

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2024

Remarks on Infrastructure Improvement Efforts in Wilmington, North Carolina
May 2, 2024

The President. Hello, North Carolina! Please have a seat. Take a seat if you have one.
[*Laughter*]

Thank you, Paris, for that introduction.

[*At this point, the President addressed audience members seated behind the podium.*]

And by the way, if my father were here, he'd say, "I apologize for my back." [*Laughter*] I apologize.

But thank you very much. Look, folks——

Audience member. It's okay. We've got your back.

The President. ——being a—[*laughter*]—thank you.

Being a teacher isn't what you do; it's who you are. And it matters.

Shooting of Law Enforcement Officers in Charlotte, North Carolina

Before I get started, I just came from Charlotte. I spent some time with some of the families of the eight police officers who were shot in the line of duty on Monday. Four of them were killed: Joshua Eyer; Alden—excuse me—Elliott; Sam—and I just—I'm going to mispronounce his name—Poleski [Poloche; White House correction]; and Thomas Weeks.

We pray for their loved ones and those left behind. I met their children and their husbands, wives—their wives and their mothers and fathers. And we pray for the recovery of the brave wounded as well.

Every time an officer puts on that shield and walks out the door, a family member wonders whether they're going to get that call, will they come home. I'm serious. The entire nation is grieving for these families.

While crime rates are down nationally, we've invested a record amount in public safety, violence interruption. We've also done much work to make communities safer. But to protect our officers, we have to get them the resources they need to be able to do their job and to keep the weapons of war out of the hands of people without—[*inaudible*].

To the men and women of law enforcement, you represent the best of us. And I want to thank you. And God bless you all. May he keep you safe.

Infrastructure Improvement Efforts

And, Governor Cooper, thank you for having us today. And I've been saying this for well over 2 years: You've got one of the best Governors in the United States of America. And I mean this sincerely. When I think of the Gov, one word comes to mind—I mean this sincerely—integrity. He has absolutely integrity.

And, Mayor Saffo, thanks for the passport to your city. [*Laughter*] And by the way, you ain't the only Wilmington in America. [*Laughter*] I'm from Wilmington, Delaware.

And guess what? The mayor lived in Wilmington, Delaware—Delaware as well as here. He lived in Wilmington, Delaware. His daughter graduated from my alma mater, University of Delaware. And we lived—where he lived is only about a mile and a half from where I live.

And thanks to a favorite son of North Carolina, who's doing a great job as Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, Michael Regan.

Folks, I'm here to talk about something very basic and fundamental to our communities, to our economy, to our basic human dignity: safe, clean drinking water.

For generations, water was delivered through lead service pipes—lines, connecting the main water line in the street to the homes and schools and businesses in this city and around the country. These lead lines are tough, durable, but they do—and they don't rust. But we've long since learned, they leach poisonous toxins into our water.

The science is clear. Lead service lines pose a severe health risk, damaging the brain and kidneys. In children especially, they stunt growth, slow learning, and cause lasting brain damage. But we know we can stop it. We know how to do it.

One study shows when you reduce lead exposure for children, their test scores actually improve in school as much as they would if they reduced the class size by a third, at one-tenth the cost of doing that. It pays off across the board.

But today, 9 million lead service lines connect water mains to our homes, schools, daycare centers, businesses. That includes some 300,000 lead service lines here in North Carolina alone—300,000. The cost to replace them is consequential. But too many families only learn the threat to their children after they get sick.

You know, this is, for some time, why I'm determined—been determined to fix it. And we're finally moving. Until the United States of America, God love us, deals with this, how can we say we're a leading nation in the world? For God's sake, we're better than this.

Let me say what I've said many times before: There is no—no—safe level of lead exposure. None. The only way forward is to replace every lead service line that connects Americans to clean water. That's why Kamala and I are making sure the administration is the first ever to set out to do it. And we're going to get it done.

As a consequence of the first major law I signed that not many on the other team signed up to support—the American Rescue Plan back in March of 2021—we provided North Carolina with historic investments in clean water money. Governor Cooper dedicated \$2 billion from the American Rescue Plan for 800 clean water projects all across this State.

