

*Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2025*

**Remarks at a Reception for New Democratic Members of Congress**  
*January 5, 2025*

*The President.* Hello, hello, hello.

Well, welcome to your house.

*Audience members.* Aww.

*The President.* We're honored to have you here. Look, we host you, the newest Members of Congress. It brings back a lot of memories. Congratulations to you and your families.

And thank you all for—the steering and policy chair, Amy Klobuchar, who, if I were you—I'd listen to everything she says, everything she does. [*Laughter*] House Democratic Caucus chair is here, but before that, we're going to have Gary Peters announced.

Gary, where are you? There he is.

And Pete Aguilar is here as well. Pete.

Well, you made it through the campaign, and now your work begins to deliver for your people. And we've been in your shoes—the excitement, the expectations, and the little bit of nervousness occasionally. It's okay.

My advice to you is to embrace the institution you serve. I really mean it. Improve it. Don't tear it down.

You know, we—36 years ago, I loved—for 36 years, I was a United States Senator. I got elected when I was 29. You have to be 30 to be sworn in, and I wasn't old enough to be sworn in. And I came down to Washington, and I—when I was in—a guy—a number of the senior Senators helped me out. And I was in Teddy Kennedy's office, waiting to—hiring staff, interviewing people, and I got a phone call in his office that my wife and daughter had just been killed, and my two boys weren't likely to live. They had been struck by a tractor trailer, broadsided them on—Christmas shopping.

And the reason I bother to tell you this story is not to seek any sympathy, but to say to you that my decision at that time was to not be sworn in, to get the hell out. And we had a Democratic Governor, so I knew they were going to be able to appoint a Democratic Senator, and that wasn't a worry.

And—but a group of about seven Democrats and Republican Senators, starting with Mike Mansfield, who they called "Iron Mike," who was a—the Majority Leader—and a Southerner named Fritz Hollings. And a bunch of folks got together, and they came to see me in two different groups to convince me to stay because I knew that—that they'd get—we'd get another Senator, but I wasn't sure—I didn't think they'd get another father, my two boys who were recovering. And so I wasn't going to stay.

But they brought me into their homes, these Senators. There were six, seven of them. I won't name all—bore you with it. But from Teddy Kennedy to Fritz Hollings to Mike Mansfield, and they just embraced me. They—and they didn't—it wasn't overly sympathetic. It was just, you know, "You just come and stay"—I'll never forget. "Just come and stay 6 months; then you can go home." [*Laughter*] Then you can go home."

But what they did was they pulled me in. They pulled me in. They invited me to their homes. There—there used to be, back in those days, Democrats and Republicans were—had friendships,

and they would still have dinners at each other's homes, private dinners and the like. And all of a sudden, I got included. I got pulled in.

And Mike Mansfield, who was the leader of the Senate—they called him "Iron Mike"—from Montana, he has more integrity in his little finger than most people had in their whole body. And I used to have to report this office every day—every Tuesday at 2 o'clock. I thought everybody reported—he'd give me an assignment. I thought everybody got an assignment. Nobody gets an assignment—[*laughter*]*—*in the Senate.

But it just basically, looking back on it, to take my pulse to see how I was doing. Because every time, as soon as the Senate was out, I'd literally jog down to the—Penn Station [Union Station; White House correction] to get on the train to go home because I commuted every day.

Anyway, to make a long story short, there's a purpose to my telling you this. I was 100 in seniority and—of the United States Senate, and they still cared for me. They looked out for me. And they gave me strength, and I stay engaged. They didn't—I—they didn't stay—I didn't stay engaged; I got really engaged. I was here for 50 years. [*Laughter*]

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

[*Laughter*] But my point is, you don't have to give up your principles or your beliefs to build relationships, to compromise and reach a consensus. That's often the only way to get big things done, at least in my experience. That's what I've tried to do my whole career.

And I'm proud of the record we're going to leave you all to build on: an economy that grows from the middle out and the bottom up instead of the top down; the once-in-a-generation investment in infrastructure—over a billion two hundred million dollars and—a trillion two hundred billion dollars; the CHIPS and Science Act; the climate change; clean energy.

The point is that—[*applause*]. The point is, whether it's reducing prescription drug costs or reducing gun violence or reasserting America's leadership in the world and, maybe most important of all, standing up for democracy.

