

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2024

Remarks at the White House "Classes to Career" Summit

November 13, 2024

The First Lady. Hello. [Laughter] Hey, Kate. Hey, Randi. Thank you. Hello! Thank you. Thank you. Thank you very much. Please be seated.

Well, Joe, that started our day off right, didn't it? [Laughter]

So, welcome to the White House.

Several years ago, a student of mine came running into my classroom and breathlessly said that she had seen me on TV. [Laughter] She had said: "Mom! Mom! That's my English teacher!" And her mother said: "That's not your English teacher. That's the Second Lady."

So, when Joe was elected as Vice President, people assumed that I would stop teaching. But you know, I just couldn't give it up. I am first, foremost, and forever a teacher. So I did both, the White House and teaching.

In the morning, I'd stand in front of my community college students for —[applause]— [laughter]—for their 8 a.m. English comp class. Actually, I'm still doing it. [Laughter] And by the evening, I was at a White House state dinner or boarding Air Force Two.

Then, one day in 2010, some White House advisers were trying to figure to—out and determine, you know, who could highlight the role of community colleges in our economy. Then someone had this revelation—you know, so—[laughter]—"Wait, doesn't the Second Lady work at a community college?" [Laughter]

So this might be surprising, but I think I had gotten so good at stitching the two worlds together and, sort of, hiding the seams, that I never considered using my experience to become an advocate. But I said yes.

And, at the time, I called community colleges America's best kept secret. And I knew that they deserved to be seen and celebrated and championed at every level of Government.

And Joe knows this too. So, when he became President, Joe put community colleges front and center in his workforce strategy. And from day one as First Lady, I knew that community colleges would be a priority for me. So part of that means pushing to make them tuition free. And—[applause].

So I've been so proud to work alongside dedicated leaders like my friend Martha Kanter—[applause]—where's Martha?—Walter Bumphus, and Jee Hāng Lee, who have put—who have been dedicated partners in this work.

So, today, less than a decade after we launched the effort to make—community college free, 34 States—plus Washington, DC—and counting offer tuition-free community college and job training programs.

We came close to making community college free for everyone across the country, but a few Senators—I'm not going to name them—[laughter]—blocked our way. But that wasn't the end. This movement continues to gain momentum. We must keep fighting for free community college.

As first lady, I've also focused on strengthening the pathways between classrooms and careers. Nearly—and you probably all know this—but nearly 60 percent of graduating high school students don't go directly to a 4-year degree. We know that—6 out of every 10 students.

Some will start working. Some will go to community college or technical colleges. Some won't even know what they want to do next.

So we continue to keep transforming education to bridge the gap between what students learn and the careers that they can enter. We've had amazing partners in high schools across the country and in advocates like Becky Pringle and Randi Weingarten.

Together, we're making sure that high school graduation isn't a sudden halt in a student's education, but rather like the seamless step forward, whether that's on a college campus, a registered apprenticeship, or another career opportunity. And we've partnered with the leaders of unions and businesses and school districts, colleges, and universities and—to match what local employers and the workers that they need.

And that's what we've been able to do with our "Investing in America" Workforce Hubs. And it's a model that communities across the country can replicate.

Community colleges are no longer America's best kept secret. Thanks to the progress of Joe's administration and what they've created, we're on our way to making them America's best kept promise. Thank you.

But there's more ground to cover, and it will take all of us to get there. If we work together, we can build a future where more high school students will graduate with credits and skills that they can apply to their future careers, where community college is free for every student in every State of America, and where all students have a clear pathway to jobs that pay well right in the communities where they grew up.

This semester is coming to a close. My students are starting to write their last assignments, and they're signing up for new classes, or some are going to graduate.

Joe and I are also preparing for what's coming next. *[Laughter]*

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

The First Lady. It has been the honor of our lives to serve in the White House and to work alongside, really, all of you in this room. So, as you keep pushing forward to make our country shine with opportunity, know that you will always have a partner in us.

And now I'd like to introduce a longtime champion of our Nation's students. Not only has Joe always supported my career as an educator, but as President, he wakes up every day with a mission to lift up all Americans through the endless possibility of education.

