobs.

You know, since the 1930s—and I have to admit to you, in my early days in the Senate, I didn't realize this law said it would—the law that established the rights of a union to organize back in the thirties—well, that law said—a little piece in it no one paid much attention to.

The law said that when the Federal Government spends taxpayers' dollars, it has to—it has to—buy American products with it and it has to use American labor. But that was honored in a—in the exception. The vast majority of the Presidents didn't do it, and the last guy didn't even know it. [*Laughter*] A lot of things he doesn't know.

But look, that's "Buy American." Past administrations, including my predecessor, failed to uphold it. But not anymore. My administration uses American products and American labor to build those products.

And by the way, for all you trade—skilled trade representatives out there, it's totally within all the rules and regulations. And there's no violation. We're not violating anything, man, except, we're showing the world what we can do.

At the same time, we're making the most significant climate investments ever. When I think—I said, when I think of climate, I think of jobs: union jobs, good-paying jobs, many that don't require a college degree. And that's what we're seeing.

We've attracted $700 billion in private investments in advanced manufacturing, clean energy, and more here in America, creating tens of thousands of good-paying IBEW jobs.

The bottom line is—this is not an exaggeration—the next decade and beyond, you'll be coming to this conference seeing how critical the IBEW is and how transformative the project—the process you're going to be making for the country. And I mean transformative.

Take nuclear power, the biggest source of clean energy. It employs over 60,000 workers, including many of you. The key to meeting the goal of a 100-percent clean power grid by 2035 depends a lot on it. That's why we're keeping existing plants open, restarting shuttered plants, and building America's first new nuclear plants in decades.

And we're investing to make sure America leads the way on new technologies, like advanced small-modular reactors of the future. It also means manufacturing the fuel that's needed to run these reactors.

For too long, we've relied on imported uranium to power nuclear reactors, imports from places like Russia, who we can't trust at all. My administration is working to change all that. We're investing $3.4 billion—$3.4 billion—in producing advanced nuclear fuel right here in America.

You know, folks, this is—I know we're going to look back on this 20 years from now and be talking about what a revolutionary period this was for the country. We're going to make a real gigantic difference.

Today I can announce that the IBEW plant in southern Ohio has already produced the first 200 pounds of that powerful enriched uranium, the first ever—first ever—made in America. And it's on track to produce nearly a ton by the end of the year, enough to power 100,000 homes in this country.

Folks, thanks to your partnership revitalizing key American industries, we're reducing reliance on imported oil, creating more jobs for IBEW workers. So far, more than 2,000 new clean energy projects have come on line nationwide since I took office, creating tens of thousands of good-paying jobs.

We're giving tax breaks that are five times greater to projects that are prevailing—providing a prevailing wage. If you don't provide a prevailing wage, you don't get the tax break. And we use registered apprenticeships to train their workers. Look, we've invested $440 million to expand registered apprenticeships programs.

Most Americans may not know—and I love it. And you guys should talk more about it, in my humble opinion. Everybody thinks: "I want to be an electrician; I'll show up, and I . . ." "Well, here. Here, here's your card." Come on, man. [*Laughter*] Think about it.

You—by the way, go on out and ask people who know you—that you're acquainted with who aren't in the business at all, "What's it take to be an electrician?" You say: "Oh, well, you just say—[*inaudible*]. You get a little bit of training." Four to five years of training to become an electrician. You're the best in the world. That's why it's the—[*inaudible*].

No, I really mean it. [*Applause*] I mean it. You're the best in the world. It's like having to go college, for God's sake. I'm serious. And I tell you what, every businessman I talk to, I remind them of who you are. Not a joke. Not a joke.

And once workers are trained, we're making sure they get the good pay and benefits they deserve.

Through my American Rescue Plan, I also enacted the Butch Lewis Act, the most prolabor union worker law for retirees in 50 years. All we're doing is protecting pensions for thousands of IBEW workers and others. The idea made—they made it hard for you to get it done is just—it blows my mind.

But we made it happen, while my predecessor never lifted a finger to do help—any help. A matter of fact, he lifted a finger—he put a thumb on it. Look, not only that, he put union busters on the National Labor Relations Board. The people I've appointed to the National Labor Relations Board actually care about American workers. No, I'm not kidding.

And despite the Supreme Court and our Republican friends trying to block us, they haven't stopped me from pursuing an alternative path to relieve the crushing burden of student debt. That includes forgiving loans for vocational schools, community college, and some apprentice programs as well.

And by the way, all these things are saving America money. We're not costing money. It's saving America. It's growing the economy, for God's sake. People are doing better.

I could go on, but I'm not going to. I'm going to resist the temptation. [*Laughter*] Because, boy, I'm tempted these days. [*Laughter*]

Together, we're doing what always worked best for this country: We're investing in America. It's—that's not complicated. We're investing in Americans—not just America, Americans—building an economy from the middle out and the bottom up, not the top down—not the top down. Because when you do that, the poor have a ladder up, the middle class does very well, and the wealthy still do very well, except they don't pay enough taxes.

