

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

**Remarks at a Veterans Day Ceremony in Arlington, Virginia**  
*November 11, 2024*

Thank you. Thank you, thank you, thank you. It's a great honor to be standing here again.

Over 160 years ago, during what would become his final days in office, President Abraham Lincoln addressed this Nation, and he said, "Let us strive on to finish the work we're in to bind up the Nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle."

My fellow Americans, the First Lady, Vice President Harris, and the Second Gentleman; Secretary Blinken, Austin, McDonough, Mayorkas; Chairman Brown; and most importantly, our veterans, servicemembers, and their families, I've said many times before—I got in trouble for saying it when I was a young Senator—I said we have many obligations, but only one truly sacred obligation—sacred: to prepare those we send into harm's way and to care for them and their families when they return home and when they don't. It's an obligation not based on party or politics, but on a promise that unites us all.

Today, as we strive on to finish the work of our moment to bind the Nation's wounds once again, we commit and recommit to this sacred vow.

This is the last time I will stand here at Arlington as Commander in Chief. It's been the greatest honor of my life to lead you, to serve you, to care for you, to defend you just as you defended us generation after generation after generation. You are the greatest fighting force—and this is not hyperbole—the finest fighting force in the history of the world.

I will never forget standing at Valley Forge, where our Nation's first soldiers laid down their lives to deliver a nation where everyone is entitled to inalienable rights: life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness. And I'll never forget walking the hills of Gettysburg, where thousands more shed their blood to make those words real.

I'll never forget at Belleau Woods—visiting there to pay tribute to the heroes who stepped on that beach, or standing on the cliffs of Normandy 80 years after D-Day to honor the servicemembers and veterans who literally saved the world with absolute heroism. Just standing there, you wonder how in God's name did they have the courage to do what they did.

I'll never forget visiting bases in Korea where America's sons and daughters answers a call to defend a people they had never met or paying my respects in Hanoi where so many of our troops defended democracy, including my friend—and once worked for me—John—the Senator John McCain.

I'll never forget my trips to Afghanistan and Iraq, where tour after tour young men and women served and sacrificed to keep our Nation safe.

Four Presidents faced a decision, after we'd gotten bin Laden, whether to end our longest war in history in Afghanistan. I was determined not to leave it to the fifth.

Every day, I still carry a card with me—my schedule—every single day for the last 10 years.

*[At this point, the President removed a document from his breast pocket.]*

On the back of my schedule, it says, "U.S. daily troops in Afghanistan—U.S. troops died in Afghanistan as of today: 2,465. Troops wounded in Afghanistan: 20,769. U.S. troops, Iraq—died in Iraq: 4,620. Wounded in Iraq: 32,766."

Ladies and gentlemen, this is my duty as President, but also as a parent. Like many of you, our son Beau Biden deployed to Iraq for a year with the Delaware National Guard.

I still remember the day he asked me to pin his bars on him—he stood ramrod straight—and how proud Jill and I and our entire family felt. But like so many of you, we also remember how hard it was when he was deployed: empty seats at the dinner table, missed holidays and birthdays, prayers of hope and worry repeated every morning and every night.

Just as we ask everything of our veterans, we ask everything of their families. The English poet John Milton wrote, and I quote, "They also serve who only stand and wait," as so many of you have.

So, for all the military families, to all those with a loved one still missing or unaccounted for, to all Americans grieving the loss of a loved one who wore the uniform, Jill and I want you to know we see you, we thank you, and we will never stop working to meet our sacred obligation to you and your families.

Jill and I, Doug and Kamala, our entire administration are proud of our work over the past 4 years. Together, we've passed more than 30 bipartisan laws to support our veterans and their families, caregivers, and survivors.

We've brought veteran homelessness down to a record low. We've delivered more benefits to more veterans than any—ever before in VA history. We've invested record resources to reduce the scourge of veteran suicide. And we took action to protect veterans from scams, because no veteran should be defrauded by those defended—they defended.

All these actions are vital, but I am particularly proud of finally passing the PACT Act. This is the most significant law in our history—our Nation's history to help millions of veterans who were exposed to toxins like Agent Orange and burn pits during their military service. Pits the size of football fields that incinerated the wastes of war: tires, chemicals, batteries, jet fuel, and so much more. Pits that left too many veterans with headaches, numbness, dizziness, asthma, and cancer.

