

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2024

Remarks Honoring the NCAA Men's Basketball Champion University of Connecticut Huskies

September 10, 2024

The President. Hello, hello, hello.

Well, let me be the first to say: Welcome back. *[Laughter]* I won't be here next year, but you may be. *[Laughter]* If these guys over here have anything to do with it, they're both trouble.

Look, it's great to have so many UConn friends and fans here today with us, including Education Secretary Miguel Cardona. You know, Miguel is a slow learner. *[Laughter]* He has four degrees and credentials from UConn. *[Laughter]* I told him that equals one from Delaware. *[Laughter]* No, only kidding. Only kidding. *[Laughter]* Don't get mad at me. Don't get mad.

He couldn't make the damn basketball team, but there's no doubt he's a Husky through and through, man.

And my Personal Aide, Jacob, who sits outside the Oval Office, played tennis at UConn. Jake—but you'd think, during basketball season, he played basketball. It's all he talks about, man. *[Laughter]* All he talks about.

We're also joined by several good friends and Members of Congress: Senator Blumenthal, who was a good friend of my deceased son, Beau; and Senator Murphy. Stand up, guys. Come on.

And the former Senator from the State of Connecticut—you'd think he had gone to UConn—and a great friend, Chris Dodd. Is Chris here? Get up, Chris. Get up. The Dodd Center is at the University of Connecticut, isn't it? Your dad and your—yes, well, I'll tell you what, man. Do they intimidate you? *[Laughter]* Because they—January 20, 2020, following the loss to Villanova, Coach Hurley said, quote: "People better get us now. That's all. You'd better get us now." *[Laughter]* Damn, Coach, you were right. *[Laughter]*

Four years later, for the first time in 17 years, there was back-to-back men's college basketball champions, the UConn Huskies.

And we've got two future Huskies right there who are going to play on the basketball team, right in the front row here. *[Laughter]*

And for the sixth time in just 25 years, the UConn Huskies are atop the men's basketball world again, man. That's pretty cool.

It wasn't easy. Last year, you started on a—underestimated. The only thing is, you only lost three star players the previous season to the NBA. People questioned whether or not you had the talent to go back-to-back. I guess they didn't see you guys standing up, man. *[Laughter]*

Although, I should note, I picked you guys on my ticket. *[Laughter]* And this morning I picked the mayor's South Carolina girls. I made a lot of money. *[Laughter]* That's a joke. *[Laughter]* Press, that is a joke.

But, man, you proved everybody wrong. You were a force, winning the Big East regular season title, winning the Big East tournament, winning the NCAA tournament games. By an average of 23 points, you won those games.

But even though you made it look easy at times, you know, you made a lot of sacrifices. The trust you built in each other, taking the time to the court, knowing every team in America was

going after you. Every time you showed up on the court, you were the number-one target. And—but you're winners. And winners win. You know, you know that winning takes a lot of work. We know that.

Together, you capped off one of the most successful 2-year runs in the history of the sport, ushering in a new era of UConn's men basketball, passing the likes of Duke and Indiana for alltime national titles. And now there's no doubt at all about who are the blue bloods of basketball.

With this team sending 4 players to the NBA draft this year, this university sending 11 athletes to the Paris Olympics, there's clearly something—you must have something in the water up there, man. *[Laughter]* I don't know what you all are drinking.

Coach, you've said that UConn has been running college basketball for 30 years. With you at the helm, I think they'd better get ready for another 30.

Every single one—every single one of you embodies the—the—I don't know—the possibilities of your school, your State, and this great Nation.

So congratulations to you all. And may God support our troops and bless our troops.

I want to hand this over now to Coach Hurley, who's going to say a few words how I'm going to fill in next year—*[laughter]*—a player. No. *[Laughter]*

Anyway, Coach, the floor is yours. You're the—a good man.

Head Coach Dan Hurley. Everywhere we go—*[laughter]*—everywhere we go, we say this thing—right?—every arena that we go into, we start—when we enter a place, and it's: "The champs are here."

The President. I thought you started with dragon underwear. *[Laughter]*

Coach Hurley. Well, it's not just the dragons. I have sharks; I have wolves.

The President. Oh.

Coach Hurley. I ride the hot hand. You know? *[Laughter]* And I—actually, I don't just make the dragons do the games. I've actually got the dragons on right now as a—*[laughter]*—a reward for the dragons. They're on right now.

Yes, I thought this would be easier in year two. Oh, man, I've been to the White House before. This is scary as shit. *[Laughter]*

Stick—stick to the script. All right.