By the way, just parenthetically, you know how much—we have a thousand billionaires in America. You know what the average Federal tax rate is for them? Billionaire—billion—not million, billion: 8.3-percent Federal tax.

Audience members. Boo!

The President. No, I'm serious. Isn't it bizarre? Anybody willing to trade their tax rate for yours—[*laughter*]—raise your hand.

Look—and, folks, our plan is working. So far, we've created 15 million new jobs. Unemployment hasn't been this low for this long in 50 years. And that includes record-low unemployment for Black and Hispanic workers as well. Wages are rising. Manufacturing is booming. We've created close to eight hundred—you've created close to 800,000 new manufacturing jobs since I became President.

And I've got to tell you, when I was a Senator and Vice President, I got so sick and tired—I know a little about corporations. There are more corporations in—[*laughter*]—registered in my home State of Delaware than every other State in the Union combined. They're not all bad guys, but they ain't all good guys, either. [*Laughter*]

Look, think what's happened, all kidding aside, for the years—the previous 15 years, 20 years. Corporations look for the cheapest labor in the world, sent the jobs—sent the product to those—sent the jobs to those laborers, whether they're in Asia or Europe, wherever they were, and then they sent the product back home.

Well, instead of importing foreign products, I'm exporting—[*inaudible*]—their products, and we're making those jobs American jobs, created here in America where they belong. It's not that complicated. [*Applause*] No, I really mean it. Five hundred fifty thousand jobs brought home—home, home, home.

But it's pretty basic stuff. I won't get off course here talking about chips, but all those computer chips, we invented. We made—about the tip of the finger, the size of it. Well, guess what? I—you know, I went over to South Korea. They said, "What are you doing that for?" I said, "I'm going to get them to invest in America instead of us having to import all of this stuff." We had this space between what we needed and what we could get.

Well, guess what? We've been—we created five hundred—$50 billion in investments here. They're bringing it here. And I asked the guy at Samsung why. You know what he said to me? He said, "You have the best workers in the world, and you have the safest place in the world to invest."

But look, folks, my predecessor and his MAGA allies have a very different view. He promised "Infrastructure Week" every week for 4 years and never built a damn thing. [*Laughter*] That's a fact.

Now, he's saying Republicans, they want—this is not your father's Republican Party, this is a different breed of cat, these MAGA Republicans. Now they want to repeal the climate law that would gut all those new jobs and industries we're creating here in America.

My predecessor rolled back protection for American workers. He opposed increases in Federal minimum wage. And he was proud—very proud—of his $2 trillion tax cut when he was President that overwhelmingly benefited the wealthy and created the—and the biggest corporations and exploded—exploded the Federal debt. I cut the Federal deficit. He exploded it.

By the way, this is no—there's no exaggeration here. It's going to expire. And if I'm reelected, it's going to stay expired.

Look, let me close with this. There are two different ways of looking at our economy. Some folks learn very different lessons growing up than you and I did. I learned the best way to get—I—you know, they learned and my opponent learned the best way to get rich is inherit it. [*Laughter*] I can't argue much with that, but they—you know? [*Laughter*] They learned that paying taxes is for working people, not the superwealthy. They learned that telling people "you're fired" is something to be laughed about.

Not where I come from, not where I was raised. I guess that's how they look at the world from Park Avenue and Mar-a-Lago, but I grew up in Scranton, Pennsylvania, and Claymont, Delaware, working class and middle class towns, like many of you did as well.

Nobody handed you anything. You paid your taxes. And being told you were fired wasn't entertainment, it was a devastating nightmare to a family. Folks, where we come from it matters.

That's why when I look at the economy, I don't see it through the eyes of Mar-a-Lago, I literally see through the eyes of Scranton and where I grew up and my grandpop's kitchen table. I see it through the eyes of working people like you and the basic value set you represent: honesty, decency, hard work, faith. It matters. Fairness matters.

And if you believe like I do everyone in America deserves just an even shot—no guarantee, just a shot—but guaranteed to have a shot. In America, we leave nobody behind where we come from.

Folks, that's the America you all are building. That's the America you're recreating. And let me ask you: Are you going to keep doing it? I know we can do this because of you, the American worker.

And I give you my—I've never been more optimistic about our future than I am today. Folks, we just have to remember who the hell we are. We're the United States of America. And there's nothing beyond our capacity—nothing, nothing, nothing.

God bless you all. Thank you, thank you. And on behalf of America, thank you. You've really done it. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Audience members. Four more years! Four more years! Four more years!

The President. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:08 p.m. at the Washington Hilton hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Kenneth W. Cooper, international president, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers; former President Donald J. Trump; David M. Prouty and Gwynn A. Wilcox, members, and Jennifer A. Abruzzo, General Counsel, National Labor Relations Board; and Lee Jae-yong, vice chairman, Samsung Electronics Co., Ltd.

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