

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2024

Remarks at a Hispanic Heritage Month Reception

September 18, 2024

The President. Thank you.

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

The President. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

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

The President. I don't know—I don't know where the hell that Joe is you're talking about, but thank—[*laughter*]. Thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you.

Folks—

Audience members. [*Inaudible*]

The President. Folks, welcome to one of the biggest Hispanic Heritage Months ever—[*applause*—ever at the White House.

Before I begin, some of you have—a lot of good friends here, a lot of elected officials. I'm not going to go through, but want to point out something they heard me say all the time.

One of the things that is changing, and you're going to change—the Hispanic community is going to change America even more: 25 percent of K-through-12 children are Hispanic—25 percent. I've been saying this for a while. Some of you thought I was exaggerating, but I'm telling you. What's going to happen over the next 10, 12 years is going to change the dynamic of this country in a big way.

And by the way, Jessica, thank you for the introduction. I'm—I—she's an actor, producer, advocate, author, and she knows how to build companies. [*Laughter*] Jessica, if I'm really good, maybe you could get a—me a job when this is all over. [*Laughter*] God love you.

The youngest Latina to start and take a company public and build a billion-dollar company, you are something else, kid. Well, folks, you know, you've done it—you've done it literally by trying to make life better and safer for other people, safer and healthier for women and children and families. Not only made a successful company and a billion-dollar company, but you did it for good reason. You did it not just for the profit. You did it for the people you care about. And it matters. It matters.

And you've done it by embracing your heritage, a proud Hispanic heritage that I see in all of you here today.

And I want to recognize our congressional partners who are here, including Pete, chair of the House Democratic Caucus; Nannette, who—where is Nanette? Nanette's crazy about me now. [*Laughter*] I'm leaving, so she loves me. No, I'm only—[*laughter*]. Alex in the Senate. Retiring CHC Chair Grace. And so many members—of the CHC members.

I'm looking forward to attending the gala tomorrow night.

I also thank you all for—all the public servants and educators that are here—artists, innovators, labor leaders, and more who are here today.

The members of the most diverse administration in history. I made a commitment when I got elected: I was going to have an administration that looked like America, that taps into the full talents of our Nation, including the incredible Hispanic Cabinet members who are here today.

Secretary of Education Cardona, where are you, Mr. Secretary? *[Applause]* Stand up. Small Business Administrator—Small Business Administrator Guzman. Where is Administrator Guzman? Stand—there you are. Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro. Where—Navy—the Navy is here somewhere. *[Laughter]* As a——

Audience member. Back here!

The President. I see—okay, man.

Audience member. Love you, Mr. José!

The President. Well, thank you. Thank you.

As the saying goes, you are your ancestors' dream. You know, I think about the courage of so many of you and your ancestors who came to America to start a new life, a nation that's more than just a place. You know, we're the most unique nation in American history—in the history of the world. We're the only nation not built on geography, ethnicity, or religion, but based on an idea—not a joke—an idea that we believe all men and women are created equal, endowed by their Creator—*[applause]*—no, I'm serious.

Think about that as the base. Not a joke. We're a nation of immigrants. We're a nation of immigrants. And by the way, it's an idea, not geography—an idea. And everyone—everyone—deserves to be treated equally throughout their lives.

You know, while we've never fully lived up to that, we've never walked away from it either. And we're sure in hell not walking away from it now.

Since our founding, the very idea of America has been nurtured, enriched, and advanced by the contributions and sacrifices and hard work and dreams of immigrants and descendants from all over the world, like so many of your families, like mine and Jill's families from Ireland and England—and Jill's—I—you know, I may be Irish, but I'm not stupid; I married—*[laughter]*—I married Dominic Giacoppa's daughter. *[Laughter]*

Audience member. *[Inaudible]*

The President. You can say that again, man. No one screws around with me. *[Laughter]*

One of the reasons Jill and I really wanted to host today's celebration is to say thank you. Thank you for your partnership and your friendship. And I mean this sincerely: We are forever grateful. I mean it from the bottom of my heart.

I also wanted to host this reception because we have progress to celebrate. Together, we're making the most significant investment in the Hispanic community ever in all of American history.

We've centered equity—equity—in everything we do. With the help of just 3½ years, we've created more than 5 million jobs for Hispanic Americans, the lowest Hispanic unemployment rate on record. We also turned Puerto Rico's economy, investing in more than \$140 billion—and adding over 100,000 new jobs in Puerto Rico.

More Hispanics have health insurance than ever before in history. A record number of Hispanic small business—small businesses are starting up, like your little small business—a billion-dollar—*[inaudible]*. *[Laughter]* Historic investments in Hispanic Saving *[Serving; White House correction]* Institutions, a—500 college, university, and community college that serve such a large percentage of Hispanic students. By the way, it's about \$15 billion—*[inaudible]*.

Under my plan for student debt relief, more than 5 million people received student debt relief. And it's going to happen more; we're going to win in court. Signified—and a significant number—[*applause*—a significant number of Hispanic borrowers.

The racial wealth gap is the smallest in 20 years. We're removing lead pipes so every American can drink clean water without getting—worrying about our children getting brain—our children getting brain damage. We're delivering high-speed affordable internet to every American, which is as essential today as when FDR delivered electricity to every American. It's that consequential.

We've increased the childcare subsidy funding by 50 percent, providing families peace of mind and still growing the economy. When we do these things, we grow the economy. When parents are able to go out and work and they can make more money, they grow the economy. And the—so it's—it's a net savings for America. It really is.