Please welcome your President, my husband and hero, Joe Biden.

The President. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you, thank you, thank you. Thank all of you. Please.

I'm Joe Biden. I'm Jill Biden's husband. *[Laughter]* And you can see she doesn't have any strong notions or ideas. *[Laughter]*

You know, teaching is not what Jill does, it's who she is—and I mean that—like many of you teachers. It's just built in her DNA. She was surprised when we got elected Vice President, and she said she wanted to keep teaching. I said, "Of course." She looked at me like: "Really? You're going to do that?" And we did it.

But the point is that this is a passion. It's a passion for Jill. And the way I look at it is, it's a simple proposition: How can we be the greatest nation in the world and not have the best education system in the world? No, I mean it. Think about it. It's pretty straightforward.

So, I'm honored to host this White House Classroom of [to; White House correction] Career Summit.

Look, 15 years ago, when Jill hosted the first one during our Vice Presidency, to state the obvious, as I said, what Jill is—for Jill, being an educator is just what she is. Period. And I believe the work she's done to connect students and good-paying jobs will prove one of the most important efforts of our Presidency, and I mean it.

Look, that's why we're all here today. And I want to thank Congressman Norcross of New Jersey. I keep reminding—my Jersey guys, we do really well in Jersey. Jill is a Jersey girl, born and raised. [Laughter] And I tell him, though, there was actually a case a long time ago. Delaware is the second smallest State in the Nation, but we own the Delaware River up to the high-water mark in New Jersey. [Laughter] It was a Supreme Court decision, for real. And I'm—so I'm—I just want you to know. That's why we're so close. [Laughter] You just step off of a—[laughter]—anyway. [Laughter] You're a good man, pal. You really are.

And to members of my Cabinet who are here, thank you, thank you, thank you—and leaders of business, education, unions, philanthropy, nonprofits, and more, you know, for being here and for your leadership. And I mean it sincerely.

You know, when we came into office, the pandemic was raging, and the economy was reeling. And from day one, I was determined not only to vaccinate the Nation, to deliver immediate economic relief for the folks who needed it the most, but I also determined to transform the way our economy works for everyone, to write a new economic playbook—and I mean it sincerely—a new economic playbook from—build the economy from the middle out and the bottom up, not from the top down.

My dad used to have an expression. He'd say, "You know, Joey, when you talk about trickle-down economics, not a whole hell of a lot trickles down on our kitchen table." [Laughter] Well, when we do that, the poor have a ladder up and the middle class do well, and the wealthy still will be able to do very well. And we all do well.

It's a playbook based on a value set that my dad taught me. He used to say—and I mean this sincerely—"Joey, a job is about a lot more than a paycheck. It's about your dignity. It's about your place in the community. It's about being able to look your kid in the eye and say, 'Honey, it's going to be okay,' and mean it—and mean it." It matters.

Well, not everyone has felt the progress, because it takes time. We've emerged from a crisis. We have the strongest economy in the world. More to—much more to do. Working families and the middle class are the center of a strong, equitable, and sustainable recovery.

And the big reason why is that I call the "Investing in America" agenda. You know, it's a page from our economic playbook that invests in all of America and all Americans, creating pathways for millions of good-paying jobs being created in our economy.

You know, the key pieces of the "Investing in America" include historic laws that I've signed, the historic investments in modernizing our roads and bridges, our ports, airports, public transit. We're replacing poisonous lead pipes. We're delivering clean water to every American. It's taking time—it's going to, but it's beginning. It's real. It's there. We're delivering affordable, high-speed internet and so much more.

Roosevelt talked about the need to electrify America during that—[inaudible]. Well, how can you have access to being able to participate in everything—in fact, you don't have access to affordable internet? You don't have access to—anyway. Don't get me going. [Laughter]

But look, we're also making sure that the supply chain—I don't think Americans heard much about supply chains before we came to office—[applause]—but the supply chain—starts in

America. We can no longer—for the longest time—for the longest time, corporate America decided to export the jobs because of cheaper labor and import the product. Well, not us. We've changed that dynamic.

