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Barack Obama

Joe Biden Medal of Freedom Presentation Address

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Hey! All right, that's enough. Don't want to embarrass the guy.

Welcome to the White House, everybody. As I have already delivered my farewell address, I will try to be relatively brief. But I just wanted to get some folks together to pay tribute to somebody who has not only been by my side for the duration of this amazing journey, but somebody who has devoted his entire professional life to service to this country, the best Vice President America has ever had, Mr. Joe Biden.

This also gives the Internet one last chance to talk about our bromance. This has been quite a ride. It was eight and a half years ago that I chose Joe to be my Vice President. There has not been a single moment since that time that I've doubted the wisdom of that decision. He was the best possible choice, not just for me, but for the American people. This is an extraordinary man with an extraordinary career in public service. This is somebody the people of Delaware sent to the Senate as quickly as they possibly could.



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Elected at age 29, for more than a dozen years apiece he served as chair or ranking member of the Judiciary and Foreign Relation Committees. Domestically, he championed landmark legislation to make our communities safer, to protect our women from violence.

Internationally, his wisdom and capacity to build relationships that shaped our nation's response to the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Iron Curtain, to counterterrorism, Iraq, Afghanistan.

And for the past eight years, he could not have been a more devoted or effective partner in the progress that we've made. He fought to make college more affordable and revitalize American manufacturing as the head of our Middle Class Task Force. He suited up for our Cancer Moonshot, giving hope to millions of Americans touched by this disease.

He led our efforts to combat gun violence, and he rooted out any possible misappropriations that might have occurred. And as a consequence, the Recovery Act worked as well as just about any large-scale stimulus project has ever worked in this country. He visited college after college -- and made friends with Lady Gaga for our "It's On Us" campaign against campus sexual assault. And when the Pope visited, Joe was even kind enough to let me talk to His Holiness, as well.

Behind the scenes, Joe's candid, honest counsel has made me a better President and a better Commander-in-Chief. From the Situation Room to our weekly lunches, to our huddles after everybody else has cleared out of the room, he's been unafraid to give it to me straight, even if we disagree -- in fact, especially if we disagree.

And all of this makes him, I believe, the finest Vice President we have ever seen. And I also think he has been a lion of American history. The best part is he's nowhere close to finished.

In the years ahead, as a citizen, he will continue to build on that legacy, internationally and domestically. He's got a voice of vision and reason and optimism, and a love for people. And we're going to need that spirit and that vision as we continue to try to make our world safer and to make sure that everybody has got a fair shot in this country.

So, all told, that's a pretty remarkable legacy. An amazing career in public service. It is, as Joe once said, a big deal. It is.



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But we all know that, on its own, his work -- this list of accomplishments, the amazing résumé -- does not capture the full measure of Joe Biden. I have not mentioned Amtrak yet or aviators. Literally.

Folks don't just feel like they know Joe the politician, they feel like they know the person -- what makes him laugh, what he believes, what he cares about, and where he came from.

Pretty much every time he speaks, he treats us to some wisdom from the nuns who taught him in grade school or from an old Senate colleague.

But, of course, more frequently cited -- Catherine and Joseph, Sr., his mom and dad: "No one's better than you, but you're better than nobody." "Bravery resides in every heart, and yours is fierce and clear." "And when you get knocked down, Joey, get up -- get up." "Get up."

That's where he got those broad shoulders. That's where he got that Biden heart. And through his life, through trial after trial, he has never once forgotten the values and the moral fiber that made him who he is. That's what steels his faith in God, and in America, and in his friends, and in all of us.

When Joe talks to autoworkers whose livelihoods he helped save, we hear the son of a man who once knew the pain of having to tell his kids that he had lost his job.

When Joe talks about hope and opportunity for our children, we hear the father who rode the rails home every night so that he could be there to tuck his kids into bed.

When Joe sticks up for the little guy, we hear the young boy who used to stand in front of the mirror, reciting Yeats or Emerson, studying the muscles in his face, determined to vanquish a debilitating stutter.

And when Joe talks to Gold Star families who have lost a hero, we hear a kindred spirit; another father of an American veteran; somebody whose faith has been tested, and who has been forced to wander through the darkness himself, and who knows who to lean on to find the light.



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So that's Joe Biden -- a resilient, and loyal, and humble servant, and a patriot. But most of all, a family man. Starts with Jill, "Captain of the Vice Squad." Only the Second Lady in our history to keep her regular day job. Jill says, teaching isn't what she does, it's who she is. A few days after Joe and I were inaugurated in 2009, she was back in the classroom teaching. That's why when our administration worked to strengthen community colleges, we looked to Jill to lead the way.

