

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2024

Remarks Honoring the NCAA Women's Basketball Champion University of South Carolina Gamecocks

September 10, 2024

The President. My name is Joe Biden. I work for Jim Clyburn. *[Laughter]*

Folks, welcome. Welcome to the White House. The national champions, University of South Carolina.

Audience member. Congratulations! *[Laughter]*

The President. All right. You've got it, kid. I was getting some tips from the coach.

Look, a lot of supporters here today, including several Members of Congress—Jim, I was just bragging about you.

Representative James E. Clyburn. Oh, thank you.

The President. You know what I mean? Because I'm afraid of you. I don't want to—*[laughter]*—don't want to cross you. And by the way, get him back in line, will you? You know what I mean?

Rep. Clyburn. I'm working on it.

The President. He used to be my close friend. We've got to get it that way again. *[Laughter]*

I love Columbia so much, I asked the former mayor to join me in the White House full time: Steve Benjamin. And he—*[applause]*. And he claimed credit for every win this year. I don't know what the story is. *[Laughter]*

Truth is, I wouldn't be here today were it not for the support of the people—great people of South Carolina. Let me say it again: Thank you, thank you, thank you.

To the families and friends and, most of all, to the players and coaches, congratulations on an incredible run of excellence. Incredible.

I know why you're so good. You've got a girl from Philly running this team. *[Laughter]* I married a Philly girl. You don't screw around with a Philly girl, man. They're tough. *[Laughter]* Jilly from Philly.

Coach, before you took the job in South Carolina, the women's team had just—you had been to just two tournaments in 17 years.

And now we're here to celebrate the third national championship—second in 3 years—with 109-to-3 record in that span—109 to 3.

Audience member. *[Inaudible]*

The President. You've got it, kid. You're back there going—you're right.

Just the 10th team ever to go undefeated in women's college basketball.

That's not to say you weren't challenged all the way to your 38-and-0 effort. You know, you had to replace five starters due to the WNBA draft and graduation. And there were doubts all over—doubts all over about contending for the title this year.

But for the record—and this is the God's truth—I picked you to win on my card. *[Laughter]* I won a lot of money. No, that's a joke. *[Laughter]*

But it's just, you never gave up. You never gave up. You kept the faith, and you just finished the job.

Look, take the title game against Iowa. In the back-and-forth game, everyone had to step up. Nine players recorded double-digits in 9 minutes—double—9. Four players scored in double figures. Your bench outscored Iowa's bench 37 to nothing.

And here's another big number. The championship game was the most watched basketball game in 5 years, peaking at over 24 million viewers. I'll tell you what, I don't think anybody is watching men's basketball anymore. *[Laughter]*

Look, from the college game to the WNBA, with a proud South Carolina alum, A'ja Wilson—and the Las Vegas Aces, who we had in the White House here to celebrate the WNBA championship.

So, you know, for the Olympics, where she also led the U.S. team to gold in Paris as one of a dozen South Carolina athletes in the Summer Games; and where Coach Staley joined my wife Jill on the official delegation opening—at the opening ceremonies; and from everywhere in between, I think it's fair to say everyone—everyone—watches women's sports now—everyone. No, you've changed—*[applause]*. It's amazing.

And when new fan—and when new fans watch for the first time, when young girls see their idols, they see the power of your example. Coach Staley, when you took this job, Carolyn Peck, the first Black female coach in Division I women's basketball national champion, gave you a piece of the net from her title game. All she asked you was to pay it forward, and that's what you've done.

After your first title game, you sent a piece of the net to every Black woman head coach in Division I basketball. That network is your legacy, kid. It's the legacy of this whole team: setting an example for the next generation.

Congratulations, national championships [champions; White House correction], University of South Carolina women's basketball. *[Applause]* You're the best. You're incredible to watch. And God bless you all.

And I'm going to turn it over to the coach to say a few words.

Head Coach Dawn Staley. Thank you. Thank you, President Biden.

To my good friend Dr. Biden and distinguished guests, thank you for this incredible honor.

To stand here in the White House—a house that symbolizes hope, unity, and opportunity for all—is a moment that is not lost on me.

I feel like this is a teachable moment for my team. I'm reminded of the journey of our State—our home State, South Carolina, has taken—how not so long ago, the Confederate flag was taken down from our State capitol, a symbol that represented division and exclusion. That moment wasn't just about a symbol being removed, it was about people coming together, uniting for a shared vision of progress, justice, and equality.

Today my staff, my team, and I stand here embodying diversity, inclusiveness, and unity. My hope is that this moment lands on you, as my team, as a powerful reminder of the beauty that comes—that can come from unifying for a common goal and doing things the right way.

To my incredible staff and my relentless team, this moment is yours. I ask so much of you, and you never back down. You rise to every challenge with grace, tenacity, and heart. We stand here today because of that commitment, because of your willingness to put in work and sacrifice to achieve something greater than ourselves.

We want to take a moment to thank our families, who are our foundation; our fans, or "FAMs"—[*laughter*—as we call them, who will travel the globe to support us and have become our unofficial sixth man.

To the University of South Carolina and the great State of South Carolina, we work hard every day to represent you well, and I truly hope we made you proud.

Most importantly, we know we wouldn't be here without the grace of God. So I'd just like to say just thank you. Thank you everyone for supporting our team. I want to thank President Biden for your leadership. We appreciate your service. And we hope—we truly hope that your legacy will continue in all of us. So thank you so much.

The President. Let me say something here. All of those of you who hold public office in South Carolina, you'd better hope she keeps coaching and doesn't run. [*Laughter*]

[*At this point, the President was presented with a University of South Carolina Gamecocks jersey.*]

Let me make something clear: I played baseball and football. I didn't play basketball in college. And there's a rumor that I can go to my left—[*inaudible*]. I can't take them on. [*Laughter*]

Thank you. It's a great honor. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:03 a.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Sen. Lindsey O. Graham; Office of Public Engagement Director Stephen K. Benjamin; Aliyah Boston, forward, Women's National Basketball Association's Indiana Fever; Laeticia Amihere, forward, WNBA's Atlanta Dream; Zia Cooke, guard, WNBA's Los Angeles Sparks; Brea Beal, guard, WNBA's Minnesota Lynx; Victaria Saxton, forward, WNBA's Indiana Fever; Tessa Johnson and TeHina Paopao, guards, Kamilla Cardoso, former center, and Chloe Kitts, forward, University of South Carolina women's basketball team; A'ja Wilson, center, WNBA's Las Vegas Aces; and Carolyn Peck, college basketball analyst, ESPN and SEC Network.

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Names: Amihere, Laeticia; Beal, Brea; Benjamin, Stephen K.; Biden, Jill T.; Boston, Aliyah; Cardoso, Kamilla; Clyburn, James E.; Cooke, Zia; Graham, Lindsey O.; Johnson, Tessa; Kitts, Chloe; Paopao, TeHina; Peck, Carolyn; Saxton, Victaria; Staley, Dawn; Wilson, A'ja.

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