Let me be clear: We believe in an immigration system that reflects our values. We don't demonize immigrants. We don't single them out for attacks. We don't believe they're poisoning the blood of the country. We're a nation of immigrants, and that's why we're so damn strong.

My mother's side of the family were a bunch of Irish immigrants who came over on coffin ships in 1848 and 1850. And guess what? We don't have—we don't know—but if you go back and look, the Irish and Irish Catholics were discriminated against as much as any other group of people that ever came to this country.

But guess what? We're proud as hell of what we've done and all of you, protecting their—our fundamental freedoms: the freedom to vote, the freedom to choose, the freedom to deny—not to deny any of those freedoms.

And, folks, in this administration, we don't erase history. Together, we make history. We're making history.

And today we honor you and the long line of patriots throughout our history who have made the promise of America real for all Americans. And let's finally honor this history by building the National Museum for Latino Americans—[*applause*—I'm trying, I'm trying—as well as the American Women's History Museum as well on the National Mall.

And by the way, all of you have pushed us forward to be a country that we say we are: for freedom, justice, equality for all. And by the way, today we honor this simple truth: Hispanic history is American history. And by the way, a lot of you all have been a hell of a lot longer than any of the rest of us in America—in America. Oh, not a joke.

Hispanic excellence is American excellence.

Look, you're all standing, and you're all going to start to rebel in a second, so I'm going to make—close this out. [*Laughter*]

I was elected to the United States Senate as a 29-year-old kid. I wasn't old enough to be sworn in. I had to wait 17 days to be eligible. And by the way, I was motivated—not a joke—many of you have been in my office. I have several busts, one of César Chávez, who came to Delaware to organize the farmworkers in Delaware. We—our largest industry, everybody thought, was the DuPont company. It's a \$4 billion industry in agriculture and chicken. He came to organize.

Here I stand, 50 years later, as your President, honored to celebrate the heritage of this incredible community.

Audience member. We love you, Joe!

The President. I always—thank you. I always said America is defined by one word. I spent an awful lot of time with Xi Jinping, more than any other world leader has. I spent over 90 hours alone with him, literally, traveled 17,000 miles with him.

I was on the Himalayan Plateau with him, and he asked me—he said, "Can you define America for me?" Not a joke. Some of you have heard this. It's true. I said, "Yes, one word." And he looked me; through an interpreter as always, he said, "What's the word?" I said, "Possibilities."

Everything is possible in America. Everything is possible in America. It's also the one word that defines Hispanic possibilities—heritage: possibilities.

Because you have never—I've never been more optimistic about the future. We just have to remember who in the hell we are. I really mean it. We're the United States of America. We're the only nation in the world that's come through every crisis stronger than we entered that crisis every single time when we moved together.

Folks, I mean this from the bottom of my heart. I am more optimistic about the future of America than I've been in the—before. We have the strongest economy in the world. We have the best system in the world. We just have to remember who the hell we are.

And by the way, it all depends on maintaining our democratic values.

So, folks, there's a whole hell of a lot—this is the single most consequential election in maybe the lifetime of anyone standing here, because it matters. The other team doesn't see the world like we see it. They don't have the same attitude we have. They are the most close-minded people I've ever dealt with.

Like I said, I know I only look like I'm 40, but I'm a lot older. *[Laughter]* I've been here 51 years: as a Senator for 36 years; Vice President; out 4 years as, working as a—at the Penn Biden Center; and then back here for 4 years.

Folks, there's nothing we can't do. I really mean it. And I'm so—that's why I'm so happy about Kamala being upbeat about what's happening.

So, folks—*[inaudible]*—and I have one great regret. There was a significant Senator from the State of Texas, Democrat, who looked at me one day and he said, "Joe, I think you're going to run for President one day." I said, "What the hell are you"—I didn't know what he was talking about.

He said, "But if you ever want to lead America, if you ever want to win in Texas, you've got to learn to speak Spanish." *[Laughter]* True story.

I took 5 years of French in high school and college. *[Laughter]* It's a—

Audience member. You're going to have time now.

The President. I do. *[Laughter]* I am.

And by the way, so what happened was I—and I tried to speak French at a—when I—early on in my career in France, and they just laughed at me. *[Laughter]*

I tried to speak—we had the largest influx of Hispanics in 1970—in 1980 Census as any State in the Union as a percentage. So I get up, and we have a large community. And I get up and I made a speech in Spanish. I mangled it. *[Laughter]* And they all cheered and said thank you. *[Laughter]*

Thank you, thank you, thank you. I appreciate it.

And the bad news for you all is, I'm not going anywhere.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:16 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to actor Jessica Alba, founder, the Honest Company; Reps. Peter R. Aguilar, Nanette Diaz Barragán, and Grace F. Napolitano; Sen. Alejandro Padilla; President Xi Jinping of China; and Vice President Kamala D. Harris, in her capacity as the 2024 Democratic Presidential nominee. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on September 19.

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Subjects: American "melting pot"; Childcare, access and affordability; China, President; Congressional Hispanic Caucus; Economic improvement; Federal student loans, partial forgiveness; Health insurance, access and availability; Hispanic Heritage Month, National; Hispanic-serving institutions; House Democratic Caucus; Immigration reform; Job creation and growth; Lead service lines, replacement efforts; Racial equality, improvement efforts; Secretary of Education; Secretary of the Navy; Small Business Administration; Unemployment rate; Vice President.

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