

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2024

Remarks at the Department of Education's National Historically Black Colleges and Universities Week Conference in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

September 16, 2024

The President. Hello, hello, hello. Thank you. Please—please have a seat. [*Applause*]

[*Laughter*] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Now, look, I love Kamala——

Audience members. Thank you, Joe! Thank you, Joe! Thank you, Joe!

The President. Thank you all.

Audience members. Thank you, Joe! Thank you, Joe!

The President. As the saying goes, you all brung me to the dance. [*Laughter*]

Folks, I want to get something straight at the outset. I love Kamala, but Delaware State is the best HBCU in America.

They're the ones—oh, you think I'm kidding? I was a 29-year-old kid, and they embraced me. They embraced me like you can't imagine. And we won—the second youngest person in American history—because of a HBCU called Delaware State.

And by the way, I hired a young man from Delaware State named Tony Allen. [*Laughter*] Came to work for me. While there, I encouraged him to continue to get his—extend his degree. He got his doctorate and left. He became president himself. [*Laughter*]

I don't how the hell that happened so quick. [*Laughter*] But, Tony, thank you, man. I've been introduced countless times, but never quite like that. And I mean it, Tony. From the bottom of my heart, I'm deeply moved. By God's grace, we were true friends, and Delaware State will always have a special place in my heart, for real.

And to the presidents and administrators of our 101 Historic Black Colleges and Universities, it's an honor to celebrate—and I mean celebrate—HBCU Week with you.

Attempted Assassination of Former President Donald J. Trump

Before I begin, I want to make a quick reference on the attempted assassination against our former President in Florida yesterday.

I commend the Secret Service for the expert handling of the situation. And the former President was protected from harm, and the subject is—and is—the subject is in custody. And acting head of the Secret Service is in Florida today assessing what happened and determining whether any further adjustments need to be made to ensure the safety of our former President.

Let me just say: There is no—and I mean this from the bottom of my heart; those of you who know me—many of you do—no place in political violence—for political violence in America. None. Zero. Never.

I've always condemned political violence, and I always will. In America—in America, we resolve our differences peacefully at the ballot box, not at the end of a gun.

America has suffered too many times the tragedy of an assassin's bullet. It solves nothing and just tears the country apart. We must do everything we can to prevent it and never give it any oxygen.

Historically Black Colleges and Universities

Folks, now to today's event.

It's an honor to recognize HBCU excellence in our Nation. I see excellence in it every single day. I see it this weekend at the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation—[*applause*]—I tell you what—the foundation gala—only about 3,500 people there. [*Laughter*] And I was happy—and I've been wanting to do this—to celebrate the first-ever White House brunch to celebrate Black excellence—Black excellence—[*applause*]—which many of you and your alumni attended. It's about trying to point out what's already been done.

I'm proud to have the most diverse administration in history that taps into the full—[*applause*]—I mean it. I made a commitment: My administration was going to look like America. It taps into the full talents of our Nation, including graduates of HBCUs, like our amazing Vice President is.

Folks, together, Kamala and I know that an education makes a person free. HBCUs' education makes you fearless, as well. It matters. [*Applause*] I mean it.

More than 180 years, born under the shadow of slavery and Jim Crow, HBCUs have instilled a sense of purpose and freedom, a commitment to make a difference for all their students; to lift up not just yourselves, but others along the way. Institutions grounded in the belief that every American of every race and every background, every Zip Code—and you know me; I mean this—should have a fair and equal chance to go as far as their God-given talents can take them. That's who we are. That's what we stand for.

But, as I've said before, we face an inflection point in history. It comes along every six or seven generations. One of those rare moments in our history when the decisions we make now—right now—are going to determine the fate of our Nation and the world for the next decades—for six, seven decades to come. And I mean it.

When I wasn't going to run for President again after my son died coming back from Iraq, I decided that I was going to write another book. I was going to write a book about the inflection points in world history, how it changed history, going all the way back to dealing with the printing press and how it's changed everything.

But look, we're still in the battle—we're still in the battle—for the very soul of America.

In 2020, I ran—and I give you my word, this was the reason: I ran to redeem the soul of America, to restore decency and dignity to the office of the Presidency. I ran to rebuild and expand the backbone of America: the middle class. And I ran to unite the country and remind ourselves that we can do anything we want to do when we do it together.

Four years later, we've made incredible progress, because Kamala and I kept our commitment to you to ensure that all our students and all of our colleges and universities should be able to succeed. That's why I signed an Executive order reestablishing the White House Initiative on HBCUs after my predecessor allowed it to lapse.

