

*Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2024*

**Remarks on Efforts To Replace Lead Service Lines in Milwaukee, Wisconsin**  
*October 8, 2024*

*The President.* Hello, everybody. Hello, Milwaukee! It's good to be back. Thank you.

*Audience member.* Welcome to Milwaukee, Joe!

*The President.* Well, it's good to be back in Milwaukee.

*Audience member.* We love you!

*The President.* Thank you.

*Audience member.* We love Biden-Harris! Milwaukee loves Biden-Harris!

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

*The President.* Thank you.

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

*The President.* Well, thank you. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

If you have a seat, have one. *[Laughter]* I said that once and there were no seats, and the guy looked at me like, "What the hell is the matter with him?" *[Laughter]*

*Hurricane Milton Preparedness Efforts*

Before I begin, I want to say we're prepared for another horrible hurricane to hit Florida. I've directed my team to do everything it can to save lives and help the communities before, during, and after this hurricane.

The most important message today for all those who may be listening to this in the impacted areas is listen to the local authorities, follow safety instruction, including evacuation orders. This is serious. And you've got to be safe, because people are dying. People have died so far—not from this hurricane, but from the last one.

*Efforts To Replace Lead Service Lines*

So, folks, let me—for this—get to today's event.

Shy, thank you for sharing your family's story. You said it all. The worst thing—and I know from experience—for a parent is something happening to your children. Your son, your family, your [and; White House correction] families like yours exposed to lead poisoning in our water, they deserve a hell of a lot better than they've been getting. And that's why we're here.

That's why people like Alfonso [Alonso; White House correction] are getting to work removing those lead pipe services [service lines; White House correction], delivering clean water.

Kamala and I go all the way back to Flint worrying about what happened then—remember?—in Michigan.

*Audience members.* Yes.

*The President.* Well, providing what's good for our health and for our environment is also good for our economy, and it's good for jobs.

Folks, the middle class built this country, and organized labor unions built the middle class. It's a fact.

We're lucky to have some great leaders here today who know how to get a job done. Tony has heard me say this before, but I think Tony is one of the three best Governors in the United States of America. And the great Mayor Chevy Johnson—Chevy, I tell you, you're one of the best mayors, pal. You really are.

Our great Administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Michael Regan. And our great Chair of the Council on Environmental Quality, Brenda Malloy [Mallory; White House correction]. Brenda, where are you? You're out—you're out there somewhere.

We're here today because we're finally addressing an issue that should have been addressed a long time ago in this country: the danger that lead pipes pose to our drinking water.

For too long, local communities have known how important it was to deal with this problem. It hadn't been given the national priority it demanded though.

I'm here today to tell you that I'm finally insisting that it gets prioritized, and I'm insisting it get done.

One of the most important things we're doing today is establishing a new rule that every lead pipe providing clean drinking water doesn't—that doesn't provide clean water must be replaced. Every single one. Not only are we setting a priority, we're showing up as a partner to get it done.

Over the past couple of years, we've provided billions of dollars to States and communities to address this problem. And today I'm announcing an additional \$2 billion in grants to States and local communities to get the job done. It matters.

Folks, people often asking me, "Why do we have lead pipes in the first place?" You probably ask yourself that. "How did that happen?" Well, it's because when they were first put in place a long time ago, lead pipes were incredibly durable, and they didn't rust. But since then, we've learned that lead pipes also leach poisonous toxins into the water that lead to terrible health consequences, particularly in the development of a child's brain. Think about what that does to a parent's peace of mind.

When I was a Senator back in 1986, I supported a law that stopped new lead pipes from being put in the ground in the first place. But that still left millions of older lead pipes that were already in the ground connected to homes, schools, childcare centers, and businesses, including some 340,000 lead pipe service lines right here in Wisconsin.

And over the years, we've only chipped away at the problem, but chipping at a problem hasn't fully solved it. It's taken too long. It hasn't been given a high enough priority until now.

Folks, as Kamala would say, "This is the United States of America, for God's sake." There's no safe—no safe—level of lead exposure, period. None.

And the only way forward is to replace every lead pipeline and connect the American people to clean water. No alternative. And that's why—that's why—Kamala and I are the first administration to take on the challenge once and for all. And we're delivering.

We know safe, clean drinking water is fundamental to the health of our communities, to enhance our economic growth, to basic human dignity.

That's why we've already replaced 367,000 lead pipe services [service lines; White House correction] all across America. And today, nearly 1 million Americans no longer have to worry about the potential impacts of lead in their water.