And every generation gets tested. I taught constitutional law for a long time, and I used to always give a lecture about every generation has to fight for—I never really believed what I was saying—[*laughter*]*—*in the sense that I didn't think I'd have to fight to maintain democracy.

But tomorrow is January 6. Tomorrow is January 6. We gather to certify the results on a free and fair Presidential election and ensure a peaceful transfer of power. It's a day that, most of our history, we took for granted, the 6th, but I hope we never take it for granted again.

You know, 4 years ago, January 6, this Capitol was attacked by a violent mob. If you can come over to the Oval before I leave, I'll show you the room that the former President sat in for 3½ hours, watching what was going on on television in the small dining room off of my—off of the Oval Office. And our democracy was really, literally, put to the test. And thankfully, our democracy held.

But the big reason is because of the bravery of the Capitol Police and the local people who stood with us. Never forget them. They're guarding you. Give them the respect and support they deserve.

But it's also due to the Members of the House and the Senate, who, even in the face of these threats—you know, those threats to their life—courageously fulfilled their duty to the Constitution. They showed up and did the work.

Now it's your duty to tell the truth, to remember what happened, and not let January 6 be rewritten as a—or even erased; to honor the Constitution not only on the most extraordinary of

days, but—it's one of the toughest days in American history, January 6—but every day. You know, you've sworn an oath, and I know you'll never forget the oath you swore to.

But now, 4 years later, I'm leaving the office of the President. I'm determined to do everything in my power to respect the peaceful transfer of power.

You know, I don't think a—[*applause*]. I wasn't going to run when I ran in 2020 because I had lost my son, didn't want any part of getting engaged again. But my son Beau and—who was the attorney general and likely the Governor—next Governor of the State of Delaware.

But you know, I think it's important to restore basic conditions. The last time this occurred, this transfer of power, the losing party never even showed up—never even showed up for the—for any—for—and everybody, understandably, says to me: "Why are you being nice, Joe? Why'd you have him over to the office for 2 hours? Why are you cooperating?" Because we've got to—the rules matter. The institutions matter. The safeguards matter. They really matter.

And look, you know, the core traditions we've long respected in America, certifying an election is—attending an Inauguration of an incoming President—and this is all part of the tradition we have to begin to restore. And I hope you, too, will work to restore the traditions to keep this country stronger.

Let me—you know, we can never forget democracy—everything is possible. Everything is possible—our freedoms, our rights, our liberties, our dreams. And the work of our democracy falls to every generation of Americans to earn it.

I know—I used to teach—I used to say that, "earn it." And I never really—I taught it, and I knew it was true, but I never felt it. I never believed it. But we have to defend it and protect it because it's always under siege.

And look, we're going through a really—I know a lot of my colleagues are tired of hearing me saying this, but we're going through a period in American history which is one of those inflection points in history. The cold war is over. The cold war era is over. We're in an entirely new era. Everything has changed, not because of any single woman or man. Because the nature of things that have changed.

Think of the transitions that are taking place in the world, unrelated to who the leadership is. Think of what's going on, whether it's global warming or whether it's the idea that the whole alliances are breaking down and being reestablished. And it seems to me that our safety depends—and security depends—in large part, on who our partners are, who our allies are. They matter.

So, you're going to be in a position to have to deal with—I—one of the things I'm proudest of is I rebuilt NATO. I say "I," but I did. For real. [*Laughter*] I mean, it took—by the way, I spent over—no, no, no. No, I—[*inaudible*]—said that—it took me over a—we calculated it—120 hours with these world leaders individually—speaking to them individually on why it was important.

I remember getting a phone call 10 days before he died from Dr. Kissinger, saying, "Joe"—I was, half the time, in a different position than Kissinger was because I was a senior Senator at the time during the Vietnam war by that time. And he said, "Not since Napoleon has Europe not looked over their shoulder with dread at what was going on in Moscow until you came—you guys came"—he said "you," but it was about me—"you came along." We've improved NATO. We strengthened it. We put it back together again. We put it back together again.

