

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2024

Remarks at a White House Conference on Women's Health Research

December 11, 2024

The First Lady. You're so quiet. It's like a classroom. *[Laughter]*

So, in the intermission, were you all, like, dancing and everything? *[Laughter]* Get a little movement. You know, you've been sitting for a while.

So thank you for standing. But you know, I'm glad you get a little—like you said, Robin, a little movement, right? It's—that's what it's all about.

So—oh, please sit down. Please. *[Laughter]* If you feel all stretched out by now.

So, before I begin, I just want to say I'm so glad that you got to come here today because the White House is decorated. And the theme this year is "Peace and Light." So I hope that you all feel that sense of, you know, peace and light and that, just for a moment, when you leave here today, that you feel—I don't know—a little—a sense of joy, because I think we all need, like, this—you know, we all need to feel joy now during this time of the season, during—just during this time.

So, anyway—*[laughter]*—okay. Now I'll start. You're all reading into that. *[Laughter]*

Anyway, for decades, for centuries even, at dinner tables and in waiting rooms, in whispered conversations, you know, when we meet our friends for coffee, women have been talking to each other about our health. Isn't that true?

Audience members. Yes.

The First Lady. So today we brought that conversation to the White House. Today we are saying to women everywhere: We hear you, and we will get you the answers you need.

So thank you for joining us for the White House Conference on Women's Health Research.

The United States has the best health research in the world, yet women's health is understudied and research is underfunded. And so many of you have said this. And the United States economy loses \$1.8 billion in working time every year to menopause symptoms that upend women's lives.

And that's what Maria Shriver and I talked about on that Saturday afternoon in April last year. So Maria keeps this quote next to her phone—you have a stationary phone? *[Laughter]*

Journalist and women's health advocate Maria Shriver. *[Inaudible]* *[Laughter]*

The First Lady. —in her office, and it says, "Why go to the Moon?" And your uncle, President Kennedy, asked, "We choose to go to the Moon in this decade and do the other things not because they are easy, because they are hard."

So, Maria, thank you for carrying on that mission, pushing for breakthroughs that are never easy, but possible. Thank you.

So, a little more than a year ago, President Biden launched—thank you, Joe—*[laughter]*—the first-ever White House Initiative on Women's Health Research, building on the foundation of decades of work in women's health from many of you in this room.

And Carolyn made sure yesterday, as we were doing speech prep, that I understood—she said, "Jill, you know, I know that we're doing this now, but there are some women"—like

Carolyn—"who's been doing this research forever and ever and ever. And I just want you to say, 'We recognize that.'" So—[*applause*].

So it—and you heard from Carolyn, you know, our incredible—and our incredible team here at the White House who's ensured that Government-funded research, you know—and they will include women from the beginning.

And that means designing studies and separating the data, which everyone has said, and reporting findings to create treatments specifically for women and for men. I mean, we're not going to leave you guys out. [*Laughter*]

And we've invested nearly \$1 billion in this research on women's health.

So, over this past year, I've traveled around the country, and I have met, honestly, some really incredible researchers. And I've been to universities and the New York Stock Exchange to bring people together and create connections across industries.

And the women of this country are paying attention. Researchers and business leaders are too.

So we brought all of you into this room to elevate all this information: discoveries that will change how we treat menopause symptoms—we've talked about this all this morning; research that uses genetics to find the cause of extreme morning sickness. And I heard this a couple weeks ago, and I was particularly interested because my own granddaughter was going through the same thing—because we're going to be great-grandparents. [*Laughter*]

So funders and founders who are seeing the market for women's health products triple, advocates who are making sure that women know that solutions are at our fingertips if we just keep fighting for them.

Together, we've laid down a new line, a marker of our progress toward closing the gaps in women's health. Everything that you've heard today—and hasn't it been, like, so informative and fascinating? I mean, I love these forums because I always learn something new. I just—you know, it's just so inspiring. Because this is our new normal.

And today isn't the finish line, it's the starting point. We—all of us—we have built the momentum. Now it's up to us to make it unstoppable.

It has been the honor of my life to serve as your First Lady and to join you in this work, but my work doesn't stop in January when Joe and I leave this house. I will keep building alliances, like the ones that brought us here today, and I will keep pushing for funding for innovative research.

So join me. Be the researcher who makes sure that each proposal you work on considers women from the beginning. Be the investor who searches for the next breakthrough product of [or; White House correction] treatment. Be the voice in every space, from boardrooms to classrooms to laboratories, who asks, "What are we doing to advance women's health?"

Let's make a promise to all those women out there right now, sitting in a parking lot somewhere, in a—after a doctor's appointment, wondering why you're not being heard, so maybe feeling, you know, like you're all alone.

And—well, I'll just have to stop here for 1 second. I did hear during that little intermission thing—like, we're not putting our doctors down—right?—so some doc back—in the back said, "You know, it sounds like you're putting the docs down." We're not putting the docs down. I don't want you to feel that way. That, you know—but I think the docs are joining us and saying, "Hey, we want the answers." So I just want to make that 100-percent clear.