Thank you, Dr. Trent, for leading it. I can't see you out there, but I'm sure you're there. And thank you, Tony and Dr. Glover, for leading my Presidential Board on HBCUs.

I'm also proud to lead the first administration in history to have a working group from the Divine Nine in the White House.

Audience member. [*Inaudible*]

The President. Oh, I've got it, man. I may—may be a White boy, but I ain't stupid. [Laughter] I figured out real quick. [Laughter] And by the way, this is an official group in the White House.

Together, we get to work—we got to work right away with our signature investment in addressing one of the most pressing issues for HBCUs. We all know—and I mean this sincerely—that HBCU students are just as capable as any other students. [Applause] No, but—but HBCUs don't have the endowments like many other college and universities that are able to fund research labs, improve campus infrastructure, and so much more.

That's why I'm proud to be delivering on a record \$17 billion—[applause]—\$17 billion—for HBCUs, the most ever any administration has ever, ever, ever committed.

Stay where you were.

And we've already distributed well over a billion.

Folks, look, I want to make something clear at the outset. If you notice, the spending we've done—I asked them to hold back there. But the spending we've done has not fundamentally increased the deficit like that other guy did. [Laughter] It—no, no, seriously. It grows the economy.

The more educated—how can we lead the world without being the most educated nation in the world? How can we lead the world without reaching out to the young people of this country to improve their capacity?

You know, it's helped everything from—HBCUs to do everything from providing financial aid via Pell grants to building new housing and research labs to prepare Black students for jobs and industries of the future in high-demand fields like cybersecurity, engineering, biochemistry, health care, and so much more.

But that's not all. Together, we spearheaded one of the most equitable economic recoveries in history. How—as I said, how can we be the strongest economy in the world and lead the world without the best education system, without—taps into the talents of every student in our—I mean, every student?

In fact, my Council on Economic Advisers issued a report this spring on the economic power of HBCUs. Here's what they found. They found HBCUs—HBCUs are engines of economic mobility in our country, raising the standard of living for everybody. For real. Despite representing only 3 percent of the colleges and universities in America, HBCUs are responsible for 40 percent of all Black engineers; 50 percent of all Black teachers; 70 percent of all [Black; White House correction] doctors and dentists; and 80 percent of all Black judges, and I'm increasing that number too.

But that's not all. My CHIPS and Science Act, which I was committed to—finally got it done—will ensure we create more hubs of innovation at HBCUs, create pathways to develop more researchers, and grow a diverse semiconductor workforce here at home.

For example, I was in New York where I announced a significant chips investment in—with Micron, a leading semiconductor company, that parented and partnered with Norfolk State University to build a 6,000-square-foot high-tech facility for students and other researchers.

My National Science Foundation just awarded \$2 million to Clark Atlanta University to support their work in the HBCU CHIPS Network, fueling semiconductor research and development and a workforce capacity at HBCUs. This is in addition to last week's announcement of \$10.5 million for National Science Foundation grants to facilitate STEM

research at more than a dozen HBCUs, including Central State University, a project to build a semiconductor R&D capacity.

I'm also excited to announce that four HBCUs—Fort Valley State University, Rust College, Savannah State University, and Shaw University—are receiving additional critical funding to boost their STEM programs, prepare their students for these incredible opportunities. And moving forward, I've encouraged semiconductor companies to continue to create and expand partnerships with HBCUs as they invest in American manufacturing.

And Vice President Harris and the National Space Council she leads are ensuring the Federal Government—industry partner and HBUs [HBCUs; White House correction] collaborate on opportunities for space-related technologies and innovation—the future.

And, folks, my Office of Science and Technology Policy is developing and sharing the best approaches across the entire Government, how to expand STEM research and investments in HBCUs.

In addition, my administration continues to diversify the Federal workforce, starting by opening doors of opportunity like the HBCU Scholar Program that celebrates its 10th anniversary.

I want to congratulate the 2024 cohorts of scholars—[*applause*]*—the largest cohort, all of whom are with us. Stand up, if you're here. [Applause] All right.*

If I'm still around when one of you are President, make sure you don't say: "Who? Joe who?" Okay? I mean—[*laughter*].

We also know that Black studies show Black students who have Black teachers are significantly more likely to graduate from high school and to—we've known this for a long time—enroll in college.

That's why my Department of Education has provided \$450 million to ensure that teachers in our schools reflect diversity in our community—[*applause*]. These small things matter a lot.

For example, this funding has gone toward the Augustus F. Hawkins program, which is preparing the next generation of teachers at HBCUs. We're the first administration to secure funding for this program, providing almost \$40 million to date.

