

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2024

Remarks on World AIDS Day

December 1, 2024

The President. You're——

Jeanne White-Ginder. [Inaudible]

The President. You're my Commander——

Ms. White-Ginder. Thank you.

The President. You're my Commander in Chief.

Ms. White-Ginder. [Laughter] It took us all. Thank you.

The President. Careful now.

I told her she's my Commander in Chief. [Laughter]

[At this point, the President cleared his throat.]

Folks, you've changed the world. Sorry, I have a cold. You've changed the world.

Jeanne, thank you for the introduction and for your courage. You just described the first time we met after your son passed away, and what I saw in you then was something extraordinary. You said it best: a mom on a mission, turning your plan into purpose.

After all these years, looking at everything you've achieved, the lives you've touched, the country you've changed, the world you've made better, you're extraordinary, and it's an honor to have you with us today again at the White House. Love you.

To the families here today, as Jill just said, we know how hard it is in different ways, but we know. We know. I hope you can find comfort in remembering the one thing that's never lost: your love for them and their love for you.

Jill and I, along with countless others, are forever grateful to you for your collective and individual courage. And Jill and I are especially grateful for the trust you put in us.

It's been the honor of our lives to serve in the White House: "the people's house," your house. We felt a special obligation to use this sacred place to ensure everyone is seen and the story of America is heard. That's why we're all together here on this World AIDS Day. And I want to thank all of you, allies and advocates who are here, including Sir Elton John's foundation and so many others for the long history of this fight, both globally and here at home.

Jill and I met with Elton and David this summer, and this event is, in no small part, the result of that meeting.

And a special thanks to one of the great public health officials—a true hero—who have led this fight against HIV/AIDS, Dr. Anthony Fauci. Where is Anthony? Anthony, you're a good man. God love you. As my mother would say, "God love you, Anthony." [Laughter]

I also want to acknowledge Dr. Laura Cheever, HIV leader, Department of Health and Human Services——

The First Lady. Oh, right here.

The President. ——who's——

The First Lady. In the front. The blonde.

The President. —who's retiring this year. She started when she was—after 25 years of service. She started when she was 10, if you take a look at her. [Laughter] God love you.

The idea of the quilt was conceived in 1985 by Cleve Jones and Mike Smith, who is here with us today. Mike, there you are. Stand up, Mike.

To honor the memory of all those we lost to HIV/AIDS. It started with one name on one panel nearly four decades ago. And decades later, 50,000 panels and 110,000 names.

This quilt weighs 54 tons, the largest community art project in the entire world, and tells the tragic stories of brothers who died too soon; moms who contracted AIDS at childbirth—her daughter's life stolen, eventually her own as well; friends and partners who lost loved ones of their lives; and so many more stories of precious lives cut too short.

And I do realize that on these days of celebration, they bring back all the memories. They're hard. It's not easy. It's important, but it's not easy. So I want to thank you for being here.

This quilt was first displayed on the National Mall in 1987. Over the years, it made its way to the Ellipse and President Clinton's Inaugural parade.

Today, for the first time in our Nation's history, the sections of AIDS quilts are being publicly displayed here at the White House because, like the first threads of this quilt stretched nearly 40 years ago—stitched nearly 40 years ago, this movement is fully woven into the fabric and history of America, shining a light on the memory and the legacy of all the sisters and brothers, sons and daughters, husbands and wives, moms and dads, partners and friends who have lost—who we've lost to this terrible disease.

Together, we honor the spirit of resilience and the extraordinary strength of people, families, and communities affected by HIV/AIDS, including the nearly 40 million people living with HIV around the world today—40 million. And we send a clear message to the Nation and to the world that we stand united in the fight against this epidemic. It matters. It matters we reinstate that.

I remember—as Senator, when this epidemic was raging—the stigma, the misinformation, the Government failing to act and acknowledge the dignity of LGBTQ+ lives and the seriousness of the AIDS epidemic. It caused serious harm. It compounded pain and trauma for a community watching a generation of loved ones and friends perish. It was horribly, horribly wrong.

We've also seen advocates, survivors, families, allies who have turned their pain into purpose like all of you have, their loss into determination, their anger into a movement that's literally changing the world. Science—new scientific discoveries, new preventative care, new global partnerships, and so much more.

For example, through what's known as PEPFAR—the President's Emergency Plan on AIDS Relief—launched by President Bush—and he deserves credit—George W. Bush—we made the single largest investment of any nation in the world to tackle a single disease, saving more than 26 million lives so far.

I'm proud to have reauthorized PEPFAR last year, and I can—I'm going to call on Congress to pass 5-year PEPFAR reauthorization to sustain these gains we made globally.

In fact, later today I'm traveling in Angola in Africa, where we're deepening our partnership across the continent on mainly health priorities, including improving outcomes for people with—people living with HIV through PEPFAR. It matters. It matters throughout the world.

But for all our progress, too many people continue to live with HIV, including 1 million Americans. That's why my first year in office, I launched a new national HIV/AIDS strategy to ensure treatment and prevention is available to everyone everywhere, all across this country, and

that includes ensuring medications that can prevent HIV infections are affordable and available in all forms, without copays for people with health insurance.

We made clear to the insurance companies, they can't deny coverage for these medications or for lab tests that doctors recommend to patients.

We're fighting the stigma of discrimination against HIV community by ending the shameful—the shameful—practice of banning gay and bisexual men from donating blood; strengthening civil rights protections in medical settings for people with HIV; educating the public about the latest science in transmission, testing, and prevention and care.

So many of you have been leading the way in these efforts, including the late Cornelius Baker, who passed away 3 weeks ago, as a pioneer on advancing HIV testing.

Together with all of you, we're also calling on States and community leaders to repeal outdated HIV criminalization laws throughout this country.

And I'm proud to announce, before the end of my term, the Center for Medical and—Medicare and Medicaid Services will update its guidance on HIV care, encouraging States to adopt the best practices using the latest science and technology. It matters. It matters.

Folks, you've been standing a long time, so let me close with this. *[Laughter]* You're pretty good. *[Laughter]* I know the fight to end this terrible epidemic is hard. But I look around today—and I mean this from the bottom of my heart—I look around today at all of you—survivors, families, heroes who have never given up—and I know it's a fight that we're going to win for all the lives lost and for all those that are still alive.

Look at what you've already done to change the hearts and minds and save lives across the country and around the world.

That's the power of this movement. That's the power of memory of your loved one. That's the power of America.

We just have to keep going, keep the faith, and remember who in the hell we are. We're the United States of America, and there's nothing beyond our capacity when we do it together—nothing, nothing, nothing.

God bless you all. And I know I'd like to invite everyone to view the quilt, so, folks, I'm getting off this stage. *[Laughter]*

But really and truly, I mean it from the bottom of my heart: You're changing the world. You're changing the world.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 3 p.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to David Furnish, husband of musician Elton John; former Chief Medical Adviser to the President Anthony S. Fauci, in his former capacity as the Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases; and Laura Cheever, Associate Administrator of the HIV/AIDS Bureau, Health Resources and Services Administration. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of the First Lady, THRIVE SS Inc. Cofounder Daniel D. Driffin, and Jeanne White-Ginder, mother of Ryan White, who died of AIDS in 1990. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on December 2.

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