

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2024

Remarks on the 12th Anniversary of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) Program

June 18, 2024

The President. Javier, thank you. Please, sit down.

Today is a good day.

Audience members. Yes! [*Applause*]

The first bill I introduced when I was President was an immigration bill that included this provision, but it never got off the ground. It needed a little more help. But now, today, a significant portion of it is being passed—or being—by Executive order.

Javier, thank you for that introduction and for sharing your family's story.

You know, I've often said doctors—we've been a significant consumer of health care in my family. Spent a lot of time in hospitals in—for our family. My—anyway. And I always said that doctors let you live; nurses make you want to live. Not a joke. A lot of time in ICU, a lot of time with my son, a lot of time—and you know, it's a—if there's any angels in heaven, they're all nurses—men and women. Not a joke.

So thank you for what you did to help us get through the pandemic, pal, and for all you're doing for our country.

My name is Joe Biden. I'm Jill Biden's husband. [*Laughter*]

And thanks to all the Members of the Congress and Homeland Security Secretary—I—I'm not sure I'm going to introduce you all the way—[*laughter*—but all kidding aside, Secretary Mayorkas, as well as Secretary Becerra and advocates and families for law enforcement, faith leaders, everybody who is here.

Two weeks ago, I did what Republicans in Congress refused to do: I took action to secure our border. That included restricting unlawful crossings at our southern border, making decisions on asylum more quickly, and so much more. And so far, it's working.

Since we implemented my order, encounters have dropped 25 percent at the border. And we're seeing the lowest number we've seen in a long time.

But, folks, I took this step after the bipartisan agreement one of the most conservative Republican Senators had helped work through in over a 4- or 5-week period—the strongest bipartisan security agreement that's ever been seen—but we were about to move forward when Republicans walked away from the deal in the most pathetic and petty of reasons: Donald Trump got on the phone, literally, and started—and the press can confirm this—and calling them—calling Senators, saying: "Don't. Don't go ahead and do this. Don't support this legislation that had bipartisan support."

And when—he asked—when you ask why, he said it wouldn't—it would hurt him politically and help me instead. So much for Republicans caring about the border.

I also know many people in this room also had concerns about the steps I had taken. I heard and respected from many of you and many people behind me of the concerns you felt. As President, I had to take these actions. Every nation must secure its border. It's just that simple. And if Trump and the Republicans wouldn't do it working with me, then I would do it on my own. And I did.

At the time I took these steps to secure the border, I also said that I would move to fix problems that made our immigration system unfair, unjust, and provisions that simply made it—no sense at all, specifically, steps that will be good for "Dreamers," married couples, and for Americans. That's why we're here today.

A few days ago, we marked the 12th anniversary of taking care of Dreamers as—that President Obama and I put in place. There are few of these immigrant—of these immigration areas that have had most positive area—impact and gotten more support from the American people across the board.

These young people known as Dreamers—Hispanic, South Asians, and more—who came to America as children, only know America as their home, have been able to live and learn out of the shadows—out of the shadows. So many of them have graduated from high school and college and are starting families on their own, building successful careers, serving our Nation in uniform, and so, so much more.

We're a much better and stronger nation because of Dreamers, like Javier, who just introduced me. So today I'm announcing new measures to clarify and speed up work visas to help people, including Dreamers, who have graduated from U.S. colleges and universities, landed jobs in high-demand, high-skill professions that we need to have grow—see our economy grow. It's the right thing to do.

I want those who have been educated at U.S. college and universities to put their skills and knowledge to work for—here in America. I want to keep building the strongest economy in the world with the best workforce in the world. We've already created 15 million new jobs, a record. We're seeing record economic growth, a record of small-business growth.

And I doubt why the action we're taking today matters—if you wonder about that, just ask business leaders, ask labor leaders, ask economists, ask elected officials. They know it's good for American business. They know it's good for the American economy. They know it's good for America, period.

This step builds on other actions we've taken to support Dreamers, from defending Dreamers in the courts and expressing—expanding access to health care for millions of Americans under the Affordable Care Act, including for Dreamers.