We're in a position where we were able to convince—did you ever think we'd be in a position—those of you who are students of history—where Japan would be spending 2 percent of its GDP on defense? We'd get 50 nations to support us—our efforts in Ukraine? Why? Because

the world's gotten so damn small—so damn small. They all understand: What happens in my neighborhood is going to affect every neighborhood.

We're putting together alliances in the South Pacific, in the Indian Ocean, the Quad. Did anybody ever think we'd get India, Japan, Australia, and the United States in one organization?

The point I'm making is, everything is changing.

I've known—I've known Putin for over 47 years. Met with him many times. I remember when I met with him in off—in the off period between the time that we were elected and before we were sworn in—or just after we were sworn—no, actually, before we—no, that's true—just after we sworn in, in early February. And I wanted to talk about reestablishing arms control and dealing with nuclear weapons.

And he started to talk about how Russia had changed and so on and so forth. And he talked about he—his—he has eight time zones. I said: "Yes, eight time zones along the—around the—Arctic Circle. And guess what? The ice is melting, and what's coming out is not greenhouse gasses. It's methane. You're never going to control it. It's not going to refreeze. What are you going to do about it?"

So my point is, so much is changing, and we have—and think about this: You know, if we don't lead the world, who leads? And that's not a criticism of any of our allies, but who has the capacity to try to hold the world together? Not a joke. We can do it without going to war. We can do it—as we've been able to do, God willing—

*[The President knocked on wood.]*

—since we've become—come into office. We can do it without sending American forces to places.

So I guess what I'm trying to say to you is—you know, let me close with what I call the Senate point of personal privilege. *[Laughter]* You know, my father used to say, "It's a lucky person that wakes up, put both feet in the ground, and believes that what he or she does matters." Well, you're among the lucky few. What you do really is going to matter economically and politically.

But one piece of unsolicited advice, and I was reluctant to say this with the press here, but I'm going to do it anyway, because they—because they—they can know the facts here. Going back to when I told you, when I got elected, I didn't want to stay. Teddy Kennedy and Fritz Hollings and Tom Eagleton and a number of Republicans as well—there were nine of them—decided to, you know, keep me engaged and invite me to everything they were doing. And Teddy used to come over my office and say, "Let's go to lunch." And I wanted no part of going to lunch or getting to know anybody. I didn't want to—I just wanted to do my job, get—get down on Union Station, and go home. I mean, for real. You—and many of you have been through what I've been through and a lot worse.

And so one day he walks over, and he says—I won't use his exact language. He says, "Darn it, Joe, you're going lunch with me." So I went over to the private Senate dining room. There's two Senate dining rooms. The one dining room where you take—you'll be able to take someone if you're a Senator, and the House is not fundamentally different.

But, in the Senate, there was—I was fairly successful at bringing together coalitions as a Senator. I don't mean it like—I mean, but I worked like hell, and it—and I—Barack used to always kid me. We'd meet every morning. The first thing, we'd meet with one another at 9 in the morning every morning, and the last person we'd each speak to at night when we ended the day was with one another. That's the deal we made. And one of the things was, he always used to say

that—you know, I know and I'd always be—I said: "Look, Barack, all politics is personal. All politics is personal."

And the reason I mention that is that I went over—Teddy had me come over to the Senate. There used to be a Senate dining room. When you walk in the first floor on the Senate side, you go down that hall on the first cross corridor where the—by the elevators. One goes into the foreign relations executive committee room; another goes down to the staircase going up to the floor, as well as an elevator; and then there's an office door on the left and one on the right. On the right is the Senate dining room.

Those of you who are Senators are going to be able to bring any of your colleagues or friends in to have lunch with you. But the door on the left used to be a private Senate dining room. You had to be—only a U.S. Senator was allowed in. And you walked in, and it was a T-shaped. You walked in, and there was a buffet table on the left, which had all the luncheon material out, and a long table on the right, like a big dining room table, but it was—seated, I'm guessing, 18 to 20 people. And then you walk straight ahead, and perpendicular was another table by windows looking out over the parking lot, and there was another table that held 20 or so people, and that was the Democratic table.

And so what would happen—Teddy brought me in, and he said, "All I want you to do is just"—and you know this to be the case—"just walk in, just sit and listen. You'll learn more in an hour sitting here with these senior Senators and others than you'll learn in the next 10 hours doing anything else."