For example, semiconductors, those little computer chips, smaller than the tip of my little finger, you know, they power everything from our smartphones to automobiles to weapon systems. America invented those chips. We, in the United States, invented them. We modernized them. We did all the work on it, but we stopped making them. We used to have over 40 percent of the market, and we got down to virtually none of it.

But not anymore. Today, we're making once-in-a-generation investments in American science and innovation that are building chip factories all across America, and they're going to be creating tens of thousands of good-paying jobs—and that's not hyperbole. But it takes time to build them.

The one thing we—you know, I was all excited about how much we've invested and how much is—coming, but it's taken time. You have to build those so-called fabs. These, quote, "fabs"—these factories to build these things are as long—as big as football fields. And guess what? They pay about an average of \$105,000 a year, and you don't need a college degree to get there. And that doesn't even count the tens of billions of dollars being spent to build these facilities and attract other businesses.

And I signed the most significant climate law ever in American history, but—in the history of the world. The Congressman will tell you, we were told we couldn't get it done, but we got it done. We got it done. And it's, you know—it's leading us into a clean energy future with even more good-paying clean energy jobs and American workers.

As a result of these laws and other things we've done—I won't take all your time, but the key actions—the end result is, we've created, in the 4 years we've been—almost 4 years we've been here, we've created 16 million new jobs—brandnew jobs—since I took office—[applause]—and in—the most in any single U.S. Presidential term. Inflation is at 2.6 percent—close to the prepandemic rate. Unemployment is down to 4.1 percent—longest stretch for a long, long time, that low.

Despite the critics saying we had to lower ambitions to get the economy going, we've attracted off the sidelines from private enterprise over \$1 trillion—\$1 trillion—in private investment in clean energy and manufacturing that are creating good-paying jobs and building factories here in America, where they belong.

Now, all this historic investment is happening in every part of the country. You know, you may—recall my saying, "I'm a President for all Americans no matter who they voted for." Well, keeping that commitment, the majority of the investments are actually in red States, not blue States, because they got hurt the most by the policies early on, all those factories shutting down.

How many times did you come from places where you'd have: "Mom and my grandpop and grandmom worked in that factory, and my mom and dad worked there, my—but I got to move, Mom, because there's no job. The factory is gone"? They got hurt very badly. It takes away the soul of the—of community.

And we're making sure these Americans have access to good-paying jobs that are being created.

"Buy America" has been the law of the land since the thirties, which hardly anybody knew, hardly anybody paid attention to.

When Franklin Roosevelt was trying to make it fair for unions to be able to organize so the business couldn't just crush them because they started, there was a provision in the law in the

early thirties that said when a President is authorized by Congress to spend money on a project, he has to do it—two things: He has to use that money to hire American workers, and he has to use American products. Well, this administration—past administrations failed to do that. Like I said, so much was exported overseas. Well, not on my watch.

My administration buys American. We're making sure the Federal projects we're building—roads, bridges, highways, and more—are getting made with American products, built by American workers, and creating good-paying American jobs—jobs that don't require a 4-year college degree, jobs you can raise a family on. In fact, my administration is requiring many of these kinds of projects to pay what—a union wage called a Davis-Bacon prevailing wage.

We're expanding registered apprenticeships, resulting in hiring more than 1 million apprentices since we've come into office. Remember, business came along and said, "We'll do the apprenticeships." [Laughter] Yes, right. [Laughter] Well, guess what? They're not.

A lot of folks don't realize that an apprenticeship is like earning a college degree. You know, you spend up to 4, 5 years training while—you get paid while you're doing it—to learn a trade to lead you to a good-paying job, like going to school before you can be registered in that particular expertise. They're among the best workers in the world.

Today I'm proud to announce that for the first time ever, the number of women in apprenticeships has reached 100,000—[applause]—100,000—three times the number from a decade ago.