It not only includes removing lead service lines, but uses modern technology to sanitize storm- and wastewater systems, in addition to connecting thousands of homes to clean tap water for the first time. These clean water projects include testing every water fountain in every school across the State and removing lead hazards, as Paris mentioned.

Now, look, our landmark bipartisan infrastructure law is allowing States across the Nation to do more by investing in record—a record \$15 billion so far nationwide in lead pipe removal.

Today we're releasing a third installment of that funding: an additional \$3 billion nationwide, which will bring the total to \$250 million for North Carolina so far, including here in Wilmington. It's going to replace 300 lead pipe service lines connecting homes, schools, and businesses here in Wilmington.

Governor, I hear you're breaking ground sometime today. Congratulations, pal. Congratulations.

Folks, this is about safety, but it's also about basic fairness. Nationally, we're directing nearly half of the funding to disadvantaged communities—half of it—that have borne the brunt of lead poisoning for so long. Studies show communities of color have been the hardest hit.

We have to make things right. And we're going to make them right now.

And when we do, it will mean clean water, healthier communities, peace of mind, and jobs befitting those communities—jobs of plumbers, pipe fitters, laborers, engineers—good-paying jobs you can make a serious living with without a college degree to raise a family on.

And, folks, protecting people from lead pipe contamination is just one of our Nation's most ambitious water agendas ever. We're upgrading old water mains, treatment plants. Some of them are as old as a hundred years old here in America—a hundred years old. And finally, we're improving water systems on Tribal lands, where nearly half of the population—nearly half of the population—still lack clean water.

And we're detecting and removing so-called "forever chemicals," referred to as PFAS—P-dash-FAS-dash—that are discharged in a—from companies and military bases into our water supply. They're very dangerous chemicals that shouldn't be near our water supply.

Earlier this month, Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Regan and Governor Cooper here in—were in Fayetteville, North Carolina, as my administration issued its first-ever national PFAS standard to get those dangerous chemicals out of our drinking water.

But that's not all. Communities across the Cape Fear watershed know too well why this matters. As a consequence of PFAS, you've seen aggressive cancers emerge in that area. It's gone so far that we're advising and warning, you can't eat the fish from the same water that you drink. That's how far it's gone.

My administration is investing an additional \$9 billion—more than ever in the history of America—to finally get rid of PFAS chemicals now—and to get safe, clean drinking water to you and a hundred million Americans across the country presently exposed to PFAS.

In all, my infrastructure law makes the most significant investment in America's infrastructure in generations. It includes roads, bridges, ports, airports, public transit, and so much more. It includes a new passenger train from Raleigh to Richmond, which, by the way, reduces pollution by—and takes thousands of vehicles off the road and provide over a thousand good-paying jobs—good-paying jobs.

Nationwide, 51,000 projects in 4,500 communities have been announced so far. To date, this has dedicated over \$9 billion to North Carolina alone—\$9 billion.

In January, I was in Raleigh to announce the most-significant-ever investment in affordable high-speed internet for every single person in North Carolina, because high-speed internet is today as important as electrification was a century ago. It's a means of communication, being able to compete.

It's not enough to just have internet access. It needs to be affordable. That's why my administration is saving families around \$30 a month on their internet bills. Over 900,000 households in North Carolina have saved a conglomerate of \$550 million on their internet bills.

But that program, called the Affordable Connectivity Program, runs out of money this month. For folks—for months now, I've asked the Congress to extend the funding, but my Republican friends in Congress have failed to act. Now I'm calling on them to act now so one in five North Carolina families don't see their internet bills go up next month.

You know, this progress is part of my vision for an economy that grows from the middle out and the bottom up, not just the top down. I'm sick and tired of trickle-down economics.

We weren't poor, but I come from a middle class household: three-bedroom home—split-level home, with a grandpop living with us, four kids, and my dad and mom.

My dad used to say: "Joey, 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 kid in the eye and say, 'Honey, it's going to be okay.' And it's about being able to have a little bit left over at the end of the month when everything is paid."