The second action I'm announcing today, which—or is about keeping families together—my dad used to have an expression; he'd say, "Joey, family is about the beginning, middle, and the end"—about keeping couples together who are married, where one spouse is a U.S. citizen, the other is undocumented, and they've been living in the United States for at least 10 years.

These couples have been raising families, sending their kids to church and school, paying taxes, contributing to our country for every—for 10 years or more—matter of fact, the average time they've spent here is 23 years, the people we're affecting today—but living in the United States all this time with a fear and uncertainty.

We can fix that, and that's what I'm going to do today: fix it.

And here's the point: It doesn't require any fundamental change in our immigration law. There's already a system in place for people we're talking about today, but the process is cumbersome, risky, and it separates families.

Under the current process, undocumented spouses of U.S. citizens must go back to their home country—for example, to Mexico, for example—to fill out paperwork and obtain long-term legal status. They have to leave their families in America with no assurance that they'll be allowed back into the United States, so they stay in America, but in the shadows, living in

constant fear of deportation without the ability to legally work. All this, even though, under the law today, they are eligible for long-term legal status.

Today I'm announcing a commonsense fix to streamline the process for obtaining legal status for immigrants married—excuse me—to American citizens who live here and lived here for a long time. For those wives or husbands and their children who have lived in America for a decade or more, but are undocumented, this action will allow them to file the paperwork for legal status in the United States, allow them to work while they remain with their families in the United States.

And let's be clear: This action still requires undocumented spouses to file all required legal paperwork to remain in the United States. It requires them to pass a—criminal background checks. And it doesn't apply to anyone trying to come here today. It only applies—this action is a better way. It doesn't tear families apart, while requiring every undocumented spouse to fulfill their obligations under the law.

Look, the actions I'm announcing today will go into effect later this summer.

And by the way, just as was true for the protection of Dreamers, the steps I'm taking today are overwhelmingly supported by the American people, no matter what the other team says. In fact, polls show over 70 percent of Americans support this effort to keep families together.

It's important. And the reason is simple: It embraces the American principle that we should be—keep families together.

In 2013, President Obama and I took a similar action that allowed undocumented spouses and children of American servicemen to stay together while they apply for legal status in America. Servicemen protecting our Nation should not have to worry about keeping their families together, for God's sake. This policy has been in place for over a decade, and it's working well, and so will the new one.

Look, let me close with this. I refuse to believe that to secure our border we have to walk away from being an America for that's—generations have been renewed, revitalized, and refreshed by the talent, the skill, the hard work, the courage, and determination of immigrants coming to our country.

Look, the Statue of Liberty is not some relic of American history. It stands—still stands for who we are. But I also refuse to believe that for us to continue to be America that embraces immigration, we have to give up securing our border. They're false choices. We can both secure the border and provide legal pathways to citizenship.

But we have to acknowledge that the patience and good will of the American people is being tested by their fears at the border. They don't understand a lot of it. These are the fears my predecessor is trying to play on when he says immigrants—immigrants, in his words, are "poisoning the blood of the country"; when he calls immigrants, in his words, "animals."

When he was President, he separated families and children at the border. And now he's proposing to rip spouses and children from their families and homes and communities and place them in detention camps. He's actually saying these things. It's hard to believe it's being said, but he's actually saying these things out loud. And it's outrageous.

Folks, I'm not interested in playing politics with the border or immigration. I'm interested in fixing it.

I've said it before—I've said it before, and I'll say it again today: I will work with anyone to solve these problems. That's my responsibility as President. That's our responsibility as

Americans. Because the simple truth is, there's not a single damn thing we can't do if we put our minds to it.

We've got to remember who in the hell we are. We're the United States of America, and nothing is beyond our capacity. We're a nation of immigrants, and that's who we are.

God bless you all, and may God protect our Forces.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:23 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Katy, TX, resident Javier Quiroz Castro; Sen. James P. Lankford; and former President Donald J. Trump. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on June 19.

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