And today I'm proud to announce four more HBCUs: Grambling State University. Morehouse College. Oh, I'm so tired of hearing about Morehouse, man. [*Laughter*] I did the commencement at Morehouse. One grad came up and said—came up to me, "Mr. President, you're not a Morehouse man." The closest I get was doing a—doing the commencement. [*Laughter*]

North Carolina Central University. And Prairie View A&M University. They're being awarded new grants to increase teacher diversity.

But we know that while a college degree is still a ticket to the middle class, that ticket is becoming too expensive. That's why we increased the maximum Pell grant by \$900 a year, the largest increase in a decade. It matters because HBCUs have twice the percentage of Pell grant students as non-HBCUs.

And my administration has also relieved the debt of 5 million Americans, including a significant number of Black borrowers. That means you can now start a business, you can buy a home, save for your children's school, give back to your community.

And it grows the economy for everybody. It—[*inaudible*]*—cost. It grows the economy.*

There's so much more we're doing to help more HBU—HBCU students walk into a life of generational wealth and to be providers for their families, leaders of the communities, dreamers and doers of the Nation. In fact, in just 4 years, working with HBCU leaders, we're making the most significant investment in Black America ever in American history.

But look, we have to be honest about the forces we face. We gather together in a year when we commemorate two of our Nation's most historic achievements: the 70th anniversary of *Brown v. the Board of Education* that desegregated our public schools. It laid the groundwork for the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and it outlawed [that outlawed; White House correction] discrimination in employment and public places, and which we've just observed its 60th anniversary.

Instrumental in both achievements was Thurgood Marshall, an alum of Lincoln University and Howard Law School—[*applause*—by the way, Lincoln is closer to Wilmington than it is to Philly; I—[*laughter*—been there many times—and generations of HBU [HBCU; White House correction] educators and students come—who came before.

It opens the doors of hope and opportunity for a generation of Black Americans and for the entire United States of America. It really does.

But today, affirmative action and the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion are under attack like not long since I started as a young civil rights guy. Books are being banned. History is being erased. HBUs—HBCUs have received bomb threats. And right now lies and hate are being spread about Haitian Americans in Ohio. It's wrong. It's simply wrong, and it must stop.

There are those who want a country for some of us, but not for all of us. But I've always believed that the promise of America—and I mean this sincerely—is big enough for everyone to succeed. No, I really mean it. Everyone.

And there's been no more important voice for that truth than the Black community and our HBCUs. That's what I see in your students: future doctors and researchers curing cancer, artists shaping our culture, fearless journalists and intellectuals challenging convention, preachers and advocates inspiring us all.

You prove that Black history is American history. It is American history. And Black excellence is American excellence.

Let me tell you something. If I show up on your campus, you'd better be nice to me.
[*Laughter*]

Look, let me close with this. Mary McLeod Bethune was the high—[*applause*—was highest ranking Black woman in Franklin Delano Roosevelt's administration. A pioneering educator, activist, she founded the proud HBCU, Bethune-Cookman University. And here's what she said. She said: "The freedom gates are half-ajar. We must pry them fully open." That's what I'm trying to do: pry them fully open.

For over 180 years, HBUs [HBCUs; White House correction] have been prying open freedom's gates. For the past 4 years, Kamala and I, with the help of all you and great leaders out there in—sitting that I served with in the Congress and the Senate, are pushing right alongside them. And God willing, as a HBCU graduate, the future President of the United States is going to soon be sitting behind the Resolute Desk pushing the gates of freedom open once and for all.

Folks, you've probably heard me say this before. We just have to remember who the hell we are. No, I mean it. We're the United States of America. There is nothing beyond our capacity when we act together—nothing, nothing, nothing. We're the only nation in history that's come out of every crisis stronger than we went in. That's because of you, because of all of us. We're a diverse nation; therein lies our strength when we unite.

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

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Every time I'd walk out of my Grandfather Finnegan's home up in Scranton, Pennsylvania, he'd yell, "Joey, keep the faith." And my grandmother would yell: "No, Joey. Spread it."

Go spread the faith.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:46 p.m. at the Philadelphia Marriott Downtown hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Vice President Kamala D. Harris; Tony Allen, president, Delaware State University, in his capacity as Chair, and Glenda Baskin Glover, Vice Chair, of the President's Board of Advisers on Historically Black Colleges and Universities; Ryan W. Routh, suspected gunman in the attempted assassination of former President Donald J. Trump in West Palm Beach, FL; U.S. Secret Service Acting Director Ronald L. Rowe, Jr.; and Dietra Trent, Executive Director, White House Initiative on Advancing Educational Equity, Excellence, and Economic Opportunity Through Historically Black Colleges and Universities. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on September 17.

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