

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2024

Remarks at a Campaign Event in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
May 29, 2024

The President. Thank you, thank you, thank you. Please—please, sit down.

Audience member. Four more years!

The President. Well, I tell you what, it's a hell of a crew, isn't it?

Audience members. Yes.

The President. The only one I'm afraid of.

[*At this point, the President pointed at Lynette Sutton, managing partner of Girl Concrete Inc.*]

[*Laughter*] Look, one of the reasons why I'm working with the chairman of the Black Caucus in the Senate and the House and working with the—the elected officials, particularly—this guy is from Maryland. My father is from Maryland. But it's not Baltimore; it's Baltimore.

[*The President imitated a Baltimore accent.*]

[*Laughter*] Baltimore. And we're rebuilding a \$60 zillion bridge in Baltimore.

Look, here's the deal. I believe—and I think the Members of Congress who've worked with me know this—I believe that everybody deserves a shot, and I mean everybody—based on—it doesn't matter what your gender is, what your color is.

And one of the reasons why things are moving the way they're moving is because I've insisted that—for example, I've—I'm listed as the most pro-union President in American history. I'm proud of that. But guess what? I also was very clear to the union presidents: You'd better hire more Blacks; you'd better hire more women. Not a joke. And you know it.

And by the way, all the things she's bragging about, I did. [*Laughter*] Because, all kidding aside, there's nothing that can't be done—I really mean it—not a damn thing that can't be done.

You know, and when we talk about small business—and I want to thank the owners here. You know, we talk about small business like it's small. It makes up 50 percent of our economy. Add the Fortune 500 companies, the small businesses equal their economic power. That's what they do: They equal their economic power. They employ more people than the Fortune 500 companies do.

It's incredible what's done, and we underestimate it. And it's about time we stop just looking at this trickle-down economy, where you say, "Okay, if the superwealthy do well, a lot will trickle down on a—our plates, and things will be well."

My dad used to say not a damn thing trickled down on his kitchen table. [*Laughter*] No, I'm serious. My dad worked like hell. My dad was a smart guy. He did well. But you know, it was always a struggle—always a struggle.

I'm from—as you Pennsylvanians know, I'm from Scranton.

[*The President imitated a Scranton accent.*]

It's not Scranton; it's Scranton when you're from Scranton.

But, all kidding aside, we're in a situation where—when coal died, we ended up—there were no—there was no work up there, and it died when I was in, like, second, third grade—fourth

grade. And we moved—my dad moved us back down to where he had been raised in Wilmington—he was raised in Baltimore and then Wilmington. His father moved to Wilmington.

And we moved down to Claymont, Delaware. Some of you know Claymont. It's about a good, long driver from here. And one of the things that occurred there was it used to be—they used to have 4,500 steelworkers in Worth Steel. And all of a sudden, it all dried up. There was no work.

And one of the things we talked about—my dad used to say: "A job is about a lot more than a paycheck. It's about your dignity. It's about respect. It's about making sure you can look your kid in the eye and say, 'Honey, it's going to be okay' and have a chance to mean it." I mean this sincerely. Not a joke.

And in Delaware—the reason I got elected when I was 29 years old to the Senate—we don't come from any money. We come from a three-bedroom house in a little development called Mayfield with a grandfather living with us, four kids. And one relative always—[inaudible]—beyond on my mom and dad. We weren't poor, but it was close family. [Laughter]

And—but everybody thought it was a simple proposition: Just give them a chance—just a chance.

And so I got involved as a kid in the civil rights movement because—the Philadelphians know this—at least the older ones do—Delaware was the only city in the—State in the Nation, Wilmington the only in city in America, occupied by the military for 9 months after Dr. King was assassinated.

I was working for a fancy law firm. I had just gotten a job. And I quit and became a public defender, because there was a National Guard person standing on every single corner in Wilmington, Delaware, with a drawn bayonet—not a joke—a drawn bayonet.

So I quit the fancy law firm I got a job with. I hadn't even gotten the first paycheck. And I became a public defender.

The point was, my dad always talked about "everybody deserves a shot"—everybody. And that's what it's all about. And it makes no distinction between whether you're a man or a woman, you're Black, you're White, you're—whatever the background is. Just flat out, everybody deserves a shot.

I remember my dad, when—he—every once in a while, when I was practicing law and—as a public defender, my office was near the Du Pont Hotel, which used to be a four-star hotel down in Wilmington. And we—every once in a while, my dad would take me to the grill there for lunch. And so we were walking by one day, and the chairman of the board of DuPont Company came down the elevator. He comes into that lobby, and he said, "Hello," and nodded at my dad. My dad said, "Hello." Then he immediately walked over to the shoeshine stand and thanked the shoeshine guys.

