

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2024

Remarks at a Diwali Celebration

October 28, 2024

The President. Well, Madam President, thank you. *[Laughter]* Shruti, thank you for that introduction. You know, just promise me when you're President one day and they say, "Joe Biden is in the waiting room," you won't ask, "Joe who?" *[Laughter]*

Rise N Shine Foundation Founder and Chief Executive Officer Shruti Amula. I won't.

The President. My wife Jill wanted to be here today, but she's traveling to Wisconsin. And Kamala couldn't be here today because she's traveling as well. *[Laughter]* They both send their love.

You know, I selected Kamala to be my running mate for many reasons. She's smart. She's tough. She's trusted. A district attorney, an attorney general of California, a United States Senator, now Vice President of the United States—there's more experience that she has than the whole of that other guy she's running against. *[Laughter]* But most importantly—and I mean this sincerely from the bottom of my heart—she has character. She has character.

It's one of the things we bonded over was the role of—each of our mothers played in our lives. They come from different places and different generations and different lives, but they shared a basic belief about—belief about America: Only in America is anything possible—only in America.

We just heard a great Surgeon General—and Vivek's become a friend—talk about the journey that—that he—of that belief: a journey of hard work, education, and entrepreneurship; a belief in family, faith, and service. Contributions that come from all walks of life: factory workers, caregivers, business owners, drivers, teachers, police officers, firefighters, artists, entertainers, and so much more, including Members of Congress, three of whom are here today. Ro—where are you, Ro? There you go. And Raja and Shri. All right.

By the way, are your kids there, Ro?

Rep. Rohit Khanna. Right there, yes.

The President. Come on up, guys.

Audience members. Aw.

[At this point, Rep. Khanna's daughter Zara and son Soren joined the President on stage.]

Audience members. Aww.

[The President addressed Rep. Khanna's children.]

The President. *[Inaudible]* All right. *[Laughter]*

You know, and the Vice President, she—I don't think she's going to be stopping by, though, tonight.

You know, we just heard how far that journey can take you as we watched Suni Williams wish her—you a—us a happy Diwali from the International Space Station.

Now, I—we were going to do a live video, but as we pointed out already, she's traveling 17,000 miles an hour, 5 miles a second, and she's going to see 16 sunrises and 16 sunsets all

while the very precise experiments are being done. It's incredible. We couldn't figure out when the hell she'd show up. *[Laughter]*

You watch the video and you see NASA's mesmerizing images of Earth, you'll notice something simple and profound.

Astronauts talk about that thin blue line that separates Earth from space, life from destruction, lightness from darkness. But we thought—we thought what a wonderful way to celebrate the festival of lights at the White House, by looking up into the heavens, to keep our heads high as we seek the spirit of Diwali—knowledge over ignorance, goodness over hate, unity over division—and to look up focused on the North Star of our Nation.

Unlike any other nation in the world, we're unique in the world. We're the only nation not based on race or religion or geography. America is based on an idea—literally, the only nation in the world based on an idea. The idea is that we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all women and men are created equal, endowed by their Creator, et cetera. We mean it. We haven't always throughout—throughout our lives we deserve to be treated equally.

We've never fully lived up to that idea, but we've never walked away from it either. That's because of you and generations before you bringing thousands of years of heritage, tradition to give shape and meaning to American life. And I mean this sincerely.

The first South Asians arrived in America in the late 1700s, but even into the 18- and 1900s, this diverse community contributed to the growth of this Nation, even serving this Nation in uniform, but were denied citizenship and equal rights. But by the time I was elected United States Senator in 1972, when I was 29 years old, a new wave of South Asians were even more welcome.

You all know the stories. Many of you were the first in your families to get a formal education. They scraped together their life savings for the first flight—flight ever, which was across the world to America, far from family, far from home, with just a single suitcase and a few dollars in their pockets. Teaching themselves English by watching television, listening to the radio; befriending neighbors of every background who lent a hand to help; planting seeds of a new life in big cities, small towns all across America that have grown into something remarkable.

The South Asian American community enriched every part of American life, and that's the truth. And that is among the fastest growing, most engaged community in the country, you are now.

