

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2023

Remarks on Infrastructure Improvement Efforts in Covington, Kentucky
January 4, 2023

The President. Please, have a seat if you have one. *[Laughter]* Folks, from inside the tent, I didn't know you all were back there. I tell you, you've got to be standing too, huh?

All right. Well, look, happy New Year, everyone.

And, Sarah, thanks for that introduction.

I'm delighted to see the mayor—Mayor Covington and—the mayor of Covington, I should say. He is Covington, I think. Joe—Joe Meyer.

And the mayor of Cincinnati. And I—I make sure I've got to do this right: Aftab Pureval? Is that—did I correct it?

Mayor Aftab Pureval of Cincinnati, OH. Yes, close enough.

The President. I—because I want to get it right. He's a hell of a lot bigger than I am. *[Laughter]*

Look, newly elected Representative Greg Landsman—he couldn't be here today. He's dealing with trying to figure out who's going to be next Speaker—*[laughter]*—of the House of Representatives. And I wish him a lot of luck. *[Laughter]* He may be the first freshman ever elected Speaker of the House of Representatives. *[Laughter]*

But it's great to be here with two individuals who are among those who worked the hardest and the longest to get this done: Sherrod Brown and Rob Portman, both men of significant integrity and people who do what they say.

It's been—they've been fighting this for years, to get the funding to repair the bridge: Sherrod, 16, and Rob, about 28. They never gave up. They got it done.

And a big thanks also to Governor Andy Beshear and Mike DeWine, who worked hand in hand to help get this done.

Folks, I'm especially happy to be here with my friend and colleague of many years—and, I might add, longest serving leader in the United States Senate: Senator Mitch McConnell. Mitch, it's great to be with you. I asked permission if I could say something nice about him. I didn't want to—I said I'd campaign for him or against him, whichever would help him the most. *[Laughter]*

But—*[laughter]*—but, Mitch, it's—you know, it wasn't easy, and—to get this done, and it wouldn't have gotten done, no matter—all the work so many others have done and—by writing the legislation and dropping in it, it wouldn't have happened without your hand. It just wouldn't have gotten done. And I want to thank you for that.

And you know, we have to find common ground—common ground—to get major legislation done in any circumstance ever, but particularly, the circumstances we've been in the last 4 or 5 years have been less than cooperative.

And Leader McConnell and I don't agree on everything. In fact, we disagree on a lot of things. But here's what matters: He's a man of his word. When he gives you his word, you can take it to the bank; you can count on it. And he's willing to find common ground to get things done for the country.

So thank you, Mitch. Thank you.

And that's exactly what we did in the bipartisan infrastructure law, which got done in no small part because of Mitch's leadership.

Folks, look, I wanted to start off the new year at this historic project here in Ohio and Kentucky with a bipartisan group of officials because I believe it sends an important message—an important message to the entire country: We can work together. We can get things done. We can move the Nation forward. We just drop a little bit of our egos and focus on what is needed in the country.

For decades, people have talked about the Brent Spence Bridge. But, folks, the talking is over. The bipartisan infrastructure law—we're finally going to get it done. And the law—it's the most significant investment—the—this whole bill is the most significant investment in America's roads, bridges since the Eisenhower Interstate Highway System.

Over \$1 billion from the infrastructure law for this. It's going to upgrade the bridge and—that the delegation has fought so hard to get done for so long. And here's why it's so important: This bridge connects Ohio and Kentucky, carries Interstates 71 and 75 across the Ohio River. It's on one of the Nation's busiest freight routes.

Truck traffic on I-75 alone carries \$2 billion of freight—\$2 billion of freight—per day between Florida and Canada. Two billion. The bridge was built in '63, as you all know, and designed to carry 80,000 vehicles a day.

Today, 160,000 vehicles cross this bridge, 30,000 of them—as you can see, about 10 of them have already passed—are trucks. Think about it: A bridge built over half a century ago handling double the volume it was built for. It's the second most congested truck bottleneck in the United—entire United States.

It doesn't take an engineer to tell anyone in this neck of the woods that the recipe for dangerous accidents, delayed shipments, and notorious gridlock. You're looking at it. Folks around here understand.

