

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2024

Remarks at the North America's Building Trades Unions Legislative Conference
April 24, 2024

The President. Whoa! [Applause] Holy mackerel! Whoa! Hello, hello, hello!

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

The President. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

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

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

The President. Thank you, thank you, thank you. Please have a seat. Whoa! Whoa! What a welcome. I'm going home. [Laughter]

Thank you, thank you, thank you, Building Trades. God love you all. [Applause] No, I really mean it.

And, Sean, thank you for your friendship, your partnership. And it's been an incredible honor—and I mean this from the bottom of my heart—an incredible honor to be endorsed by the Building Trades. I mean it. You're the best.

Not a joke. It's not a joke. You're the best in the world. And that's not a joke. You're the best in the world. You know, you had my back in 2020. And because of you, I'm standing here as President of the United States of America—because of you. And that's a fact.

And because you, in 2024, we're going to make Donald Trump a loser again. Are you ready? [Applause] Are you ready?

I'm so damn proud to be with you. And I really mean it: I'm proud to be with you. All my relatives, my grandpop and everybody else up in—were—they're all gone now, but in Scranton, they—my—I had an uncle who used to say, "Joey, you're belt buckle to shoe sole union."

Well, let me tell you something. I'm proud to be the most union—pro-union President in American history. And it's because of you. You're proof what have—I've always known—not a joke—I've always known that Wall Street didn't build America. The middle class built America, and unions built the middle class. That's a fact. That's a fact.

Folks, being with you today reminds me of where I grew up in Scranton, Pennsylvania, and Claymont, Delaware. I was up in Scranton last week. It's great to have the mayor of Scranton, by the way, Paige Cagnetti. Where are you, Paige? She's here today. I don't—it's a big crowd out there, but you'll—if you see her, you'll know her. [Laughter]

Look, in Scranton, I learned a basic value set that all of you learned as well, no matter where you're from. I learned that money doesn't determine your worth. I learned that all anyone wants is just a fair shot—a fair shot—at making it. Don't block the road for me. Give me an even shot.

My dad, I swear to God, used to have an expression. He'd come home from—after he closed—he'd come for dinner and then go back and close his—the shop. My dad would say: "Joey a job"—and I mean it sincerely—"a job 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 child in the eye and say, 'Honey, it's going to be okay' and mean it."

That's what we're all about: dignity of all workers—the dignity of workers. I mean it. And we all grew up—[*applause*]. We all grew up with folks who sort of looked down on us because of what our dads did. They weren't in business. They weren't executives. They weren't something special. But they are special.

You know, but people like Donald Trump learned a different lesson. He learned the best way to get rich is inherit it. [*Laughter*] He learned that paying taxes is something working people did, not him. He learned that telling people "you're fired" was something to laugh about.

Not in my household. Not in my neighborhood. I mean it sincerely. No joke. Especially being fired because you had no protection.

Folks, I guess that's how you look at the world from Mar-a-Lago, where Trump and his rich friends embrace the same failed trickle-down policies that have failed working class families and union families for over 40 years.

But if you grew up where we grew up, nobody handed you anything. Being told you were fired wasn't entertainment. It was devastating. It was a nightmare. And, folks, we all know people like Trump who look down on us, don't we? We all know somebody we grew up with like that.

Well, folks, where I come from, it matters. When I look at the economy, I don't see it through the eyes of Mar-a-Lago, I see it through the eyes of—through the eyes of Scranton and working people like all of you and my family.

You know, we know the best way to grow an economy is from the bottom up and the middle out, not the top down. My dad used to say not a whole hell of a lot trickled down on his kitchen table in that top-down policy.

When we do that, when we work from the bottom up and the middle out, the poor have a ladder up and the middle class does well. And by the way, the wealthy still do very well if they just start paying their damn taxes.

So it's either Scranton values or Mar-a-Lago values. These are competing visions of the economy at the heart of this election, competing visions of what we look at and see as America.

Folks, one of the reasons I ran for President was to rebuild the backbone of the middle class, and we have. We're following my blue-collar blueprint to rebuild America. And guess what? It's working. You're building that America. You're—in this room—are building that America.

For example, thanks to my bipartisan infrastructure law, more than 51,000 new manufacturing projects have been announced so far, and we're just beginning. It's just beginning. It's just beginning—[*applause*]. We're just starting.