And guess what? The plan we put in place is beginning to work. We've created a record 15 million jobs since I came to office—more than any President has—15 million, including 460,000 right here in North Carolina.

Unemployment is down in North Carolina from 5.6 percent to 3.5 percent, lower than any year under the previous administration and the lowest in 25 years.

Wages are rising nationwide, up 3 percent in North Carolina. I realize there's more to deal with. There's more we have to do.

There's a lot of—the corporations are adding on costs that don't—aren't justified.

By the way, Walmart just announced that they're going to—they opened a new store, and they just announced that they're going to charge the—for all the products they have, the same exact price that was charged before the pandemic—before the pandemic.

And we're eliminating thousands of junk fees. It used to be—right now you bounce a check at your bank, and you're likely to be charged between \$35 and \$50 for that bank overcharge. Guess what? They can't now charge more than \$8. Same with credit card fees.

Look, and manufacturing is booming: nearly 800,000 new manufacturing jobs and counting. Where in God's name is it written we can't be the leading manufacturer in the world here? Where is that written? It's not.

And cities like Wilmington are coming back.

We're doing all this at the same time we're cutting the Federal deficit. We cut the Federal deficit by fighting to make the very wealthy and big corporations begin to pay their fair share.

And by the way, I've been fighting for years as a Senator—I know I look like I'm only 40, but I'm a little bit older—[laughter]—in taking on Big Pharma.

You know, if any of you have a prescription that has to be filled, I could put you into Air Force One, you pick any city in Europe or in parts of the Middle East or in Asia, take you to that same prescription, get it filled in those countries—in Berlin or in Toronto, Canada, or in Rome, Italy—you'll pay 40- to 60-percent less than you pay here.

How many of you know somebody who has the need for insulin because they have diabetes? Well, guess what? It now costs—not \$400 a month—\$35 a month. And by the way, they're still making 350-percent profit. It only costs them 10 bucks to make it. [Laughter]

And by the way, when I first got this passed, it included everybody, not just the elderly. And guess what? This next term, I'm going to make sure everybody qualifies for this.

And by the way, what we passed already is saving the Government—the taxpayers—\$160 billion over 10 years. Because guess what? Not only it helps the consumer, it means the Federal Government doesn't have to pay all that money to the drug companies. [Applause] No, I'm serious.

This is what they call, where I come from, "a big deal." [Laughter]

Look, my predecessors and my MAGA Republican allies—his allies have a very different view. Every single Republican voted against the American Rescue Plan—every one.

Audience member. Shame on them! Shame!

The President. That's providing hundreds of millions of dollars to deliver drinking water to all of North Carolina's schools.

The vast majority of them voted against the infrastructure law as well. In fact, your Senator, Ted Budd, called the infrastructure law, quote——

Audience members. Boo!

The President. No, no.

Audience member. Shame on him!

The President. He called it—the law—"fatally flawed." Then he went on to say, and I'm quoting, "a liberal Trojan horse for a socialist agenda," end of quote. *[Laughter]*

I don't know about you, but I don't think ensuring kids can drink clean water and to avoid brain damage is a socialist agenda. I think it's just plain decency, plain fairness.

But, as you might guess, the Senator hasn't been shy. He's asked on 10 separate occasions for new funding in those very laws he voted against—*[laughter]*—10 separate—*[laughter]*. As they say, "God bless the boy." *[Laughter]*

Remember—remember that—the Trojan horse socialist agenda? Well, I don't know about the Senator's—I don't—I didn't think the Senator was a Socialist. He keeps asking. *[Laughter]*

But look, that's okay. I promised to be, all kidding aside, a President for all Americans, whether you voted for me or not, because we owe it to the American people. So, Senator, I'll see you at the groundbreaking. *[Laughter]*

You may recall that my predecessor promised "Infrastructure Week" every single week for 4 years. *[Laughter]* He didn't build a damn thing—nothing. *[Laughter]* No, I'm serious.