You all saw what happened 2 years ago—2 years ago—when the bridge was closed for weeks because of the damage from a crash: lost revenues of local businesses, congestion on alternative routes, nightmare commutes. One company called it what everyone else felt: "total chaos."

Folks, this is the United States of America, for God's sake. We know, and now we're proving, we're much better than we've been of recent past. The funding from this infrastructure law is going to upgrade the current bridge and to build a second new bridge right next to it for interstate traffic.

Look, that will keep locals' traffic from competing with those massive trucks and freight. Look, it means folks around here will actually be able to use the bridge again to work—for work, for school, for emergencies, without bumper-to-bumper traffic. And it will be safer and easier commutes.

First responders will get to folks who need help without delay. And our Nation's commerce can flow more efficiently through this area because tractor trailers and other large vehicles will be able to move products to their destination without so much congestion.

Look, it's not just here that the infrastructure law is being used, and just—we're just getting started. We're doing it all across America, from coast to coast.

As I speak, the Vice President of the United States is in Chicago today. We're rebuilding four drawbridges in the South Side so barge and ship traffic can continue to move in and out of Illinois's international port. We're going to move product faster and ships—from ships to shelves.

Secretary Pete Buttigieg is in Connecticut. We're renovating the Gold Star Memorial Bridge so traffic along the busy Northeast Corridor of the United States can move smoothly along I-95.

Tomorrow Mitch Landrieu, our Infrastructure Coordinator, is going to be in San Francisco. We're upgrading the iconic Golden Gate Bridge so it can withstand future earthquakes and be around for generations to come.

And it's not just bridges. Already, over a million households across Ohio and Kentucky are getting access to high-speed internet through the infrastructure law. It didn't exist before.

And right across the river in Cincinnati, we're going to award \$127 million to replace the old Western Hills Viaduct with a new structure—to make freight movement by road and rail more reliable and efficient, a critical piece right at the beginning of this entire corridor—and I know a big priority for you, Mr. Mayor.

And on the Tennessee River here in Kentucky, we're investing \$465 million to finish building the Kentucky Lock and Dam to clear bridge—barge traffic. And we're going to lead, then, to more economic growth in this area.

In Louisville, transforming Ninth Street from a six-lane thoroughfare into an area of large pedestrian zone, bicycles, bus lanes, better public space.

In Lancaster, Ohio, and Hopkinsville, Kentucky, the infrastructure law is helping companies that make batteries for electric vehicles build new manufacturing sites and create more jobs so our electric vehicle future is going to be made in America, all of it.

And we're doing all this with American workers and American products that are made in America. It's a simple concept. I can sum it up in two words: Buy American. I don't sign anything that the Congress passes unless it's buying of something American.

With Sherrod Brown's help, we're making sure that the iron, steel, construction materials that they're building in this bridge are made here in America, in the United States—made in Ohio, made in Kentucky—employing thousands of people all by itself.

And that work we're going to do largely and it's being largely done by unions. Not labor, union. I can say the word "union." Laborers, electricians, carpenters, cement masons, ironworkers, steelworkers, communication workers, autoworkers, and so much more. These are good jobs you can raise a family on, and most don't require a college degree.

All of this is about making an investment in America's Heartland, in America's people, in America's future. It's about making things in America again. It's about good jobs. It's about the dignity of work. It's about respect. And, folks, it's about damn time we're doing it.

For too long, we've talked about asserting American leadership, about building the best economy in the world. But to have the best economy in the world—the reason I pushed this bill to begin with—you have to have the best infrastructure in the world.

You can't have the best economy in the world without having the best infrastructure in the world, to get products to market, creating thousands of good-paying jobs. For most of the last century, we led the world by a significant margin because we invested in our people. We invested in ourselves. But along the way, we stopped.

We used to rank number one in the world in research and development, from the Federal Government's funding. Now we rank number nine. China used to rank number eight. Now China ranks number two. We risk losing our edge as a nation, and China and the rest of the world are catching up.

Communities in places like Ohio and Kentucky saw factories leave, towns hollowed out, infrastructure start to crumble. Just between 1990 and 2020, Ohio lost more than 350,000 manufacturing jobs—350,000 lost. Kentucky lost 20,000. Now we're back on track.