Roads, bridges, ports, airports, clean water systems, available high-speed internet all across America and built by the Building Trades.

Remember when President Trump promised us—[*laughter*]
[*Laughter*]

Audience member. Say it! Say it!

The President. He promised us "Infrastructure Week." Well, I tell you what, it took 4 years; he never built a damn thing. Nothing. I'm serious. Are you surprised?

I'm sure—I'm making sure the projects, like project labor agreements, so highly skilled workers have a voice on the job.

But even before Trump was President, Trump preferred nonunion workers in his real estate projects. And I don't want to get into the stories. But anyway. Even he—even in that he didn't keep his word. He just asked contractors, vendors, and small businesses. And if you read in the press, if any of it's true, he never paid them—a whole hell a lot of them. The guy has never worked a day in a working man's boots.

By the way, he gave me a pair of boots as a gift, by the way. *[Laughter]* I know how to put them on. I still sometimes cut the yard. They don't—the Secret Service doesn't let me do it anymore. *[Laughter]*

Folks, I'm making Davis-Bacon requirements stronger to guarantee prevailing wage. By the way, we're making them stronger. That will—*[applause]*—that alone will increase wages for more than a million construction workers.

Trump's MAGA allies are trying to take it away now. But it's not going to happen on my watch.

Since the 1930s, the law has said when the Federal Government spends taxpayers' dollars on a project, it can only buy American products to do it and use American workers to get it done. That's "Buy America." Donald Trump failed to uphold that. But not anymore. My administration uses American products and American workers. That's why it's growing. *[Applause]* I mean it.

Because, folks—*[applause]*—it's not a joke. It's not a campaign line. The God's truth is you're the best workers in the world. That's a fact. You're the best workers in the world.

When I went out to South Korea to get them to start to build back those computer chips here in America, I said, "Why are you"—and they decided to do it, investing billions of dollars. I said, "Why are you doing it?" He said: "Two things: You have the best workers in the world, and you have the safest place in the world to do it."

Well, folks, when I think climate, I think jobs. I think union jobs—good-paying jobs that don't require a college degree.

You've attracted nearly \$700 billion in private-sector investment in advanced manufacturing, in semiconductors, clean energy, and so much more here in America, creating tens of thousands of good-paying jobs, Building Trades jobs. In fact, construction of new factories has more than doubled in our administration.

Meanwhile, Donald Trump still thinks windmills cause cancer.

[At this point, the President made the sign of the cross.]

Ooh! *[Laughter]* That's what he said. And by the way, remember when he was trying to deal with COVID? He said just inject a little bleach in your veins. *[Laughter]* He missed; it all went to his hair. *[Laughter]*

Look, I shouldn't have said that. *[Applause]* I probably shouldn't have said that. *[Laughter]*

Audience member. Truth!

The President. You guys are a bad influence on me. *[Laughter]*

Trump and his MAGA allies want to repeal the most significant investments in climate ever, the work that—that you risked your lives doing lots of it. You know, it—and he wants to risk all those jobs. Are you surprised? I'm not.

A lot of you don't know that if you want to be a pipe fitter—a lot of people don't know, if you want to be a pipe fitter or an electrician or any of the other trades here, it takes 4 or 5 years of hard work as an apprentice.

Most people think you can walk up—and I keep—you guys should talk more about this. They think you can walk up and you just say, "I want to be an electrician," and you get a license. It's 4 or 5 years. It's like going back to college. It's going—like getting a college degree.

And that's the reason—the reason you're the best is because you're the best trained in the world. You get it; I get it. But Donald Trump has no clue.

He undermined union apprenticeships by lowering standards and lowering pay. He ended—I ended his antiwork policy to save the building trades apprenticeships program because they're the gold standard of the world. They are. They actually are.

And look—and earlier this week—earlier this week, I teamed up together to recruit young people into the building trades. It's—my American Climate Corps will now pave a pathway to your apprenticeship program, because it matters. It matters.

Through my American Rescue Plan, there's—not a single Republican voted for, I might add—I also enacted the Butch Lewis Act, the most prolabor law in 50 years, because of you—because of you. That one act—that one act—has already protected hard-earned pensions of over 1 million workers and retirees and counting.

