

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2024

Remarks on the 30th Anniversary of the Violence Against Women Act
September 12, 2024

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

Thank you, Ruth, Nicole, and Kyle for sharing your stories. Your courage literally inspires the Nation, and we stand with you. The entire Nation stands with you.

You know, my daughter Ashley—the love of my life and the life of my love—she is—she—and anyway, I don't get—anyway. *[Laughter]*. I get emotional when I talk about her.

And thank you, Ada, and your beautiful poetry.

It's also an honor to see so many friends, brave survivors, and devoted advocates.

And thank you to the bipartisan Members of Congress who have worked tirelessly—and I mean tirelessly—to ensure and expand what we're doing here today, as well as the—*[applause]*. The reason I put these glasses on, the sun is shining that way, and I want to see you all over there. *[Laughter]*

As well as the late Dianne Feinstein and Representative Sheila Jackson Lee, whom we miss very much.

It wasn't too long ago that we as a country didn't want to talk about violence against women as a national epidemic, let alone do something the Government had to address. Society often looked away.

In so many—so many—places, violence against women wasn't a crime; it was referred to as a "family affair." We were told addressing it would cause disintegration of the family. That's what I got accused of: "Biden was disintegrating the family." Not a joke. That was a full-blown campaign.

And that shelters—this is the one that really angered me—shelters that we were putting in place were nothing more than "indoctrination centers"—indoctrination; few police—few police—departments had special victims units; and there was no national hotline to call—none.

There was a background—that was the background when I first wrote the Violence Against Women Act in 1990. My goal was to do more than change the law: to change the culture of America—I mean it; to provide more protection and support for survivors; and to create accountability for perpetrators.

The way I looked at it—I come from—I was raised by a dad—a gentle, decent man. He taught my siblings and me that the greatest abuse of power—the greatest abuse of power was to abuse power. And the cardinal sin that a man could do was raise his hand to a woman or a child.

So I believed that the only way we could change the culture was by shining a light on that culture and speaking its name. We started holding public hearings, despite Senators saying it was—I was—it was too salacious for the public to see. That was one of the arguments: "You may be right, Joe, but it's too salacious for the public to see. They won't understand."

We had to let America know what was going on. Americans, at our core, are basic, decent people, and I believed that if they could see the truth, we could begin to change things. And that's what happened.

The Violence Against Women Act broke the dam of congressional and cultural resistance, brought this hidden epidemic out of the shadows, and began to shift the legal and social burdens away from the survivors onto the perpetrators where they belonged.

For example, the new law created the first-ever national hotline for survivors to get help. It supported shelters, rape crisis centers, housing, legal assistance for women and children all across America. And the law helped train police officers and advocates and prosecutors and judges and court personnel to make our entire system—entire system—more fair and responsible to the needs of survivors.

And over the last 30 years, every time we've reauthorized that law—when I was Senator, when I was Vice President, when I was President—we've strengthened it. We've broadened the law's domestic violence protections, to including dating violence and to better support survivors of stalking and sexual assault. We expanded services to protect immigrants, communities of color, rural communities, Tribal lands, LGBTQ survivors.

And to create a new program to end the backlog of rape kits, instead of prevention programs in every State, we secured historic funding to increase so much more.

Since we passed VAWA, according to the Department of Justice, between 1993 and 2022, annual rates of domestic violence have dropped by almost 70 percent, while rape and sexual assaults have declined by more than 55 percent.

And our first-ever Domestic Violence Hotline has received over 7 million calls since 1996. It matters. It saves lives, being able to pick up that phone and call. I remember the first time I listened in. "I can hear him. I can see him. He's coming. Please, send somebody. Please, please, please."

You know, but there's always more to do. Let me just say, the first and best decision I made when I was the nominee in 2020 was selecting Kamala Harris as Vice President—not a political statement; it's a factual statement—a former district attorney, attorney general, U.S. Senator, who has prosecuted and stood up to sexual violence offenders her entire career.

You can't say that about my predecessor. [*Laughter*]

Kamala and I have also taken steps beyond this law to address violence against women. We know that during the pandemic—and you know it as well—domestic violence increased.

That's why, through our American Rescue Plan, I directed \$1 billion in supplemental funding to ensure survivors trapped in bad situations could get the port [support; White House correction], including safe housing.

We also passed the most significant gun safety law in 30 years that narrowed—[*applause*—that narrowed the so-called "boyfriend loophole" to include dating partners convicted of abuse who say they could not own a firearm. What a fight that was, but we won it.

I signed a bipartisan bill to end what's known as forced arbitration. Remember that? We hire you. If in fact you—anything happened, you—where you—it has to go to arbitration and not—you can't go to court. It prevented survivors of abuse and harassment in the workplace from getting their day in court. We ended that.

It was amazing, the people who opposed us doing that. That just stunned me.

And to keep college students safe, we sent the—we strengthened the protections under title IX that my predecessor then weakened. And building on the work we started when I was Vice President, when I launched the "It's On Us" program that Kyle mentioned earlier, we're increasing funding—increasing funding—to prevent campus assault—sexual assault. It's important.

And we've created reforms that fundamentally shift how the military investigates and prosecutes sexual assault and domestic violence, including—including—independent prosecutors who now report outside the military officer command structure.