And I said, "Why?" "Everybody deserves to be treated with dignity—everybody." I'm not making this up. That's how we were raised, how all of you were raised. Everybody deserves an even shot.

And so that's what we're doing. And we're doing it with incredible help.

You know, we're in a situation where not only are we dealing with the issue of whether or not Black women or women generally can get into fields they haven't been able to get into before, but guess what Jill is doing? My wife started this effort.

We don't spend—we spend one-third as much on research—medical research for women as we do men. That's changing. It's changing. Everything is changing.

I've got more women in my administration than I have men in my administration. *[Laughter]*
No, fact. Fact. Fact. Okay?

There's a simple reason for that: All the women in my family are smarter than all the men.
[Laughter]

But my—my point is, I just think what we're all about, cut it all away, it's about giving everybody just a shot. No one is asking for a free ride, just a shot. And that's what we're doing. And I think that's why we have—we have a long way to go.

But we have literally the strongest economy in the world right now—in the whole damn world. We've got more to do.

What we have to do is make sure that economy benefits everybody across the board, everybody has a shot. And that's why I've changed the way we look at things.

We no longer think about building a trickle-down economy. Not a joke. In literal terms, it is you build from the middle out and the bottom up. When the middle class does well, the poor have a shot and the wealthy still do fine, as long as they start paying their taxes. No, I'm not—I'm not—that's not a joke.

You know, all that stuff I got done—they told us we couldn't get anything done—I got it done with the Black Caucus and others helping me in the Congress. But guess what? We have a \$1.2 trillion infrastructure bill—\$1.2 trillion. And guess what that means?

Remember Trump had "Infrastructure Month" for 4 years, didn't build a damn thing. Well, we're changing the way in which everything works in this country. We're—how can you be the most powerful country in the world with a second rate infrastructure, whether it's your ports, highways, airports, et cetera.

We're also in a situation where, in addition to that, we made sure that people have a shot to do the things they need to do. You know, I'm not trying to be nice to—I know a lot about HBCUs because Delaware State, which was a State—HBCU, was the place I got organized and started. I went to University of Delaware.

But the fact is that—you know, the fact is that this is just people wanting to know that you just give them a shot. And so guess what? HBCUs don't have the money to put in the research labs and all the experimental stuff because they don't have the endowments they have. But those are all the jobs of the future. AI and all the rest cost billions of dollars to get it going.

Well, guess what? They told me I couldn't do anything. I got 16 billion—with a "b"—billion dollars this year—for HBCUs.

And there's two reasons. It'd be a wasted asset if we didn't, but I want to prove to everybody there's not a damn thing that a White man can do that a Black man can't do or do better. I mean it sincerely. It's important to get it done.

And you go down the list of all the things we're talking about, and one of the things is that a lot of—a lot of people don't know how to get to their—you know, the Government has some good programs, but sometimes, it's hard to figure out how they work. So what did we do? We have an entire staff designed to be able to go out to say to people: "This is how you apply for this. This is how you do this. This is"—

[The microphone generated feedback.]

Every time I walk next to you, DJ, this goes off. *[Laughter]* I don't know, man. That's one powerful sucker here, man. *[Laughter]* His program, I walk up, and he—my microphone goes off.

But any rate, I guess what I'm trying to say is, I've never been more optimistic in my life, not because I'm President; because I see things changing. And I promise you—I promise you—it's going to seem to—this group will understand it and believe it. But the rest of the world looks to the United States.

Imagine—answer the rhetorical question: If we weren't leading the world, who leads the world? Name me a country. Name me one single country that could possibly lead. So we pull the world together. No, I'm serious.

And we have such enormous opportunities—such enormous opportunities to change the way in which we have been working, to build things that we've never been able to build.

And look, I'll end by saying there's a phrase—I'm—I used to always get kidded at the United States Senate because I was always quoting Irish poets on the floor of the Senate. They thought I did it because I was Irish. That's not the reason. I did it because they're the best poets in the world. *[Laughter]*

And there's a poet who wrote a poem called "The Cure at Troy." And he said, "Once in a lifetime, that longed-for opportunity rises up, and hope and history rhyme." We have a shot to make hope and history rhyme. We really do. We really do.

We've got to remember who in the hell we are. We're the United States of America. We have a value set that goes beyond the Constitution: just basic decency, honesty. It matters. It matters.