She's also traveled the world to boost education and empowerment for women. And as a Blue Star mom, her work with Michelle to honor our military families will go down in history as one of the most lasting and powerful efforts of this administration.

Of course, like Joe, Jill's work is only part of the story. She just seems to walk this Earth so lightly, spreads her joy so freely. And she reminds us that although we're in a serious business, we don't have to take ourselves too seriously. She's quick with a laugh or a practical joke, disguising herself as a server at a party she once hosted to liven the mood.

She once hid in the overhead compartment of Air Force 2 to scare the senior staff. Because why not? She seems to have a sixth sense of when to send a note of encouragement to a friend or a staffer, a simple thank you or a box of macaroons.

She is one of the best, most genuine people that I've met not just in politics, but in my entire life. She is grounded, and caring, and generous, and funny, and that's why Joe is proud to introduce himself as "Jill Biden's husband."

And to see them together is to see what real love looks like -- through thick and thin, good times and bad. It's an all-American love story. Jill once surprised Joe by painting hearts on his office windows for Valentine's Day.

And then there are these Biden kids and grandkids. They're everywhere. They're all good-looking. Hunter and Ashley, who lived out that family creed of raising good families and looking out for the least of our brothers and sisters. Beau, who is watching over us with those broad shoulders and mighty heart himself -- a man who left a beautiful legacy and inspired an entire nation. Naomi, and Finn, and Maisy, and Natalie, and little Hunter -- grandchildren who are the light of Joe's eyes, and gives him an excuse to bust out the squirt gun around the pool. This is the kind of family that built this country.



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That's why my family is so proud to call ourselves honorary Bidens. As Yeats put it -- because I had to quote an Irish poet, and Seamus Heaney was taken, "Think where man's glory most begins and ends, and say my glory was I had such friends."

Away from the camera, Jill and Michelle have each other's backs just as much as when they're out championing our troops. Our girls are close, best friends at school, inviting each other for vacations and sleepovers. Even though our terms are nearly over, one of the greatest gifts of these past eight years is that we're forever bonded as a family.

But, of course, I know that the Obamas are not the only ones who feel like they're part of the Biden clan because Joe's heart has radiated around this room. You see it in the enduring friendships he's forged with folks of every stripe and background up on Capitol Hill. You see it in the way that his eyes light up when he finds somebody in a rope line from Scranton. Or just the tiniest towns in Delaware. You see it in the incredible loyalty of his staff, the team who knows that family always comes before work because Joe tells them so every day, the team that reflects their boss's humble service. Here in this building where there have been no turf wars between our staffs because everybody here has understood that we were all on the same mission and shared the same values, there has just been cooperation and camaraderie. And that is rare. It's a testament to Joe and the tone that he's set.

And finally, you see Joe's heart in the way he consoles families, dealing with cancer, backstage after an event; when he meets kids fighting through a stutter of their own, he gives them his private phone number and keeps in touch with them long after. To know Joe Biden is to know love without pretense, service without self-regard, and to live life fully.

As one of his long-time colleagues in the Senate, who happened to be a Republican, once said, "If you can't admire Joe Biden as a person, you got a problem. He's as good a man as God ever created."

So, Joe, for your faith in your fellow Americans, for your love of country, and for your lifetime of service that will endure through the generations, I'd like to ask the military aide to join us on stage.

For the final time as President, I am pleased to award our nation's highest civilian honor -- the Presidential Medal of Freedom.



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And for the first and only time in my presidency, I will bestow this medal with an additional level of veneration, an honor my three most recent successors reserved for only three others: Pope John Paul II, President Ronald Reagan, and General Colin Powell.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am proud to award the Presidential Medal of Freedom with Distinction to my brother, Joseph Robinette Biden, Jr.

Will the aide please read the citation.

Military Aide:

Vice President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. In a career of public service spanning nearly half a century, Vice President Joseph R. Biden, Jr., has left his mark on almost every part of our nation, fighting for a stronger middle class, a fairer judicial system and a smarter foreign policy; providing unyielding support for our troops; combating crime and violence against women; leading our quest to cure cancer; and safeguarding the landmark American Recovery and Reinvestment Act from corruption.

With his charm, candor, unabashed optimism, and deep and abiding patriotism, Joe Biden has garnered the respect and esteem of colleagues of both parties, and the friendship of people across the nation and around the world. While summoning the strength, faith and grace to overcome great personal tragedy, this son of Scranton, Claymont, and Wilmington has become one of the most consequential Vice Presidents in American history, an accolade that nonetheless rests firmly behind his legacy as husband, father, and grandfather.

A grateful nation thanks Vice President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. for his lifetime of service on behalf of the United States of America.

[The Medal of Freedom is presented.]