And I want to thank Kirsten—Senator Kirsten Gillibrand and Congresswoman Jackie Speier. Is Jackie here? I know Kirsten couldn't be here. And, Jackie, if you're here, stand up, because you deserve special recognition. I don't see you, but you may be out there. [Laughter] Jackie's leadership on this has made a big difference.

For the first time in nearly a decade, the rates of sexual assault and harassment within the Active Duty military forces are down, finally—down.

Kamala and I also continue to stand with women and girls worldwide who are facing violence and demand basic human rights. I also signed the historic Presidential memorandum to punish individuals around the globe who use rape and sexual violence as a weapon of war and terror.

And we continue to condemn Russia for its widespread violent sexual assaults in Ukraine, just as we condemned the terrorist group Hamas and its appalling, despicable acts of rape, mutilation, sexual violence in Israel on October 7 and against hostages in captivity.

Silence and denial can hide much, but it can erase nothing—nothing. Some injuries are so heinous, so horrific, so grievous, they can't be buried, no matter how hard people try.

And today I'm proud to announce a new significant actions: a record of nearly \$700 million in grants this year alone to more than 40 VA—VAWA-funded programs in States, Tribal communities, and across the country—\$700 million.

We're also issuing new policies to expand housing protections for survivors, give law enforcement more tools to remove guns from domestic abusers, and we are—we are tackling the next frontier of gender-based violence and abuse: deep-fake images and videos generated by artificial intelligence.

Back in 2022, we established civil protections for those who—whose imminent—whose intimate images are shared without their consent. It's now a crime.

Today, in response to my call to action, we have received new commitments from leading technology companies to combat the creation of exploitive deep-fake images and to stop distributing and making money off this kind of sexual abuse, which they're doing now.

Folks, but the fact is, we know our work never stops. To any survivor who is struggling, I want you to know you're not alone. Doug [Jill; White House correction] and I, Kamala and Doug, and our entire administration and entire community have your back.

For example, Kamala and I will continue to defend reproductive freedom in America. My predecessor is proud that he put Justices on the Supreme Court to overturn *Roe v. Wade*. As a result, Republicans are criminalizing doctors, denying IVF treatment, turning women away from emergency room, and forcing survivors of rape and incest to leave their States to get care. It is outrageous.

In its decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, the Supreme Court majority wrote, and I quote, "Women are not without electoral or political power." End of quote. No kidding. [Laughter] No kidding. Talk about out of touch. [Laughter] Clearly, the Supreme Court and my predecessors have no clue about the power of women in America.

Let me close with this. The Violence Against Women Act is my proudest legislative accomplishment in all the years I've served as Senator, Vice President, and President. I mean that from the bottom of my heart. [Applause]

Thank you. Thank—and I'm so proud, so grateful for the heroes—the heroes I've met along the way, standing up here on these Capitol steps, who are here today and across the country: women and men who run shelters and rape crisis centers; fighters and allies who stand up to industry titans to expose the truth; survivors who speak up for themselves and empower those suffering in silence.

You've changed the Nation. You've turned your pain into purpose. And your bravery and your spirit are unbreakable. And because of you—and this is not hyperbole—because of you, we're a better nation than we were 30 years ago.

By the way, my daughter is a social worker in Philadelphia, providing housing for abused women and those coming out of prison. She was going to be here today, but she's ill. She was going to introduce me.

I want to thank her and all like her. You all are the reason why—and I mean this from the bottom of my heart. I hear about what a terrible nation—I'm an—optimistic about our Nation. I've never been more optimistic about our future. I really haven't.

We just have—we have to remember who we are. We're the United States of America. And there is nothing—nothing—beyond our capacity when we do it together.

We're the only nation in the world that's come out of every crisis stronger than we went in. And we're going to continue to fight and end all this scourge that we had to deal with.

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

Thank you, thank you, thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:14 p.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Ruth M. Glenn, president of public affairs, National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, who introduced the President; Nicole Matthews, executive director, Minnesota Indian Women's Sexual Assault Coalition; Kyle Richard, associate director of men's engagement and special projects, It's On Us; Ada Limón, 24th Poet Laureate of the U.S.; former President Donald J. Trump, in his capacity as the 2024 Republican Presidential nominee; and Douglas C. Emhoff, husband of Vice President Kamala D. Harris. He also referred to his brothers James B. and Francis W. Biden and sister Valerie Biden Owens. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on September 13.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Violence Against Women Act, 30th anniversary.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Biden Owens, Valerie; Biden, Ashley B.; Biden, Francis W.; Biden, James B.; Biden, Jill T.; Emhoff, Douglas C.; Gillibrand, Kirsten E.; Glenn, Ruth M.; Harris, Kamala D.; Limón, Ada; Matthews, Nicole; Richard, Kyle; Speier, K. Jacqueline; Trump, Donald J.

Subjects: Artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies; Civil and human rights, U.S. promotion efforts; Conflict-related sexual violence, efforts to combat; Domestic violence; Gaza, hostages held by Hamas; Gender-based violence; Gun control efforts; Hamas political-paramilitary organization; Israel, attacks by Hamas of October 7, 2023; Reproductive health care; Russia, conflict in Ukraine; Russia, human rights issues; Sexual assault and harassment; U.S. Supreme Court opinion overturning 1973 decision in *Roe v. Wade*; Ukraine, Russian invasion and airstrikes; Vice President; Violence Against Women Act, 30th anniversary; Women's rights and gender equality.

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