Like Lillie Key right here in Milwaukee. She's a nursing assistant, protecting the health of others. She actually knows—actually at work right now. But, in her own home, there was a lead pipe threat to her own health and to all her grandchildren she helped raise there. She was

spending a big chunk of her paycheck on bottled water every month because it was too expensive to replace the lead pipes.

But 3 weeks ago, Lillie got lead service line replaced for free. How? Because of what I call in—our "Investing in America" agenda.

One of the many reasons Kamala and I fought so hard to pass the bipartisan infrastructure law—which, I might add, is over a trillion 200 billion dollars—was not only to modernize our Nation's infrastructure—roads, bridges, ports, airports, transit system, electric grids, affordable high-speed broadband—but also to get rid of the godforsaken lead pipes drive—deliver clean drinking water to everyone in their homes, their schools, and their businesses.

Right here in Wisconsin, we've invested more than \$200 million, replacing tens of thousands of lead pipelines. And today——

*Audience member.* Thank you, Joe!

*The President.* No, thank you. Thank you.

Today we're releasing another \$43 million for Wisconsin as part of two, six—\$2.6 billion nationwide to support replacing lead pipe service lines.

And while the Federal Government can't do it alone, we're providing the single largest investment ever to team up with States and cities to get the job done together. And I mean team up at every level.

Right after I signed the bipartisan infrastructure law, Kamala announced our administration's ambitious blueprint to use every tool—every tool—at our disposal at the Federal, State, and local level to protect our families from lead poisoning. As a result of that work, I'm announcing a new rule, written into law from the Environmental Protection Agency, that requires water systems across America replace lead pipe service [lines; White House correction] in—every single one in America within 10 years must be done.

I want that rule into law no matter who is President. It matters.

We're seeing that collaboration here, where the city of Milwaukee will now replace all of their lead pipe service lines within 10 years, instead of what was projected to take 60 years to get it done. That was the projection. Folks, this is a big deal, as someone once said. [*Laughter*]

It's about saving families from going through what Shy and Lillie's families had to go through, saving hundreds of thousands of mothers and infants from low birth weights and children with [from; White House correction] lasting brain damage, protecting more than a thousand adults from premature death from heart disease every single year because of lead.

It will save lives, but it will also—saves the taxpayers billions of dollars over time.

It's about the basics. It's about clean water. To me, it's a simple proposition.

This is also about fairness. Nationally, I'm directing nearly half of this funding go to disadvantaged communities that have borne the brunt of lead pipe poisoning for damn too long.

Studies show community of colors—community of color have been the hardest hit. One study showed Black children were at least two times more likely to have elevated levels of lead in their blood than children of other racial groups. We have an obligation to make things right.

Like all major investments we're making in the environment, it's also about creating jobs—good-paying jobs, many of them union jobs for laborers, plumbers, pipefitters, like Alfonso [Alonso; White House correction].

That's why my administration is bringing together the city of Milwaukee's local unions, educators, employers to create an "Invest in America" workforce hub right here in Milwaukee. Sometimes, you forget the basics.

This is—this hub is going to train and connect residents to good-paying jobs replacing lead pipelines. It will create new registered apprenticeships, helping everyone, including women and people of color, to access these jobs with good pay and benefits for themselves and their families.

And we're also using the power of our example as a global leader, helping replace lead pipes around the world. Last month at the United Nations, I was proud that my wife Jill and our international aid agency, USAID, brought together 26 nations, funded primarily through philanthropy, to launch a coalition to end childhood lead poisoning, poisoning that kills more people in developing countries than HIV/AIDS and malaria combined.

Folks, replacing lead pipes is just one piece of our Nation's most ambitious clean water agenda ever.

We're upgrading outdated—[*applause*]. We're upgrading outdated water mains and treatment plants, making them more resilient to climate disasters. That means less likely to break down after massive floods and still run when the power grid goes down.

We're improving water systems on Tribal lands, where nearly half the population still lacks clean water. Half the population on Tribal lands still lacks clean water. It's outrageous. We're committing to making it right.

And, as part of my Cancer—[*applause*]. And as part of my Cancer Moonshot initiative to end cancer as we know it, we're detecting and removing so-called forever chemicals, referred to as PFAS. These are chemicals that are found in many everyday products, but are unsafe and shown to contribute to cancer and other health conditions. We set the first-ever drinking water standard to protect 100 million Americans from PFAS—including folks all across Wisconsin.

Folks, what's the Government for if it cannot protect the public health? And, in the process, we're creating jobs. We're building a better America. And clean water is just one critical part.