On this day in America, we think about that journey of light. Earlier in our Nation's founding, generations before [you lit a; White House correction] diya in the shadow of the suspicion. Now, in the [our; White House correction] time, Diwali is celebrated openly and proudly here in the White House.

And by the way, this is not my house. This is your house. *[Applause]* No, it really is. It's the "people's house."

Every time they give—you know, they introduce me, "And now we're going to hear from the next President," I wonder, "Where the hell is he?" *[Laughter]* *[Inaudible]*

But we also know today we face an inflection point, on a serious note—one of those rare moments that only come in several—once in every several generations, where the decisions we make today will determine the future to come for decades, literally.

Every generation has been called to move us forward to be the nation we say we are. But only once in every few generations are we reminded not to take the idea of America for granted, because it's never guaranteed. That moment is now.

American democracy has never been easy. In a country as diverse as ours, we debate, we dissent, as we forge a path forward through compromise and consensus. But the key is we never lose sight of how we got here and why.

For me, 50 years of public service comes with—with that comes a clarity of confidence in America. We're a nation with a heart, a soul that draws from old and new. In America, everything runs deep, especially the courage to serve and protect, to heal and to bear witness, to immigrate, to dare to dream.

With my Presidency, I've tried to channel that American spirit by bringing to bear all my experiences and wisdom gained from it and to get us through one of the most difficult periods in our Nation's recent history and to be a bridge between generations like [linked; White House correction] in memory and imagination and joined by our histories and with faith in our futures—a future with a new voices.

Now it's your turn to use your voice to talk with family and friends; to talk to the people you work with, you pray with, you go to school with. Remind them we're all a part of something bigger—and I mean this from the bottom of my heart—something special.

In fact, the story goes that when President Kennedy set the bold goal to send an American into space—and that inspired patriots like Suni Williams to become an astronaut—President Kennedy went to NASA Headquarters. He asked a maintenance worker what his job was. And here's what the janitor replied. He said, "I'm helping send America to the Moon." "I'm helping send America to the Moon."

Folks, no matter who you are, what you do, or where you come from, we all have a role to play to keep the American experiment going. The America of your dreams needs you now, quite frankly, more than ever.

Let me close with this. In late November 2016, a dark cloud formed from hate and hostility toward immigrants, including South Asian Americans, that we hear once again in 2024. It was then that Jill and I hosted the first Diwali reception, and it was at the Vice President's residence, an Irish Catholic President—Vice President, at the time—opening our home for a holiday celebration by Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs, and more. How America—how America can remind us all of our power to be the light, all of us.

Now, as President, I've been honored to host the biggest Diwali receptions ever at the White House.

To me, it means a great deal. As Senator, Vice President, and President, South Asian Americans have been key members of my staff, from Kamala to Dr. Murthy to so many of you here today.

I'm proud that I kept my commitment to have an administration that looks like America—looks like America—taps into the full talents of our Nation, including a record number of South Asian Americans at every level across our entire Government.

I was honored to have just lit the diya with several of them, as Jill and I have done each year in office. You'll see it shortly in the Blue Room.

It was the chance to wish my staff happy Diwali, but it was also a chance to thank them for their service to our country, just as I offer my thanks and gratitude to all of you that are here tonight.

Together, we may show the power in the gathering of light—the light of knowledge, the light of unity and truth, the light of freedom of—for democracy, for America—America we share and cherish. Only in America is everything possible.

So, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for being here. Welcome to your home.

Happy Diwali, America.

God bless you all. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:22 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to former President Donald J. Trump, in his capacity as the 2024 Republican Presidential nominee; Reps. Raja S. Krishnamoorthi and Shri Thanedar; and National Aeronautics and Space Administration Astronaut Sunita L. Williams. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on October 29.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Diwali celebration.

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Names: Amula, Shruti; Biden, Jill T.; Harris, Kamala D.; Khanna, Rohit; Khanna, Soren; Khanna, Zara; Krishnamoorthi, Raja S.; Murthy, Vivek H.; Thanedar, Shri; Trump, Donald J.; Williams, Suni.

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