We made that happen. While Trump promised it, he never even lifted a finger to try to get it. Are you surprised?

Audience members. No!

The President. I—hell no, I'm not, either. [*Laughter*]

Trump put union busters on the National Labor Relations Board throughout his administration. I've appointed people in my administration that actually care about American workers, like former—the building trades leader, Marty Walsh, who was a great Labor Secretary during my administration.

By the way, if you ever need—if you're ever in a foxhole, I tell you, you want—

[*The President briefly imitated a Boston accent.*]

Marty Walsh with you, man. [*Laughter*]

Oh, you think I'm kidding. He's the real deal.

You know, I've walked proudly on union picket lines, while at the same time, Trump bashed unions from nonunion shops. Are you surprised?

Audience members. No!

The President. Look, I want to sign the PRO Act into law.

Audience members. Yes!

The President. Trump said he'd veto it. Trump said he'd veto it. Beyond that, he supports a national right-to-work law, for God's sake.

Audience members. Boo!

The President. No, I—think about it. What is the single biggest killer that could happen? A national right-to-work law.

Look, he might as well say he doesn't support any unions.

Are we going to let him—that happen, pal? We're not going to let that happen.

Audience members. No!

The President. Let me ask you: Does anyone here think the tax system is fair? Raise your hand.

Well, Trump is proud of his \$2 trillion tax cut in his administration that overwhelmingly benefited the very wealthy and the biggest corporations while exploding the Federal debt. Trump added more to the national debt than any President in a single term in all of American history—to the national debt.

I cut the national debt so far—[*applause*]—and still got all those other things did by doing simple things like, you know—remember those 40 Fortune 500 company—or those Fortune 500 companies, 40 of them—I think, no, it was 50—who didn't pay a single penny in taxes and made 40 billion—4 billion—\$40 billion? Well, guess what? I did a terrible thing. I made them pay 15 percent. [*Laughter*] And we cut the deficit by \$70 billion.

Look, now Trump is saying if he gets elected, he wants to give another—by the way, that tax credit of his expires next year. Okay? [*Applause*] Well, let me tell you something: It's going to stay expired and dead forever if I'm reelected. But anyway.

He wants another—he wants to give another massive tax cut for the wealthy. And he also says he wants to cut your Medicare and Social Security, and you're going to let him—that happen?

Audience members. Boo!

The President. No, he—by—

Audience members. Boo!

The President. By the way, these guys mean this stuff. They mean it. And the Republican caucus went ahead and said they want to do that too.

Look, folks, I remember there used to be two parties—real parties, you know. But this ain't your father's Republican Party. This is a different breed of cat. [*Laughter*]

Look, I've got a better idea. I'm going to protect Social Security and Medicare by making the very wealthy begin to pay their fair share of the—no billionaire—[*applause*]. Look—look, guys—no billionaire—and there's a thousand of them in America—a thousand billionaires—no billionaire should pay less in taxes than a teacher, a nurse, a construction worker, a police officer.

Guess what? You know what their average—average tax rate for a billionaire in America is? Eight-point-three percent. That's what they pay.

Audience members. Boo!

The President. I'm serious. I'm serious.

Look, if we just charge them 24 percent in their tax, which isn't the highest tax rate, we'd generate fifty—\$500 billion over the next 10 years, allow us to significantly cut the deficit, allow us to move all from—have daycare. Allow us to do so many things to make the country stronger.

I want to point out one thing. It's a little off point, but I wanted you to remember it. I asked the Treasury Department, because I was getting all this compliment and, from some, criticism about being so pro-union—I said, "What happens to wages generally when unions have to get paid a decent salary?" Everybody's salaries goes up. Everybody. You grow the economy. You grow the economy. You grow the economy.

Look, the bottom line is, we're doing what's always worked best in this country: investing in all of America and all Americans. Our plan is working. So far, we've created over 15 million new jobs, including 848,000 construction jobs for a record 8.2 million across the construction industry.

Folks—and by the way, did you know there are only two Presidents in American history who left office with fewer American jobs than they entered it: Herbert Hoover and, yes, Donald "Herbert Hoover" Trump. [Laughter] Only two.