For example, earlier this year, I was in Milwaukee with your Governor and your mayor when I announced nearly \$36 million for the 6th Street project. As you know, during the sixties, so-called "urban renewal" swept through this country. The construction of—I-4—I-94 and I-43 were torn down. Roughly—they tore down roughly 17,000 homes and 1,000 businesses were lost, displacing residents and businesses all along 6th Street, also—so the people outside the neighborhood could drive downtown more quickly.

With bike lanes and bus lanes gone, speeding and reckless driving increased, resulting in crash rates five times that of the city's average; locking people out of opportunities, leaving them more isolated from the social and economic life for the rest of the city. But not anymore.

We're going to rebuild the 6th Street. We're going to—a future with wider sidewalks for children walking to school, safer bike lanes for residents and visitors, dedicated bus lanes to get to work faster, new trees to provide shade, modern infrastructure to prevent sewage from flowing into the Milwaukee River and Lake Michigan. We're making it easy for historic Black communities in the north and Latino communities in the south to access jobs, schools, and entertainment opportunities in the city and around a central hub. This will be life-changing.

The bottom line is, I said I'd keep my commitment to insist that all communities have access to investments that improve safety and security of their neighborhoods. And that's what we're doing: giving everyone a fair shot—and, my dad would say, "leaving no one behind."

Folks, there are some folks who don't have any problem leaving people behind, like my predecessor in the White House and his allies in Congress; like your Senator, Ron Johnson, who voted against——

*Audience members.* Boo!

*The President.* He voted against everything I just talked about—every single thing. In fact, Ron Johnson called the law that is removing these lead pipe, protection [protecting; White House correction] the public—for public health, creating jobs in Wisconsin—he called it a "radical" agenda. [Laughter]

*Audience member.* He's a radical agenda.

[At this point, the President made the sign of the cross.]

*The President.* [Laughter] I'm going to restrain my Irish side here. [Laughter]

I don't think there's a damn thing radical about protecting kids from lead poisoning—protecting women from low birth rates, protecting them from brain damage, and so much more.

My predecessor, along with the Senator, rolled back clean water protections that kept industries from polluting our water and destroying our wetlands. They slashed the Environmental Protection Agency's budget and eliminated important programs that guaranteed clean water.

You may also remember, when the last guy was President, he promised "Infrastructure Week" every week for 4 years—[laughter]—and he didn't build a damn thing.

Folks, in plain talk, we can't go backwards. We have to keep moving forward, protect the health and well-being of our families, our communities, and our country and, in the process, growing our economy and creating good-paying jobs. We can't wait any longer.

Folks, let me close with this. When folks see shovels in the ground on all these projects that protect people's lives and put people to work, I hope they feel what I feel—pride: pride in their hometowns making a comeback; pride in America, that we can get big things done when we work together.

I've never been more optimistic—and I mean this from the bottom of my heart. I've never more—more—in my whole life, been more optimistic about our Nation's future.

We just have to remember who the hell we are. We're the United States of America.

And there is nothing—there is nothing—beyond our capacity when we work together. So, let's keep working together and get it done.

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

Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thanks, everybody. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:42 p.m. at the Department of Public Works Field Headquarters. In his remarks, he referred to Shyquetta "Shy" McElroy, chair and organizer, Coalition on Lead Emergency (COLE) Parents Lead, who introduced the President, and her son Nathan; Alonso Romo, member, Laborers' International Union of North America (LIUNA) Local 113 in Milwaukee, WI; Vice President Kamala D. Harris; Gov. Anthony S. Evers of Wisconsin; and former President Donald J. Trump. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on October 9.

*Categories:* Addresses and Remarks : Lead service lines, replacement efforts in Milwaukee, WI.

*Locations:* Milwaukee, WI.

*Names:* Biden, Jill T.; Evers, Anthony S.; Harris, Kamala D.; Johnson, Cavalier "Chevy"; Johnson, Ronald H.; Key, Lillie; Mallory, Brenda; McElroy, Nathan; McElroy, Shyquetta "Shy"; Regan, Michael S.; Romo, Alonso; Trump, Donald J.

*Subjects:* Apprenticeship programs and job training; Broadband and wireless technologies; Cancer research, prevention, and treatment; Climate resilience, improvement efforts; Council on Environmental Quality; Drinking water, safety improvement efforts; Energy grid infrastructure, improvement efforts; Environmental justice; Environmental Protection Agency; Infrastructure improvements; Job creation and growth; Labor movement and organized labor; Lead service lines, replacement efforts; Natural disasters, Hurricane Milton; Natural disasters, preparedness efforts; PFAS and chemical pollutants, regulation efforts; Vice President; Wisconsin, Governor; Wisconsin, President's visit.

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