Folks, where is it written—where is it written that the United States cannot and will not lead the world in manufacturing once again? We're going to do it. Just since I got elected, we've created 750,000 new manufacturing jobs.

Today, just a few hours from here, Intel is investing \$20 billion—\$20 billion—near Columbus to expand what I refer to as "the field of dreams," expanding semiconductor manufacturing. That's 7,000 construction jobs, 3,000 full-time jobs, paying an average of \$135,000 a year—those full-time jobs—and you do not need a college degree.

Micron is investing \$100 billion in semiconductors factory in Syracuse. TSMC is investing \$40 billion in Phoenix to do the same. \$20 billion in Poughkeepsie, New York, for IBM.

Another—altogether, there's a commitment to close to \$300 billion in major—major private investment in American manufacturing and to bring semiconductor manufacturing back to the United States. And by the way, we invented—we invented—the semiconductor. The United States. Then we got back on our heels.

No, think about. Think about why the recession got so bad 2 years ago. Cars got so expensive. We didn't have semiconductors. Scores of them are in the engines of every automobile. We invented them. And then we went to sleep. We exported jobs.

Now we're exporting product and creating jobs. And it's happening in no small part because of another bipartisan effort, the CHIPS and Science Act, which, Mitch and all these folks here with me today, they all supported it.

It's about revitalizing American manufacturing. It's about America once again being the leading edge of technological innovation. It's about America's national security.

Folks, it's about one more thing: It's about pride. Simple pride. Pride that I know all of us here today can feel. Pride in our country. Pride in what we can do and what we can do when we do it together.

Folks, let me close with this. After years of politics being so divisive, there are bright spots across the country. The Brent Spence Bridge is one of them, a bridge that continues and connects different centuries, different States, different political parties; a bridge to the vision of America I know we all believe in, where we can work together to get things done.

And thanks to those here today who are in the Congress, who were willing to cross the aisle to get something done, they know that passing these two bipartisan laws just by themselves was more important than partisan politics. And it's going to make a gigantic——

[At this point, the President sneezed.]

Excuse me—a gigantic difference.

Together, we're proving our best days are ahead of us. And I mean this from the bottom of my heart. I've been doing this a long time, folks. Our best days are ahead us; they're not behind us.

I've long said—and I mean this—I have never, ever, ever been more optimistic about America's prospects than I am today. Never. Never. I've traveled to over 140 countries around the world. As I was—I'll paraphrase the phrase of my old neighborhood: The rest of the countries, the world is not a "patch on our jeans" if we do what we want to do and we need to do.

It's never been a good bet to bet against America. It's never been more true than today.

I can honestly say here today, I've never been more optimistic about America's future. We just have to remember who in the hell we are. We are the United States of America, and there's nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing beyond our capacity when we do it together. And I mean it. Think about it. Name me another country in the world that sets its sights that didn't complete it.

So, folks, thank you all for your local officials. Thank you all for this Congress and Senators that are here.

May God bless you all; may God protect our troops. Keep the faith. Every time I'd walk out of my Grandpop Finnegan's house up in Scranton, he'd yell, "Joey, keep the faith!" And my grandmother would yell, "No, Joey, spread it." Let's go spread the faith. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:05 p.m. near the Brent Spence Bridge. In his remarks, he referred to Sarah May, member, Ironworkers Local 44; Sen. Sherrod C. Brown; former Sen. Robert J. Portman; and Gov. Mike DeWine of Ohio.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Infrastructure improvement efforts in Covington, KY.

Locations: Covington, KY.

Names: Beshear, Andrew G.; Brown, Sherrod C.; Buttigieg, Peter P.M.; DeWine, Mike; Harris, Kamala D.; Landrieu, Mitchell J.; Landsman, Gregory J.; May, Sarah; McConnell, A. Mitchell; Meyer, Joseph U.; Portman, Robert J.; Pureval, Aftab.

Subjects: Bipartisanship; Broadband and wireless technologies; Economic improvement; First responders, service and dedication; Infrastructure improvements; Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act Coordinator; Job creation and growth; Kentucky, Governor; Kentucky, President's visit; Labor movement and organized labor; Manufacturing industry, domestic investment; Ohio, Governor; Research and development; Secretary of Transportation; Semiconductor manufacturing; Senate Minority Leader; Vice President.

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