

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2024

Remarks Honoring the 2023 Women's National Basketball Association Champion Las Vegas Aces and an Exchange With Reporters

May 9, 2024

Vice President Kamala D. Harris. Good afternoon, everyone. Good afternoon. Please have a seat. Good afternoon.

So, to the world champion Las Vegas Aces, Coach Becky Hammon, and Team President Nikki Fargas: Congratulations, congratulations. And welcome back! Welcome back! Welcome back to the White House!

To our dear President, Joe Biden; my husband, the first Second Gentleman of the United States, Doug Emhoff; and to all the Members of Congress and the distinguished guests who are with us this afternoon, thank you all for the work you do every day. It's good to be with everyone.

So this is a team, we all know, that embodies excellence. You all started this season in the spotlight—defending champions, the team to beat—and you met that pressure with greatness. You performed with skill, with hustle, and with heart and faced every opponent and every obstacle as one team and one family.

It was, as we all know, Aces versus everybody. [*Laughter*] I heard.

And, of course, the result: 34 regular season wins—a WNBA record—and another championship trophy.

As a team, you all are defined by your excellence and by your resilience. We saw it that last game—that last game in Brooklyn. Down two starting players, trailing nine points at halftime, you showed what you were made of.

A jump shot from Jackie. Back-to-back threes from Cayla. Two quick baskets from Alysha. And nine straight points from A'ja—who, of course, was Finals MVP and is, I will say, simply one of the best basketball players in the world.

So, as a point of personal privilege, I will say: Aces, it is a special privilege to watch you all play because you do it with such joy: joy in the game, in the competition, and working together as a team.

And in addition to being champions on the court, you all are role models and leaders off the court. You advocate to protect the freedom to vote. You speak out for LGBTQ rights. You fight for pay equity.

And through the Las Vegas Aces Foundation, you mentor high school athletes across Las Vegas Valley, from Centennial to Desert Oasis. You teach them about college recruitment, financial literacy, and career development.

And while you play on the iconic Las Vegas Strip, you have made the entire Vegas community your home—another reason, I know, why Nevada feels such pride in what you all have accomplished.

And earlier this year—we just talked about it—I was honored to host the first official gathering of women's sports leaders—from athletes, to coaches, to executives—at my residence to recognize the incredible power and importance of teams like yours.

You simply inspire people across our Nation and around the world. Through your excellence, you show young leaders and young women leaders they can be and do anything. And for that, I thank you all for who you are. And heartfelt congratulations, again, on your win.

And now, it is my honor to introduce another leader who knows a thing or two about winning—[*laughter*—our President, Joe Biden.

The President. A'ja, when she was saying you're one of the best, she was including men in that—[*inaudible*]. [*Laughter*]

Folks, welcome to the White House the 2023 WNBA champions, the Las Vegas Aces.

Kamala and your very own MVP, Doug—[*laughter*—the Second Gentleman. [*Laughter*]

And thanks to the Members of Congress that are here.

A special thanks to the members of the administration, including Acting Labor Secretary Julie Su.

And above all—[*applause*—by the way, she was a center. No, I'm only—[*laughter*—thank you all for the—and the entire Aces organization, especially coaches and players: the first WNBA team in over 20 years to win a title back to back.

I kind of like that back-to-back stuff. [*Laughter*]

Ever since you moved to Las Vegas in 2018, you've embodied excellence: five straight playoff appearances, three Final appearances in 4 years. And this year, the best regular-season record in league history, including the most wins in a season; eight and one in the postseason before winning the title again.

Participant. Eight and one.

The President. And along the way, you led—you led——

Participant. Eight and one. [*Laughter*]

The President. —by giants of the game: Hall of Fame Coach Becky Hammon. Becky, where—[*applause*]. The deepest bench in the league. Starters led by four All-Stars: Chelsea Gray, Jackie Young, Kelsey Plum, and a woman new to the limelight—[*laughter*—A'ja Wilson, the pride of Columbia, South Carolina.

Jim Clyburn here? Because he's bragging about you a lot. [*Laughter*]

And while she couldn't be here, I want to acknowledge someone who will be considered one of the greatest alltime coaches [players; White House correction], Candace Parker. She played 16 seasons in the league, two Olympic Gold Medals, two regular season MVPs, and a Final MVP. And look—and going out on top of the world with her third ring, she announced her retirement from the game.

But I want to thank her for an incredible career, but we know she's got a whole world in front of her—a whole world.

It's been a banner year for women's basketball—more watching y'all than anybody else. [*Laughter*] The most watched women's college game ever.

It matters to girls and women, finally seeing themselves represented, and it matters to all of America.

That's why, as a nation, we need to support women's sports by showing up in person, watching on TV with more sponsorships and programming, and helping grow the business of

women's sports and keep—that keep inspiring—you keep inspiring the entire nation. And that's not hyperbole. You really do. Think of what this year has been.