So I remember sitting down. And Jim Eastland—I ran because of civil rights in my State. We were segregated by law, to our great shame. And here is Jim Eastland and, you know, John Stennis and Herman Talmadge and all these guys—these Southern, by any definition, racist Senators. And I sat there and listened. Teddy and Eastland would go at it hammer and tong up on the floor. They'd go down and eat together. They didn't leave their values behind, their points of view, but they sat and ate with one another.

And so what happens when you get to know that the other Senator—he is—her husband has testicular cancer and is dying? Well, you have a different perspective. When you find out that one of them has a son that they—that has a serious learning disability or somebody has just lost their mother or father, you learn about what they're going through, and it personalizes things in a way that only private conversation and personal things can do.

And you begin to understand, and you begin to learn about—and you'll find this; you already know this in your States as Congresspersons in districts—that the next district over, the person may not be a bad guy or woman, but they have a constituency of a very different view than yours does—not bad or good, different than yours does. Not a whole lot of people in Kansas worry about fishing rights in the Atlantic. [*Laughter*] Not a whole lot of people in, you know, on the Atlantic coast are worried about agricultural issues on corn in Nebraska.

I mean, so you begin to look at other people's perspectives, and it becomes less personal—it becomes less personal. It's not "you're a bad person."

The end result of it all is, we lost that. And so, as I think some of my senior colleagues in this room can tell you, you know, I was Vice President for 8 years. I think it was the sixth or seventh year, things had really gone to hell in the way we were dealing with each other on the floor, the leadership. And everybody wondered how in the hell I could get along with the Senator from Kentucky. He never once—[*inaudible*]*—*he never once lied to me, whatever he said he did, and I understood his circumstance he was in.

But here's the deal. I realized that every time there was something going on in the Senate—I think he'd tell you, the main reason Barack picked me to be Vice President was my background in American foreign policy, because I had done so much of it, and because of my relationships in the Senate and the Congress. I was—I loved the Senate. I consider myself a Senate man more than I do a President—for real—after 36 years.

And so I realized there were a lot of new Senators I didn't know, I didn't have a personal relationship with, and realized what it—how difficult that was for me to figure out their thinking, why they were doing what they were doing, why—and what could I do to answer their concerns without violating any principles that they had.

And so I decided to go over to the Senate dining room. And I walked in the door. There's nothing there. There's lounge chairs. There was no place—and I don't—not sure about the House—there's no place in the United States Senate where a group of Senators can say, "Let's go have lunch together, all together." It doesn't exist.

It's a gigantic loss—a gigantic loss. When we'd do on CODELs, we used to take our spouses with us. It matters. It matters, when you know one spouse is having great difficulty because their husband isn't being in the position where they're home on time because they're taking too much time what they're doing in their job or whatever it is.

And when you get to—think about your personal relationships. The people you grew up with, you have different points of view on. The people you, in fact, know, you worked with, who have different perspectives in life, much of it's because of their present—their circumstance. And when you know it, you can almost always figure a way through it.

We don't do that anymore. And I'm not saying this for the first time, but the single greatest loss we have is, we don't know each other anymore. We don't know each other like we used to know each other. I'm serious. Not a joke.

And so I really urge you—presumptuous of me to say this—if you're a good politician, you're good at interfacing with people. You can get people to trust you, looking at you, and knowing what you're saying to them is true. Your word is your bond. You break it once, man, in the Senate or the House, goodbye Charlie. I'm not joking.

It's fundamentally, fundamentally different. But if you say: "I've got to do this because this—my constituency, this is important to them. I know it's not to your"—forget it.

The end result of all this is, in my career, I have been asked to do the eulogy of the most incredibly different people: Strom Thurmond, hundred years old, on his deathbed, I get a phone call from the—from the hospital, from out of Walter Reed. And it's his wife, Nancy, saying: "Joe, I'm here with the doctors at the nurses station. Strom asked me to ask you whether or not you would do his eulogy."

And I said, "Well, Nancy"—"No, Joe, it's important to him. Would you do his eulogy?"