His administration rolled back wetland protections, making it easier to pollute our water supply. They gave mining companies wide leeway to contaminate our groundwater. They slashed the Environmental Protection Agency's budget, eliminating important programs that guaranteed clean water.

At the same time, he and his MAGA allies in Congress were happy to give the very superrich a \$2 trillion tax cut in his administration—\$2 trillion—that benefited the superwealthy and the biggest corporations while exploding the Federal debt.

You may remember that when I was trying to get these bills passed that I—we talked about, including the veterans bills and the rest, they said we couldn't afford it. And I looked out there, and there were 40—there were 50 corporations of the Fortune 500 who made \$40 billion and didn't pay a single penny in tax. No, no, I'm not—I'm not making this up. As I said, look it up. *[Laughter]*

But here's the deal: didn't pay a single—but I just was able to raise the tax to 15 percent. That's less than all of you pay. And guess what? Not only did it get everything passed, we were able to reduce the Federal deficit.

My predecessor—*[applause]*. My predecessor, the guy running this time, racked up more Federal debt than every previous President in history—more Federal debt during his administration. He talks about saving money.

Well, that's not how I see things. I believe doing what's always worked best for this country: investing in all of America and investing in all Americans.

Look, let me close with this. When folks see shovels in the ground on all these projects, when they see new pipes being laid and people going to work, I hope they feel the pride that I

feel: pride in their hometowns making a comeback, pride in America, pride in knowing we can get big things done in America when we set our mind to it—big things.

There's nothing beyond our capacity. Think about this. We're the only country in the world that's come out of every crisis we've entered stronger than we went in every single time.

And, folks, I've never been more optimistic about our Nation's future. We just have to remember who we are. We're the United States of America. I mean it from the bottom of my heart.

And there's nothing—there's nothing—beyond our capacity when we work together. So, let's get out and work together and get this done.

May God bless you all, and may God protect our troops.

Thank you, thank you, thank you, all. I appreciate it.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5 p.m. at the Wilmington Convention Center. In his remarks, he referred to Paris Pugh, teacher, Bradley Creek Elementary School in Wilmington, NC; Ofc. Joshua Eyer of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department (CMPD), Deputy U.S. Marshal Thomas M. Weeks, Jr., and Officers Samuel Poloche and W. Alden Elliott of the North Carolina Department of Adult Correction, members of the U.S. Marshals Service Carolinas Regional Fugitive Task Force, who were killed in a shooting while attempting to serve an arrest warrant in Charlotte, NC, on April 29; CMPD Officers Christopher Tolley, Michael Giglio, Jack Blowers, and Justin Campbell, who were injured in the shooting; Vice President Kamala D. Harris; and former President Donald J. Trump. He also referred to his sister Valerie Biden Owens and brothers Francis W. and James B. Biden. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on May 3.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Infrastructure improvement efforts in Wilmington, NC.

Locations: Wilmington, NC.

Names: Biden, Francis W.; Biden, James B.; Blowers, Jack; Budd, Theodore P.; Campbell, Justin; Cooper, Roy A., III; Elliott, W. Alden; Eyer, Joshua; Giglio, Michael; Harris, Kamala D.; Owens, Valerie Biden; Poloche, Samuel; Pugh, Paris; Regan, Michael S.; Saffo, Bill; Tolley, Christopher; Trump, Donald J.; Weeks, Thomas M., Jr.

Subjects: Broadband and wireless technologies; Carbon emissions, reduction efforts; Crime rates; Drinking water, safety improvement efforts; Economic improvement; Environmental Protection Agency; Federal deficit and debt; Household income and wages; Inflation; Infrastructure improvements; Insulin cost controls; Job creation and growth; Junk fees imposed on consumers, prevention efforts; Law enforcement, service and dedication; Lead service lines, replacement efforts; Manufacturing industry, domestic investment; North Carolina, Governor; North Carolina, President's visit; North Carolina, shooting of law enforcement officers in Charlotte; PFAS and chemical pollutants, regulation efforts; Prescription drug costs, reduction efforts; Rail infrastructure, improvement efforts; Tax Code reform; Unemployment rate; Vice President.

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