And that's why I'm so excited about being with all of you. Like I said, in 1969 I got involved deeply in the civil rights movement, nineteen—and I—we used to—those of you Pennsylvanians know that Delaware used to be a slave State and a Southern State in its attitudes. I mean, for real. We have the eighth largest Black population as a percent of the population of any State in the Nation.

And one of the things that I—that amazed me was how the community stepped up when you gave it a shot. We've gone from a red State to a blue, blue State, but the reason is—the reason I'm elected—Nixon won my State by 60 percent of the vote when I rate as a 29-year-old kid. You have to be 30 to be sworn in. You can be elected early; you can't be sworn in until then.

And I wasn't intending to run. I was running because no one else would run, and they came to me and said, "You run." And I went to my—a professor I had at Delaware—University of Delaware. And he was my political philosophy professor. I said, "What do you think I should do, Doctor?" He said, "I think you should"—he said, "Remember what Plato said."

I mean, "What the hell did Plato say?"

He said, "The penalty good people pay for not being involved in politics is being governed by people worse than themselves." It's really kind of basic. So I ran thinking I'd make a point. I wasn't even sure I could win.

But I was smart enough to hire my sister. She and I went to school together. She was 3 years younger than me, 2 years behind me at the University of Delaware. She graduated Phi Beta. I graduated. You know? *[Laughter]* She managed all my campaigns—*[laughter]*—you know, so—I guess the point I'm trying to make is, I think we should shoot really high. We should aim high.

And look at all that's been changed. For example, you know, the bridge went down over the Chesapeake. And we were there the next day. I was with the Governor. And it was billions of dollars. But guess what? We changed it. It's already cleared, the channel—already moving things. But they told us we can't do all that. Remember?

Governor Westley W.O. "Wes" Moore of Maryland. That's right.

The President. There's nothing we can't do.

Remember when the highway—when the guy ran on the—the tractor-trailer took the—the bridge out here on 495? Well, guess what? Seven days. Seven days, because we can do anything when we put our mind to it.

And so that's the only thing—I think what you do—those of you in the Black community who take the chances and open the business, take the chances on getting deeply engaged, you give people confidence. I mean, you give people confidence and make people believe we can do what we can do.

So I came basically to say thank you. And I ain't going anywhere. Now—I did DJ's program this morning, and he made a good point. He said: "You can't just talk in generalities and talk about democracy and all this. You've got to talk specifics, how people affect people." But I figure this is one audience—the one audience I can talk about the general—the general things that have to be done. We need a value set. We have to be what we say we are, that we hold these truths self-evident.

I know it sounds corny, but I really mean it. In every single major—I've known every major foreign leader in the last 40 years. I've known them personally just because of the nature my job. And so, when I became President, all these meetings with the G-7 and the G-20 and all these heads of state, there's not a single one that I leave that—one of those meetings overseas or here—that a leader doesn't come up to me—not a joke—as I'm leaving and go like this: "Joe, you can't let that other guy win. My democracy is at stake"—not ours, his—"my democracy is at stake."

But if we win this and begin to keep this going, we can literally change the Nation and change the world.

God love you all. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:58 p.m. at the SOUTH Restaurant and Jazz Club. In his remarks, he referred to Rep. Steven A. Horsford, in his capacity as chair of the Congressional Black Caucus; former President Donald J. Trump; and Darryl L. "D.L." Hughley, host of the nationally syndicated "D.L. Hughley Radio Show," who recorded an interview with the President for later radio, online, and social media broadcast. He also referred to his brothers Francis W. and James B. Biden and sister Valerie Biden Owens. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on May 30. Audio was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Campaign event in Philadelphia, PA.

Locations: Philadelphia, PA.

Names: Biden Owens, Valerie; Biden, Francis W.; Biden, James B.; Horsford, Steven A.; Hughley, Darryl L. "D.L."; Moore, Westley W.O. "Wes"; Sutton, Lynette; Trump, Donald J.

Subjects: Civil rights movement; Congressional Black Caucus; Diversity, equity, and inclusion, improvement efforts; Economic improvement; Group of Seven (G-7) nations; Group of Twenty (G-20) nations; Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs); Infrastructure improvements; Labor movement and organized labor; Maryland, collapse of Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore; Maryland, Governor; Pennsylvania, Democratic Party event; Pennsylvania, Interstate 95 overpass collapse; Pennsylvania, President's visit; Racial equality, improvement efforts; Small businesses, promotion efforts.

DCPD Number: DCPD202400468.