Let me close with this. This year, we hosted a Black History Month celebration in this very room. I was introduced by a student named Nijel, who just graduated from UNLV. He spoke about how he was the son of a Las Vegas firefighter who stood on the shoulders of generations of Black firefighters that came before him.

He spoke about how they became a foster family and how he started a nonprofit to provide clothes for foster children who had very little on their own. In trying to reach more foster kids, he reached out to his entire community to help, and no surprise, the Las Vegas Aces stepped up and answered the call. God love you.

And he's here. Where—where are you? Where is he?

Vice President Harris. There he is.

The President. There you are. Stand up.

He's here today, and his nonprofit is just one of many ways the Las Vegas Aces are more than just a team. They represent a belief in excellence, in team work, in community.

And the Las Vegas Aces understand that America—in America, we make history. We don't erase history; we make it.

Vice President Harris. That's right.

The President. I want to thank you for showing that the future of women's sports is brighter than the Vegas lights.

Congratulations, again.

Now I'm going to turn this over to Nikki, the team president.

Madam President, please come forward.

Team President Nikki Fargas. Mr. President, Madam Vice President, thank you so much for once again inviting the Las Vegas Aces, two-time WNBA world champions, back to the White House.

Although 1992 is ancient history for many of these young ladies standing behind me—*[laughter]*—I don't even know if some of them were born—I'm certain, Mr. President, that you remember that year's election season quite vividly. There were only two women in the Senate at the time: Nancy Kassebaum and Barbara Mikulski.

But in 1992, a then-record four women won seats, including the first Black woman ever elected, Carol Moseley Braun.

Following the swearing in of that class, headline writers dubbed 1992 the "Year of the Woman." Senator Mikulski was a bit insulted, noting that "calling 1992 the 'Year of the Woman' makes it sound like the 'Year of the Caribou' or the 'Year of the Asparagus.'" She added, "We're not a fad, a fancy, or a year."

Four years later, the WNBA announced, "We Got Next." At that time, many thought the league was just a fad, a fancy. But visionaries like David Stern and Val Ackerman, alongside some of the best athletes in the world, set above and about to provide the doubters wrong.

Altering the landscape of professional sports and of American politics have both proven equally challenging. And change is slow.

But three decades later, that change is real.

Today, the Senate counts 25 women among its numbers. And the second-most powerful person in the world is not just a woman but a woman of color.

The WNBA has likewise seen dramatic growth in ticket sales, merchandising, and TV ratings, while forward-thinking corporate partners begin to understand the value in investing in women.

We are not a fad. We are not a fancy. We are not a year. We are the WNBA, 28 years strong and counting.

Mr. President, Madam Vice President, thank you again for so graciously welcoming us to our Nation's Capital.

We would like to add to your athletics wardrobe—[*laughter*]—as two-time MVP A'ja Wilson and point guard Chelsea Gray present you with Aces jerseys just in time for the WNBA season's opener on May 14.

[*At this point, the President and Vice President were presented with team jerseys.*]

The President. Tell her to put me in, Coach. I'm ready to play. [*Laughter*]

Thank you. Thank you.

Vice President Harris. Congratulations.

Participants. Thank you.

Participant. Thank you for having us.

[*As the President and Vice President exited the room, a reporter shouted a question as follows.*]

2024 Presidential Election

Q. Mr. President, when will you debate President Trump? When?

The President. Set it up.

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 4:35 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Sens. Catherine Cortez Masto and Jacklyn S. Rosen; Reps. Steven A. Horsford and James E. Clyburn; Chelsea Gray, Jackie Young, and Kelsey Plum, guards, A'ja Wilson, center, and Candace Parker, former forward-center, Las Vegas Aces; and Nijel B. Murray, founder, Klothes 4 Kids, and his father Duane Murray. Vice President Harris referred to Cayla George, center-forward, and Alysha Clark, forward, Las Vegas Aces. Ms. Fargas referred to Sen. Patricia L. Murray; former Sen. Barbara Boxer; and Valerie B. Ackerman, commissioner, National Collegiate Athletic Association's Big East Conference, in her former capacity as president of the WNBA. A reporter referred to former President Donald J. Trump.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : 2023 Women's National Basketball Association champion Las Vegas Aces; Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters, White House.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Clyburn, James E.; Cortez Masto, Catherine; Emhoff, Douglas C.; Fargas, Nikki; Gray, Chelsea; Hammon, Becky; Harris, Kamala D.; Horsford, Steven A.; Murray, Duane; Murray, Nijel B.; Parker, Candace; Plum, Kelsey; Rosen, Jacklyn S.; Su, Julie A.; Wilson, A'ja; Young, Jackie.

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