

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2024

Remarks on Earth Day in Triangle, Virginia

April 22, 2024

Hello, hello, hello. Thank you, Za'Nyia, for sharing your story that embodies the spirit of Earth Day.

On this day 54 years ago, with literally toxic rivers burning, air filled with pollution, millions of Americans from every age and background rallied together to stand for our environment and for future generations.

I got to know Senator Gordon Nelson—Gaylord Nelson, excuse me—from Wisconsin when I got to the Senate. And he organized the first Earth Day. I later introduced the first climate bill in the United States Senate. And all these years later, as President, I was able to sign into law the Inflation Reduction Act, the most significant [climate; White House correction] investment everywhere in the history of the world, and we're just getting started.

Earth Day pushed the country forward, leading to Environmental Protection Agency, and we're fortunate enough to have with us the EPA Administrator Michael Regan. Where are you, Michael? Stand up. Get up. Get up. I stole him from Carolina. We're not letting him go back. [Laughter]

And we're joined by our great Secretary of Interior, Deb Haaland. Deb, stand up. The first Native American ever to serve in a Cabinet.

And AmeriCorps CEO Michael Smith—Michael, where are you? There you—[applause]—joined by Members of the Congress, including Ed Markey of Massachusetts, who, by the way, thought this was an important idea a long time ago and talked about dealing with the Climate Corps—one—needed one. Ed, we owe you a lot, pal. [Applause] We owe you a lot.

And Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont, who understands what beautiful territory looks like up in Vermont and has done everything in his power to protect it. Bernie, you're the best.

And Representative Ocasio-Cortez of New York—you know, I learned a long time ago: Listen to that lady. [Laughter] Listen to that lady. We're going to talk more about another part of the world too, real quickly.

Look, joined by all of you advocates and community leaders, that's—this is a good day.

It's fitting to be here in Prince William Forest Park. On March 31, 1933, during the Great Depression, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt created the Climate [Civilian; White House correction] Conservation Corps, which is talked about a little bit, to put Americans to work to conserve our country's natural resources. Thousands—thousands—of young Americans from the Civilian Conservation Corps built this park, providing jobs, recreation, hope, and healing at the time.

We know today we face another kind of existential threat that requires equally bold and clear action. As President, I've seen the devastating toll of climate firsthand. Since I've been President, I've flown over all the major fires and the thousands upon thousands of acres that have burned flat by wildfires, more acres than the entire State of Maryland combined. I've met with families whose homes were wiped off the map by devastating hurricanes, floods, and storms.

Last year was Earth Day's [the Earth's; White House correction] hottest day [year; White House correction] on record. And, over the last 2 years, natural disasters and extreme weather in America have caused \$270 billion—\$270 billion—in damages. And the impacts we're seeing—

decades in the making because of inaction—are only going to get worse, more frequent, ferocious, and costly.

But since Kamala and I took office, we've been acting. And today I'm proud to announce two major steps forward. The first: Energy costs are among the biggest costs for families to budget, particularly poor and middle-income families. In fact, low-income families can spend up to 30 percent of their paychecks on their energy bills. It's outrageous.

To reduce family energy costs for folks with low and moderate incomes today, the Environmental Protection Agency will invest \$7 billion from my Inflation Reduction Act in a new program called "Solar for All."

It will award grants—60 grants across the country to States, Territories, Tribal governments, municipalities, and nonprofits to develop programs that enable low-income and disadvantaged communities to benefit from residential solar power. And it's a big deal.

This new Solar for All program means that 900,000 households—900,000—will have solar on their rooftops for the first time and soon. Millions of families will save over \$400 a year on utility bills. And that's \$350 million nationwide. And my dad said it matters what's there at the end of the—end of the paycheck. But a month is out, do you have anything left?

It means we'll cut more than 5 million metric tons of carbon pollution annually.

And, folks, Solar for All will give us more breathing room and cleaner breathing room. It's going to also create 200,000 good-paying and union jobs over the 5—[*applause*]*—over the 5 years in communities that need them most: fenceline communities.*

You know, as I always say, I think about climate—when I think about it, I think not only about health and safety, but I think about jobs. And that brings me to my second announcement.

Last fall, I talked about a historic new program that my administration was launching, with the help of my colleagues on my right here, called the American Climate Corps. As I said—and I'm not being solicitous—Ed Markey talked about that long before—long before.

It's patterned after the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Peace Corps and AmeriCorps [AmeriCorps; White House correction]. Like them, it brings out the best in young people to do what's best for America and will put tens of thousands of young people to work at the forefront of our climate resilience and energy future—clean energy future.

Today I'm proud to announce that Americans across the country can now apply—now apply to become the first members of the American Climate Corps. We're recruiting for over 2,000 positions in 36 States to start with—in Washington DC, Puerto Rico, with many on the way. Just go to Climate Corps—as mentioned already, climatecorps.gov to apply. You'll get paid to fight climate change, learning how to install those solar panels, fight wildfires, rebuild wetlands, weatherize homes, and so much more that's going to protect the environment and build a clean energy economy.

To ensure a pathway to good union jobs and careers, you'll have access to pre-apprenticeship training through a new partnership we're announcing today with the North American Building Trade Unions [Trades Union; White House correction]. And when—[*applause*].

As you may remember, when I announced in 2020, I initially didn't announce my climate position until I talked to the unions, because unions were all against—they thought climate cost them jobs. Well, guess what? IBEW stepped up, and they all stepped up, and now our strongest support comes from union members.

When you finish your service—when you finish your term of service, you'll also be eligible for a streamlined path to Federal Government jobs related to climate and clean energy.