Look, folks—folks, we're moving again. We're moving again as a country. We're beginning to gain momentum. We have the best economy in the world, but we've got a lot more to do. But we're moving again because you guys and women. I mean—I'm not being solicitous. That's why we're moving. We're building again. And we're just getting started.

Let me close with this. As I travel the country, I see the amazing things you're doing—I mean it, all over the country, in red States and blue States.

And this past June, I was in Philadelphia, Sean's hometown. And I married a Philly girl. You don't screw around with Philly people. [Laughter] If I didn't vote for every Philly—root for every Philly team out there, I'd be sleeping alone. [Laughter] You all think I'm kidding. [Laughter]

Look, remember when that tanker truck crashed and closed the key stretch of I-95 in Philly? It was expected, like in the last administration, it would take months and months for anything to happen.

Well, 150,000 vehicles travel that overpass every single day. So what did we do? We contacted all of you. We organized. You organized. We rebuilt that. You rebuilt that in less than 2 weeks, record time. How? Because you're the Building Trades—laborers, operating engineers, cement finishers, plumbers, pipe fitters, steelworkers. So many union workers.

You showed up—[applause]. You showed up around the clock. And you got it done. By the way, that's America.

By the way, unions are more popular today than they've ever been in a long, long time, not because of Joe Biden supporting them—because of you. You always step up. You step into the breach. You get things done. That's the union movement. That's what it's about.

In Baltimore, we're moving heaven and earth—or as my dad, from Baltimore, would say—

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[The President imitated a Baltimore accent.]

Baltimore—Baltimore. [Laughter] We're moving heaven and earth to rebuild the Francis Scott Key Bridge after its tragic collapse, and we're doing it with you: with union labor and American steel—[applause]—and American steel.

That's America. That's the union movement.

Look, folks, I mean you're doing—you ought to see—I mean, I've been to the site. It's incredible. I've been over that bridge a lot. I mean, I commuted every day for 36 years as a U.S. Senator, when my wife and daughter were killed and I used to commute back and forth to be with my boys. And I've over that area in Baltimore Harbor. You—it's incredible what you're doing.

And, folks, the choice is clear. Donald Trump's vision of America is one of revenge and retribution. A defeated former President who sees the world from Mar-a-Lago and bows down to billionaires, who looks down on American union workers. It's not just he's not supporting; he looks down on us.

I—no, I'm not joking. Think about it. Think about the guys you grew up with who you'd like to get into the corner and just give them a straight left. *[Laughter]* I'm not suggesting we hit the President. *[Laughter]* But we all know those guys growing up. We all know guys like that growing up.

My vision of America is one of hope and opportunity—the view from Scranton and working class Americans like you. Here's the future I see, and I mean this from the bottom of my heart. I've never been more optimistic about America's chances, not because I'm President, because of the state of the moment. The world needs us.

Look at we—I just signed—we just signed the bill to give support to Ukraine. We rebuilt NATO. We increased it.

Like it or not, we're the leading country in the world. The rest of the world looks to us.

I see an America where we defend democracy, not diminish it. I see an America where we protect freedoms, not take them away. I see an economy that grows from the middle out and the bottom up, where the wealthy pay their fair share so we can have childcare, paid leave, and so much more, and still reduce the Federal deficit and increase economic growth.

Folks, imagine what we can do next. Four——

Audience member. [Inaudible]

The President. ——more years. Pause.

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

The President. Are you ready?

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

The President. Are you ready to move forward?

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

The President. Well, thank you. We're all ready. We're ready to move forward not back.

Are we ready to choose unity over division, dignity over hate, truth over lies? Are you ready to choose freedom over democracy—for democracy?

We can do this. I give you my word as a Biden, I've never been more optimistic about our future in my entire career. We just have to remember who we are. And I mean this. Think about it. We are the United States of America, and there's nothing beyond our capacity—nothing, nothing, nothing—when we do it together. We've got to do it together.

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

Thank you all. I don't want to go.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:40 p.m. at the Washington Hilton hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Sean McGarvey, president, North America's Building Trades Unions; Lee Jae-yong, vice chairman, Samsung Electronics Co., Ltd.; and David M. Prouty and Gwynn A. Wilcox, members, and Jennifer A. Abruzzo, General Counsel, National Labor Relations Board.

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