Thank you, Mr. President—

The President. I went to Catholic school too.

Coach Hurley. *[Laughter]* You're just—thank you, Mr. President, and, obviously, everyone in here, you know, who's joined us, you know, for the celebration today.

You know, we said it last year. We wanted to make this thing an annual visit for us. And, you know, here we are again as back-to-back champs, right back here. So, you know, obviously thrilled to be here.

Our—our goal, really, going into the year: We knew we had the potential to have a special team, and it was like a real simple mindset that we were trying to create, which was like: Let's just win every single, you know, tournament or every opportunity to win a championship; like, let's just win everything.

And there were five opportunities for us to win championship trophies during the course of the season, and we—and we won—[*laughter*—we won all five.

You know, being a championship program, I think everyone in the organization understands the standards and the way we go about our business. In the organization, it's the highest possible standards that we hold each other to. We understand that because we've climbed the mountain before.

And this team here, it was a different group of men that we took the court with this year and, you know, produced even greater results and an even greater team and a team that will go down as one of the most dominant teams in college basketball history, the way we just destroyed everybody.

From those early season tournaments all the way through to, you know, the Big East tournaments and March Madness, you know, we won everything. Our kind of—our mindset is, like, relentless competitiveness with the way we go about things, a focus on just consistent improvement. You know, we mindfully communicate with each other. I don't do that with the refs, but—[*laughter*—with each other, we do well with it.

And then we really—you know, we're really a strong pack of Huskies here. You know, we don't have any—you know, any weakness in the group here. It is just an incredibly strong, you know, group of men: their relentlessness, their resilience and toughness, their talent, their skill, the preparation, their connection and brotherhood and the way they sacrifice for each other.

You know, we played a brand of basketball that was absolutely beautiful to watch and absolutely dominant and—but then all we can think about is winning the next one. It's weird as shit. [*Laughter*] Sorry again. [*Laughter*] I just don't know where I am.

Strengthened by our success as a program, you know, our focus, again, is quickly turning to our pursuit of this third national championship in a row, potentially. [*Applause*] Yes.

Today—I mean, today is, like, an incredible moment for us to pause, because, basically, you just celebrate cool stuff like this and then just work really hard. You know, like, that's basically all that this thing is.

And for us right now, it's just like, you know, lock in on this three-peat, celebrate these incredible players that we've lost, and then, you know, go get ready to truly make history in college basketball next year as the first three-peat champion since Coach Wooden and truly do something historic.

And that is not lost on any of us. The enormity of our season coming up is special, so we're excited about that.

But thank you, President, for giving us the opportunity to be here. And it's—only the champs come in here. You know, there's no participation or high scorer, you know? [*Laughter*] "Oh, I was the high scorer. I had a triple-double." I'm going: "No. Triple-doubles don't get you in the White House. You've got to be a champion to get in here." And we're in here.

Mr. President, we'd like to have you add something to your UConn collection of—[*laughter*—of championship swag.

[*At this point, the President was presented with a University of Connecticut Huskies jersey.*]
The President. Good.

Any parents in the room? Stand up. Any parents, stand up. Come on.

Coach Hurley. [*Inaudible*]

The President. You and I had something in common: We married up. [*Laughter*]

All right. Any graduates of the University of Connecticut in the room? Stand up.

All right. Such a great honor. Thank you very, very, very much. And although I won't be President next year—I'm retiring—[*laughter*—]but I may come back and watch you.

Thank you.

Q. Mr. President, what's your advice for—[*inaudible*]?

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:45 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Personal Aide to the President Jacob J. Spreyer; Jordan Hawkins, guard, National Basketball Association's New Orleans Pelicans; Andre Jackson, Jr., guard, NBA's Milwaukee Bucks; Adama Sanogo, center, NBA's Chicago Bulls; Office of Public Engagement Director Stephen K. Benjamin, in his former capacity as mayor of Columbia, SC; Donovan Clingan, center, NBA's Portland Trail Blazers; Stephon Castle, guard, NBA's San Antonio Spurs; Tristen Newton, guard, NBA's Indiana Pacers; and Cam Spencer, guard, NBA's Memphis Grizzlies.

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Names: Benjamin, Stephen K.; Blumenthal, Richard; Cardona, Miguel A.; Castle, Stephon; Clingan, Donovan; Dodd, Christopher J.; Hawkins, Jordan; Hurley, Dan; Jackson, Andre, Jr.; Murphy, Christopher S.; Newton, Tristen; Sanogo, Adama; Spencer, Cam; Spreyer, Jacob J.

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