

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2024

Remarks at the Guardian of Defenders Memorial in Claymont, Delaware
November 11, 2024

The President. Thank you all very much. I'm not sure the Sisters at St. Joseph ever even thought you'd all be standing next to my grade school for me, but thank you. [*Laughter*]

Please have a seat. Please.

Father John, Father Van, thank you for your service in the military, in addition to our church.

It's really special for my sister and I and so many of—to be back—come back here to Holy Rosary. You know, so many years ago, we attended that school when we moved from Scranton. We moved from Scranton to Claymont. It used to be called Brookview Apartments. And we came—[*laughter*—that's where we lived. And we—I remember the first day.

You know, I'm deeply humbled by this plaque in Beau's honor. And one of the things that—it means the world to us. You know, I think of Beau every day, especially today.

We've come full circle. In 1953, 180 years ago, I started third grade here. [*Laughter*] And I remember pulling—I remember distinctly pulling up to this—to Holy Rosary—the big church was not there yet; we had church in the basement of the school—and pulling up into the—into the parking lot, looking over at this wall around this beautiful estate and wondering, "Who lives there?"

I was unaware that, the year before, the diocese had purchased it and gave it to—or, excuse me, had got—had been given it and been given to—and Holy Rosary Parish purchased it.

And, you know, it was—used to be called the Grubb/Worth Mansion—a mansion like many that used to overlook the Delaware River, like Archmere and moving the way up. The—before the industrialization began in southeastern Pennsylvania, there were these beautiful mansions along the Delaware, when you looked down to the Delaware. My high school was Archmere and—it's "arch by the sea." You could see all the way down from Archmere, from the back patio.

And I remember looking at that's—before the church was built—at this mansion, and thinking to myself, "I wonder who lives there." Little did I know, the Sisters of Saint Joseph were living here. [*Laughter*]

But, you know, it's—I remember that—and here I am today behind this wall where two parish priests served as military chaplains and are using this mansion as a memorial to those who fought and died in Afghanistan and Iraq.

I've been in and out of Afghanistan and Iraq over 30 times, and it's a godforsaken area.

Today I'm thinking of the moment that I pinned my—I came home one weekend—I came home most weekends—and Beau said to me, "Dad, what are you doing Friday?" And I said, "What do you have in mind, pal?" He said, "I want you to pin my bars on me."

I said: "Pin your bars on you? You're attorney general of the State of Delaware. What do you—what do you mean, 'pin your bars on you'?"

He said, "Dad"—he stood ramrod straight when I agreed to do it, to pin the bars on him. And—and he was so damn proud: proud to be joining the military, the National Guard. And our entire family felt that pride and how grateful we were to General Vavala, who's here today, for sort of shepherding us through this area.

And thinking of that year he was deployed to Iraq—the year he was, a year later—like so many of you, we remember how hard it was: the empty seat at the dinner table at Christmas time; missed holidays; Hallie and the kids not seeing him; prayers, hope, and worry repeated every morning and every night.

I remember my wife used to say—stand by—she would leave before I would in the morning, and she'd stand by the—by the sink, and she'd—as she was heading down to teach at Del Tech, and she'd say a prayer—mumble a prayer, the same prayer—prayers of hope and worry repeated every morning and every night.

Just as we ask everything of our veterans, we ask everything of our veterans' families. The poet John Milton wrote, "They also serve who only stand and wait." And so many of you with children who are in the military or husbands or wives, you've stood and waited. You've stood and waited. You've gone through the same concern that you would if they—it just—it's different.

As I said, they—you all—they also serve who only stand and wait.

Folks, you know, it's—and a like—it was like yesterday. I was thinking—and Beau told me when he—when he signed up, he said, "Dad"—I said, "Why did you do it?" He said, "Dad, it's my duty." "It's my duty." "It's my duty."

Duty. That was the code my son lived by: duty.

The creed of millions of veterans have followed that code [code; White House correction]. Each one bound by the sacred oath to support and defend not a place, not a person, not a President, but an idea, an idea unlike any other in human history.

We're the only country in the world founded on an idea. Every other country is based on geography or religion or politics, but we're an idea. The idea of the United States of America, that we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men and women are created equal, endowed by their creator with certain—that's why we were founded. That's who we are. That's who we were. That's who we remain.

And—but because of our veterans, because of many of you, we've never walked away from it, even though there's been temptations to walk away from that democratic notion.

Folks, Beau would be very honored—very honored—by this plaque. Beau—what he'd also say, though, "Dad, it's not about me." And those of you knew Beau like Fred Sears and others knew Beau, that's what he'd say. "This is not about me, Dad. It's not about me. It's about our servicemen. It's about all veterans. It's about all families."

I've said many times before, including this morning when I spoke at Arlington Cemetery, as the Presidents do, that we have many obligations as a nation—many obligations. We only have one truly sacred obligation, and that is to care for those and prepare those we send into harm's way, and care for them and their families when they come home and when they don't come home.

On this Veterans Day and every day, let's remember—remind ourselves of that sacred obligation.

On behalf of the Biden family, thank you for honoring our son Beau's memory, for honoring all of our veterans and their families.

And I asked Father permission to come back up when the family—our family is scattered all over the country—want to get them all together and bring them all up privately to see this as well.

And Father, both priests—you know, out of their own money, they built—they bought this. They—I'm going to see to it, Father, that we raise the money you spent so you—we reimburse you for this. It's a—[applause].

And God bless America, and may God protect our troops who are still in harm's way.

Thank you.

[At this point, the President observed the unveiling of a bronze plaque dedicated to the memory of his son Joseph R. "Beau" Biden III. He was accompanied by his sister Valerie Biden Owens and daughter-in-law Hallie O. Biden.]

Former U.S. Army Chaplain Maj. Donald Van Alstyne, USA (Ret.). Let us pray.

We thank you, O God, for this inspirational day where we have given tribute to our veterans who have served our country selflessly and with integrity. Send us forth with your blessings, and may we never forget our veterans who contributed to the greatness of our Nation.

Amen.

The President. May I say something? The reason they're getting me out of here quickly: Because of the nature of things today, Philadelphia Pike is closed as long as I'm here. *[Laughter]* And—no, I'm serious. You think I'm kidding.

So, if I don't get the hell out of here, you're all locked in here, and anybody who's with me is going to lose votes, so—*[laughter]*.

Thank you, thank you, thank you. God love you all. I really mean it. From the bottom of my heart, thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:38 p.m. on the grounds of the Holy Rosary Pastoral Center at the Grubb/Worth Mansion. In his remarks, he referred to former U.S. Navy Chaplain Cmdr. John J. Gayton, USN (Ret.); Maj. Gen. Francis D. Vavala, ARNG (Ret.), former adjutant general, Delaware National Guard; and Fred C. Sears II, former president and chief executive officer, Delaware Community Foundation. He also referred to his grandchildren Natalie P. Biden and R. Hunter Biden II. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on November 14.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Guardian of Defenders Memorial in Claymont, DE.

Locations: Claymont, DE.

Names: Biden, Hallie O.; Biden, Jill T.; Biden, Natalie P.; Biden, R. Hunter, II; Gayton, John J.; Owens, Valerie Biden; Sears, Fred C., II; Van Alstyne, Donald; Vavala, Francis D.

Subjects: Delaware, Guardian of Defenders Memorial in Claymont; Delaware, President's visit; Military families; U.S. servicemembers, service and dedication; Veterans Day; Veterans, service and dedication.

DCPD Number: DCPD202400994.