We're also announcing a new collaboration with Bloomberg Philanthropies that puts American Climate Corps members in energy communities—like former coalmining communities, power plant communities—that have powered our Nation, but have been fenceline communities that have hurt very badly for generations.

Today—today's announcement builds upon an unprecedented and historic action we've already taken to tackle the climate crisis, deliver environmental justice, and build a clean energy future. Just look at the last few weeks alone.

To ensure clean energy [air; White House correction], we issued new standards for chemical plants that emit toxic pollution. Now it's ending. And because of the Clean Air Act, we're going to reduce the number of people at risk for cancer in fenceline communities, who have been smothered for decades by pollution, by 96 percent, according to the studies.

And by the way, parenthetically, you know, my State of Delaware, which everybody thinks is a wealthy State—I lived in a place called Claymont, Delaware. It's in that arc that goes up into Philadelphia—into Pennsylvania and to the Delaware River. More energy plants, more oil refineries than anywhere, including Houston, Texas. And I lived in just—literally, the school I went to was literally a quarter mile from that border.

And the prevailing winds were southeast, where we lived. So there was never any incentive for the Pennsylvanians to move to do something, but it affected Delaware. And we had the highest cancer rate in the 1970s of any nation—any State in the Nation. And guess what? A lot of us from—me included, ended up with bronchial asthma and many other diseases.

Fenceline communities are the ones we have to help first, because they've been taking the brunt of all this.

To ensure clean drinking water, we issued the first-ever national drinking water standard that will protect people from exposure to harmful substances known as "forever chemicals." And after 30 years of inadequate protections, we finally are going to put a ban on asbestos, which we know causes cancer.

It's all part of a plan to reassert America's climate leadership. We rejoined the Paris Agreement and sparked a domestic clean energy manufacturing boom, providing incentives for 80,000 farmers to implement climate-smart agricultural practice. So plant what absorbs carbon from the air and get them—pay them for doing it.

We've quadrupled the number of electric vehicles sold, and 11,000 dealerships have now signed up to sell more.

We're modernizing our infrastructure with better roads and highways and energy grids and more so they can withstand and recover from extreme weather.

Already underway, we're replacing every single lead pipe in America so everyone can turn on a faucet, home or at school, and drink clean water that doesn't contain lead.

We're also reducing flood risk for communities, improving drought resilience, and conserving 41 million acres of our most precious and sacred lands and water. I committed that I'm going to try to reserve—take—of all nondeveloped land and waters, we're going to take 30 percent of it by 2030 and make sure it is conserved, period. We're well on our way.

We've already attracted nearly \$700 billion in private sector investments in advanced manufacturing and clean energy, creating tens of thousands of jobs here in America.

And all across the board, we're lifting up communities and workers too often left out in urban, rural, suburban, Tribal communities all across the country.

But, folks, despite the overwhelming devastation in red and blue States, there are still those who deny climate is in crisis. Our MAGA Republican friends don't seem to think it's in crisis. They don't want our—they actually want to repeal the Inflation Reduction Act, which provides the funding for a vast majority of these projects, and roll back clean air—protections for clean air and clean water.

And you—I'm not going to go into it now, but you—I'm not making it up. It's real. Just listen to what they say. Anyone in or out of government who willfully denies the impacts of climate change is condemning the American people to a very dangerous future and the world, I might add. They want to take us backwards, sideline our workers, let China and others lead the race for clean energy.

I'm determined—absolutely determined—that we move forward—we move forward.

Let me close with this. In 1933—and it was referenced by the Congresslady—that when Roosevelt outlined the Civilian Conservation Corps, he said, quote—and I'm quoting—"More important than the material gains will be the moral and spiritual value of such work." He always put it in the context that went beyond just what the immediate need was.

I'd say the same holds true for what we're doing here today. It has a moral imperative.

And I've never been more optimistic about America's future. We just have to remember who we are. We're the United States of America. And there is nothing—nothing—beyond our capacity if we work together.

And so happy Earth Day, folks. And God bless you all, and may God protect our troops.

We're going to get this done, I promise you, come hell or high water. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Come on up.

[At this point, the President welcomed Sen. Bernard Sanders, Reps. Edward J. Markey and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, and AmeriCorps member Za'Nyia Kelly, who introduced the President, up to the dais. He then spoke as follows.]

All right, guys. Let's get this done. Okay? All right.

God bless you all. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:54 p.m. at the Prince William Forest Park. In his remarks, he referred to Vice President Kamala D. Harris.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Earth Day in Triangle, VA.

Locations: Triangle, VA.

Names: Haaland, Debra A.; Harris, Kamala D.; Kelly, Za'Nyia; Markey, Edward J.; Ocasio-Cortez, Alexandria; Regan, Michael S.; Sanders, Bernard; Smith, Michael D.

Subjects: Air quality, improvement efforts; American Climate Corps; AmeriCorps; Apprenticeship programs and job training; Cancer research, prevention, and treatment; Climate change; Drinking water, safety improvement efforts; Earth Day; Electric and hybrid vehicles, promotion efforts; Energy efficiency and weatherization, homes and buildings; Environmental Protection Agency; International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW); Job creation and growth; Labor movement and organized labor; Land and maritime conservation efforts; Lead service lines, replacement efforts; Natural disasters, climate change impacts; Paris Agreement on

climate change; Secretary of the Interior; Solar and wind energy, promotion efforts; Toxic chemicals and pollutants, regulation; Vice President; Wildfires, damage and recovery efforts.

DCPD Number: DCPD202400325.