So the White House, all of us here, we will keep fighting for you until your worries turn into answers, your symptoms into solutions. Until women everywhere benefit from the lifesaving and world-changing research that we know is possible.

A new future can ring out from this conference, one that answers the call from women who have been waiting for too long. Let this be the moment that we push harder, the moment that people say changed the world of women's health forever.

Thank you. *[Applause]* *[Laughter]* Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you very much. Please.

So I'm so grateful to have a President who—*[laughter]*—who heard us—*[laughter]*—and took action quickly. So, without Joe, really, this wouldn't have been made possible. And that's the power of someone who understands how to make things happen in Government—because God knows, Joe, you've been for—what?—50 years. *[Laughter]*

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

So someone who has fundamentally shifted how our Nation approaches women's health research. So please welcome my husband, your President and champion, I think, of all of us. So my husband, Joe Biden. Come on, Joe.

The President. Thank you.

Thank God she said "yes" the fifth time I asked her to marry me. *[Laughter]*

Please have a seat.

You know, I—as they used to say in the Senate, a point of personal privilege: I—when—no man deserves one great love, let alone two. When I was introduced to Jill, my younger brother—my youngest brother said, "You'll love her; she hates politics." *[Laughter]*

Well, look, I—hello, everyone. My name is Joe Biden; I'm Jill Biden's husband. *[Laughter]* Let's be honest, we wouldn't be here today without Jill.

Across our administration and across Congress, across the country, the work we're doing on women's health research is some of the most important work this administration has ever done.

And I've always believed that our Nation is at its best when we—when we plumb the endless possibilities that exist for all our women and girls. And that includes their health.

Women on—are half our population, to state the obvious. But like Jill said, for too long, they've been underrepresented when it comes to health research. And that's real.

You know, that's why, over a year ago, we launched the first-ever White House Initiative on Women's Health Research. And the goal was to fundamentally change and improve how we approach and invest in women's health research—we weren't doing enough of it—and to pioneer the next generation of scientific research and discoveries that are going to improve care for—women receive all across the country.

Because the fact is the health of our moms and grandmothers, sisters and daughters, friends and colleagues affects not just women's well-being, but the prosperity of the entire Nation. And that's a fact. I—we haven't gotten that through to the other team yet. *[Laughter]* No—no, I mean it, across the board. Anyway, I won't get into that. *[Laughter]*

But that's why, in my State of the Union Address this year, I called on Congress to invest \$12 billion in women's health research to benefit millions of lives and families and communities all across America.

Folks, but my administration wasn't going to wait for Congress to secure the funding. We looked for other ways to prioritize women's health with existing dollars that are already in the Government and to get important work started.

And I knew where to start: Rosa DeLauro. Rosa, stand up. I'm not joking. As they say in southern Delaware—you all think I'm kidding. I'm not kidding. *[Laughter]* She's incredible. Every important thing I've ever tried to get done that no one paid attention to, you were there for me. I mean it sincerely. You're the best, Rosa. What you did on child tax credit—I mean, across the board.

And, folks, women's health is a—something that matters so, so very much. Along with Members that are here today, you—she's going to keep this effort going to—when we leave. When we leave—when Jill and I leave.

Audience member. Fight like hell. *[Laughter]*

The President. Well, we're going to fight like hell. And we're—I—I'm the—we're—we're no longer going to be President and First Lady, but we're not going away. *[Laughter]* And so—*[applause]*—along with Members here, like Diane [Diana; White House correction] and Lauren. Where—where is Diane [Diana]?

Representative Diana L. DeGette. Right here.

The President. There you go. Stand up, kiddo. Let them see you.

And, Lauren, thank you.

So I'm so proud that, to date, we've secured \$1 billion so far in women's health research from different government agencies.

You know, our new agency, ARPA-H, which is patterned after Advanced—it's called Advanced Research Projects and Agencies for Health—is based on DARPA, which is the Defense Department program for Advanced Research and Projects Agency. That drove breakthroughs—the Defense Department broke breakthroughs in everything from the internet to GPS. It had a big budget for doing everything else, but it also had this specific individual budget.

And ARPA-H does for biomedicine what DARPA does for technology, driving breakthroughs to prevent, detect, and treat diseases, including cancer, Alzheimer's, diabetes, and so much more. We're using their funding to drive breakthroughs in women's health in ovarian cancer and menopause, in migraines, in high blood pressure for pregnant women.

The National Institute of Health is using their funding to break down the silos—a lot of silos in Government, a lot of silos across the—in America—to make more progress and do it more quickly.

For example, we know that heart disease is the leading cause of death for women. But we don't know—we don't know—enough about how menopause may affect heart disease. And that's going to change now. We're going to learn so much more.

And the Department of Defense is dedicating funds to research women's health issues like arthritis, cancer, chronic fatigue that affect women in the military, but this research is going to benefit all women—all women.

Our work doesn't stop here.

Look, you know, the addition to—in addition to launching the Women's Health Research Initiative earlier this year, I signed an Executive order that—directing the most comprehensive set of executive actions ever taken—ever taken—in the history of this country to improve women's health issues.