When I took office, not a single State had a registered apprenticeship program for teachers. Today, 46 States, plus Puerto Rico and DC, have launched registered apprenticeship programs for teachers. Some will say I did that because I feared for my life, but—[laughter]—but not true. I wanted to do it anyway. [Laughter]

I'm also proud to announce that we've committed more than \$80 billion—\$80 billion—toward strengthening and expanding our workforce. As Jill just described, that includes supporting free community college programs so students and workers can train for good jobs without the burden of student debt.

It also described what we launched—the Workforce Hubs, where we collaborate with local leaders, community colleges, unions, local businesses to train and connect Americans to good-paying jobs. And it's good for students and workers. It grows the economy for everyone.

I know I'm listed as the most pro-union President in American history. I'm very proud of that. But guess what? Guess what, folks? Business is now acknowledging—it helps them too. I had Treasury Department do a study: What's the effect of focusing on unions? Everybody—everybody's standard of living is raised—everybody's.

We've also—really proud to have launched the American Climate Corps, you know, patterned after the Peace Corps and the AmeriCorps [AmeriCorps; White House correction], to put tens of thousands of young people on a path to good-paying clean energy apprenticeships and jobs. That's the future.

And with the support of the private sector, we're also bringing business into the high schools so younger students can learn about and train for good-paying jobs, including those that don't require a 4-year degree, as Jill pointed out.

There's so much more that you'll learn about at today's summit. And you—many of you will bring more information as well. But look, it really matters.

Let me close with this. You heard Jill speak about incredible students. Well, joining us today is another American worker who embodies the incredible character that we see all over the

country: Maurice Bogard, Jr.—Maurice, I'm going to ask you to come up here in a second—a father of two young children, one of whom I work for. *[Laughter]*

He's going to actually come up?

[Maurice Bogard, Jr., apprentice, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 38 in Cleveland, OH, and his children Aiden and Jaxson joined the President on stage.]

Now, look, Maurice is from Cleveland, Ohio. From the day his children were born, he had a survival mindset to do whatever he could to improve the positive—circumstances for his family: 12-to-16-hour days at multiple jobs, even working out of town for months at a time just to get by, just—it meant fewer hours with his children, as well, and his family.

Last year, his sister, who is also with him today—Sis, stand up—every man like me needs a strong sister—*[laughter]*—I have one—*[laughter]*—sent him to a link to a—about a pre-apprentice program where you can learn a trade, funded by my American —by the American Rescue Plan that I signed into law as soon as I came to office. Well, Maurice signed up. Within hours, he had an appointment. He soon started a 4-week training program to connect him with his local IBEW, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers.

Today, he's on his way to becoming a journeyman electrician, working at the stadium of his hometown baseball team, the Cleveland Guardians. *[Laughter]*.

Mr. Bogard. Yes, sir.

The President. A good-paying job with good hours, good benefits, and a lifelong career and a sense of dignity and pride to be the father he always wanted to be.

Mr. Bogard. Yes, sir.

The President. And it's not just him. Millions of workers and families have more opportunity today than they did 4 years ago in an economy—economy that's growing from the middle out and bottom up.

[The President addressed Mr. Bogard as follows.]

You—he can—put him down. He can do whatever he wants. *[Laughter]*

[The President addressed one of Mr. Bogard's sons as follows.]

All you got to do—look, you can do anything you want, pal. *[Laughter]* Okay? You want to make a speech later, you can. All right? *[Laughter]* All right.

An economy where everyone has a fair shot, we leave nobody behind, and invest in America and all Americans—that's what we've done together by reminding ourselves who we are.

For Lord's sake, we're the United States of America. There is nothing—I mean this from the bottom of my heart—there's nothing beyond our capacity when we do it together. And there's no —group I'd rather be doing it with than all of you.

So God bless you all, and may God protect our troops. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 10:20 a.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Natasha Johnson, sister of Mr. Bogard. He also referred to his sister Valerie Biden Owens. The First Lady referred to Randi Weingarten, president, American Federation of Teachers; Martha J. Kanter, chief executive officer, College Promise; Walter Bumphus, chief executive officer, American Association of Community Colleges; Jee Hang Lee, president and chief executive officer, Association of Community College Trustees; and Rebecca S. Pringle, president, National Education Association.

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