The PACT Act has already helped over 1 million veterans and their families get the benefits they deserve. They deserve those benefits.

And today I'm proud to announce that the VA will expand the number of cancers covered under the PACT Act and to all veterans who served at K-2 Air Base in Uzbekistan constantly surrounded by toxins.

We want to honor you. We want to have your back just like we did in Agent Orange, just like we're working on a rule to make sure you don't have to prove your illness as a consequence of your service, which is often too hard to do.

God willing, we will make sure that any rare condition you've developed is covered. And we're committed to getting this rule in place by the end of my term.

Folks, this matters. Too many of our Nation's veterans have served only to return home to suffer from permanent effects of poisonous chemicals. Too many have died, like our son Beau and Sergeant—like Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson, for whom the PACT Act was named.

A couple years ago, after I signed the PACT Act, I handed the pen to his daughter Brailey [Brielle; White House correction]. She and her mom are with us today. I don't know where you are, but God love you. There they are. Stand up, ladies. *[Applause]*

I give you my word, I mean this: I'll never forget, after I handed the signing pen—that beautiful young lady who had lost her whole world—she held the pen in her hand, and she looks at me, and she said: "Thank you. Thank you for my daddy."

God love you, honey. God love you.

But I don't think she was just thanking me. She was thanking all of you here, all of us, everyone who fought hard and came together to keep our promise to our veterans to keep the faith.

My fellow Americans, we stand here today. We think about all that our veterans have given to our Nation, serving and sacrificing in uniform just as they serve and sacrifice here at home as educators, firefighters, law enforcement officers, construction workers, entrepreneurs, business leaders, doctors, nurses, elected leaders, and so much more.

And just as routinely—they routinely put aside differences to work together, this is the moment—this is the moment—to come together as a nation, to keep faith in each other.

The world is depending on each of you and all of us—all of you—to keep honoring the women and the men and the families who have borne the battle, to keep protecting everything they've fought for, to keep striving to heal our Nation's wounds, to keep perfecting our Union.

We're the only nation in the world built on an idea. Every other nation is based on things like geography, ethnicity, religion. But we're the only nation—the only in the world—built on an idea, and that idea is we are all created equal and deserve to—created equal throughout lives. We haven't lived up to it every time, but we've never walked away from it, even when it's hard—especially when it's hard.

And today, standing together to honor those Americans who have dared all, risked all, and given all to our Nation, we must say clearly: We never will give up.

God bless our veterans and their families, and may God protect our troops today and always.

God love you. Thank you so much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:52 a.m. in the Memorial Amphitheater at Arlington National Cemetery. In his remarks, he referred to Douglas C. Emhoff, husband of Vice President Kamala D. Harris; Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Charles Q. "C.Q." Brown, Jr., USAF; former Presidents George W. Bush, Barack Obama, and Donald J. Trump; and Danielle Robinson, widow of SFC Heath M. Robinson, USA. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on November 12.

*Categories:* Addresses and Remarks : Veterans Day ceremony in Arlington, VA.

*Locations:* Arlington, VA.

*Names:* Austin, Lloyd J., III; Biden, Jill T.; Blinken, Antony J.; Brown, Charles Q. "C.Q.," Jr.; Bush, George W.; Emhoff, Douglas C.; Harris, Kamala D.; Mayorkas, Alejandro N.; McDonough, Denis R.; Obama, Barack; Robinson, Brielle; Robinson, Danielle; Trump, Donald J.

*Subjects:* Afghanistan, withdrawal of U.S. military forces; Joint Chiefs of Staff; Mental health programs and services; Military families; POW/MIA, identification and return of remains to U.S.; Secretary of Defense; Secretary of Homeland Security; Secretary of State; Secretary of Veterans Affairs; U.S. servicemembers, environmental exposures in war zones; U.S. servicemembers, service and dedication; Veteran suicide rate; Veterans benefits; Veterans Day; Veterans, service and dedication; Vice President; Virginia, Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington; Virginia, President's visit.

*DCPD Number:* DCPD202400993.