And look—[*applause*]*—it ensures that women's health is integrated and prioritized all across the entire Federal Government—all research projects and budget plans, across the entire Government. And it spurs new research and innovation on a wide range of women's health needs throughout their lives. And it does so much more—so much more.*

Folks, there's literally never been a more comprehensive effort from the Federal Government to spur innovation in women's health research in our entire history.

And thank you, by the way, kiddo. [*Laughter*] I—no, I mean it. I mean it.

If I can digress for a moment, I would—I have been the beneficiary of a lot of the research that's been done. I had a—two cranial aneurysms. I had two 9-hour operations. They took the top of my head off twice; they couldn't find a brain the first time. [*Laughter*]

But, all kidding aside, I mean the research that's going on across the entire world. I visited every single solitary major health center in the world—in the world—seven of them. And you know, a lot of what—what happens, even in not just women's research, but you know, docs who are great, they walk by the mirror, and they see a Pulitzer Prize—a Nobel Prize about to be won and—rather than sharing the data. But that's all changing. That's all changing.

And this initiative lays the groundwork for discoveries and research for generations to come. Mark my words. And the benefits we gain tomorrow will happen because we made the decision to do something about them today—today, now.

And all of you in this room are leading the way, and that's not hyperbole. You really are. It's a hell of a combination of people that make things change.

Let me close with this. And my daughter Ashley sitting here, she runs a—she works for women—she runs a women's health shelter—women's health center—shelter in Philadelphia. And you know, this holiday season is a time not for gratitude, but for reflection. Gratitude is important, but we've got to reflect on what's going on.

And let me say to you that it's been an honor of my life to serve as your President the last 4 years. But I'm—and I'm forever grateful. [*Applause*] I really am.

But folks, it's not a joke. We're blessed to live in America. We're blessed to live in America. I've been to over 140 countries. I mean, but for the grace of God, I could have been born a lot of other places. Literally the greatest country on Earth, that's who we are. But we've got to raise up even more than we are now.

I often say, America can be summed up in one word. I was on the Tibetan Plateau with Xi Jinping, and he said, "Can you define America for me?" And I—this is all on the record. I said, "Yes, one word: possibilities."

Think about it. We're the only nation in the world where people—they think there's arrogance in that. But we've never failed to get things done when we set our mind to it. It's all about possibilities. Anything is possible.

That's what the Women's Health Research Initiative is all about: possibilities. You know, and that's what this conference is all about. That's what you're all about. Researchers, innovators, investors; businesses, advocates, elected officials; public, private, and nonprofit leaders unleashing the drive and discovery and the talent and imagination that you have in this room, a spirit of innovation inherent in who you guys are.

I really mean it. Think about it. Turn and look at the people to your left and right who you know are engaged in this. It's all about the possibilities and belief we can do things, we can change things fundamentally.

I think inherent in the American conscience is setting a bold vision and taking concrete steps to make our dreams a reality, holding on to one more thing that we can never lose: hope—hope, hope, hope. Because what we need—we need to raise the expectations of the American people up. We've got to let them know we haven't forgotten. Whether it's a business or labor or whether it's politics, whatever it—we haven't forgotten.

You have—you guys go out there. You take care of all of these folks. Guess what? How many of them think that we just sort of forgotten? Why aren't we focused?

Because of you and your fearless determination, you're making real progress. You're really making progress.

There's still so much more to do. And we're going to take all of us to get it done. I know it's a battle. But I know I have a hell of a lot of—a hell of an army here. *[Laughter]* You know, when I look around at all of you here today—and I mean this sincerely—I know it's a battle we're going to win. We're going to win this battle.

We just have to remember who in the hell we are. We're the United States of America. And there is nothing we've ever set our mind to we've been unable to do when we've done it together. It's not beyond our capacity, when we work together. And that's what you're all doing: working together.

And so I—and I want to close by thanking my wife for Jill—I mean, Jill, I tell you. Like I said, when we got married, my brother said, "Don't worry; she doesn't like politics." Well, I tell you what, you stepped up, kid. *[Laughter]* You've stepped up.

And, in case you wonder, when she speaks, I listen. *[Laughter]*

Thank you all so very, very much. Let's get this done. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 11:45 a.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Reps. Rosa L. DeLauro and Lauren Underwood; and President Xi Jinping of China. He also referred to his brother Francis. The First Lady referred to Robin Arzón, vice president for fitness programming and head instructor, Peloton; and Carolyn M. Mazure, Norma Weinberg Spungen and Joan Lebson Bildner Professor in Women's Health Research and professor of psychiatry and psychology, Yale School of Medicine, in her capacity as Chair of the White House Initiative on Women's Health Research. She also referred to her granddaughter Naomi K. Biden Neal.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : White House Conference on Women's Health Research.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Biden, Ashley B.; Biden, Francis W.; Biden, Jill T.; DeGette Diana L.; DeLauro, Rosa L.; Underwood, Lauren; Xi Jinping.

Subjects: Advanced Research Projects Agency for Health (ARPA-H); China, President; National Institutes of Health; Research and development; White House Initiative on Women's Health Research; Women's health issues; Women's Health Research, White House Conference on.

DCPD Number: DCPD202401065.