Well, you know, people change. I'm not making them rewrite Strom Thurmond. He was a segregationist. But when Strom Thurmond got elected to the United States Senate, the second time around, the New York Times had a big headline in nineteen—I can't remember the year now—"Strom Thurmond, Hope of the South," because Strom Thurmond decided that "separate, but equal" is not right—not that Blacks and Whites should be together, but if you do separate but equal, you had to spend as much money on Black schools as White schools.

By the time Strom Thurmond left the United States Senate, he had—I'm not making a case for him, but he had more African Americans on his staff than any United States Senator had—more. Strom Thurmond had an illegitimate child with a Black woman. Never denied it and never stopped paying for her—his upbringing.

There's a lot of strange people, a lot of different people. No, I mean—well, I'll bet I could look at you, and I could find some strange things too. *[Laughter]* No, but I'm really serious. Think about it. Think about it.

And so, when you sit down with people—I mean, the idea that I got Jesse Helms to vote to fund the United Nations. *[Laughter]* I'm serious. Went to Jesse Helms's eulogy—I mean, Jesse Helms's funeral. You know what Jesse Helms talked about? Before he died, he said: "I made a big mistake, Joe. I should have never said what I said."

And by the—I didn't get on with him at all. But you know what he said? He said, "I should have never said what I said about, you know, all those folks just got out of trees not long ago, like monkeys." He said: "I was wrong about that. I want to take it all back."

People can change. But you've got to know that—you've got to talk to them. Doesn't mean you can do it. But things can change.

And, folks, we can't go through another 4, 8, 12 years what we did in the last previous 4 years. We can't do it.

And a lot of you have a lot of experience in foreign policy. The rest of the world looks to us. They look to us. We're the only organizational capacity of any nation in the world to pull these things together.

Who else will do it? They're good people—the Brits, the French, the Germans, a whole range of people. But do you think any of them can do it? They're looking to us.

We can do it without sending troops. We can do it without a war. We can do it without a whole—all the things that are the downsides. And I think with your help and a lot of people—the help of the leadership here, we've done a pretty damn good job so far of putting things back on track.

So please don't listen to those who say, "Don't talk." You're smarter than most of these people are. You know what you want to do. *[Laughter]*

Well, I'm serious. Think about it. How many people get here just purely based on prejudice, just purely based on the kinds of things that are just lies?

But people change. And so I know I drove Barack crazy when I'd say, I know, I know, I know—politics is all personal. But think about it.

How in God's name do you think I got Yoon and the Prime Minister of Japan, after World War II, never speaking to one another and hating each other because of what happened to the women, to sit down and sign a treaty together at Camp David? How did that happen? What changed? Not their publics, but they realized what they had at stake, and they decided to move something.

So my point is, I've looked at all your—I should—shouldn't say this, but I did. I looked at all your backgrounds. *[Laughter]* You're smart as hell. You're incredibly, incredibly qualified.

So please reach out. I don't want you to compromise on any principle you fully disagree with, but just understand the other person's perspective. It's a way to get to go. Because if we don't do that, look at—anyway, I'm confident you're going to be able to change this, turn this around, in a way that we continue down the road we're on.

*Audience member.* Yes!

And so thank you, thank you, thank you. And God bless you all.

*Audience member.* God bless you, Joe.

*The President.* And keep it personal.

Thank you.

[*The President left the podium and greeted attendees. He then spoke briefly as follows.*]

Can you turn that down? We've got a tradition in our family. When it's somebody's birthday and you know it is, you've got to——

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:02 p.m. in the State Dining Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Sens. Amy J. Klobuchar and Gary C. Peters; House Democratic Caucus Chair Rep. Peter R. Aguilar; President-elect Donald J. Trump; President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin of Russia; former President Barack Obama; Sen. A. Mitchell McConnell, in his former capacity as Senate Majority Leader; President Yoon Suk Yeol of South Korea; and former Prime Minister Fumio Kishida of Japan. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on January 6.

*Categories:* Addresses and Remarks : Democratic Members of Congress, reception for newly elected.

*Locations:* Washington, DC.

*Names:* Aguilar, Peter R.; Biden, R. Hunter; Kishida, Fumio; Klobuchar, Amy J.; McConnell, A. Mitchell; Obama, Barack; Peters, Gary C.; Putin, Vladimir Vladimirovich; Trump, Donald J.; Yoon Suk Yeol .

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