



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 6, 2020

**Remarks as Prepared for Delivery by Vice President Joe Biden in Gettysburg,
Pennsylvania**

On July 4, 1863, America woke to the remains of perhaps the most consequential battle ever fought on American soil. It took place here on this ground in Gettysburg.

Three days of violence, three days of carnage. 50,000 casualties wounded, captured, missing or dead. Over three days of fighting.

When the sun rose on that Independence Day, Lee would retreat.

The war would go on for nearly two more years, but the back of the Confederacy had been broken.

The Union would be saved, slavery would be abolished. Government of, by, and for the people would not perish from the earth, and freedom would be born anew in our land.

There is no more fitting place than here today in Gettysburg to talk about the cost of division — about how much it has cost America in the past, about how much it is costing us now, and about why I believe in this moment we must come together as a nation.

For President Lincoln, the Civil War was about the greatest of causes: the end of slavery, the widening of equality, the pursuit of justice, the creation of opportunity, and the sanctity of freedom.

His words here would live ever after.

We hear them in our heads, we know them in our hearts, we draw on them when we seek hope in the hours of darkness.

“Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth upon this continent a new nation conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.”

Here, on this sacred ground Abraham Lincoln reimagined America itself. Here, a president of the United States spoke of the price of division and the meaning of sacrifice.

He believed in the rescue, the redemption, and the rededication of the Union, all this in a time not just of ferocious division, but also widespread death, structural inequality, and fear of the future.

And he taught us this: A house divided could not stand. That is a great and timeless truth.

Today, once again, we are a house divided. But that, my friends, can no longer be.

We are facing too many crises. We have too much work to do. We have too bright a future to leave it shipwrecked on the shoals of anger and hate and division.

As we stand here today, a century and a half after Gettysburg, we should consider again

what can happen when equal justice is denied and when anger and violence and division are left unchecked.

As I look across America today, I'm concerned. The country is in a dangerous place. Our trust in each other is ebbing. Hope is elusive.

Too many Americans see our public life not as an arena for the mediation of our differences. Rather, they see it as an occasion for total, unrelenting partisan warfare.

Instead of treating the other party as the opposition, we treat them as the enemy.

This must end.

We need to revive a spirit of bipartisanship in this country, a spirit of being able to work with one another.

When I say that, I'm accused of being naïve.

I'm told maybe that's the way things used to work, but they can't any more.

Well, I'm here to say they can. And they must if we're going to get anything done.

I'm running as a proud Democrat, but I will govern as an American president.

I will work with Democrats and Republicans and I will work as hard for those who don't support me as for those who do.

That's the job of a president.

It's a duty of care for everyone.

The refusal of Democrats and Republicans to cooperate with one another is not due to some mysterious force beyond our control. It's a decision. A choice we make.

And if we can decide not to cooperate, we can decide to cooperate as well.

That's the choice I'll make as president.

But there is something bigger going on in the nation than just our broken politics, something darker, something more dangerous.

I'm not talking about ordinary differences of opinion. Competing viewpoints give life and vibrancy to our democracy.

No, I'm talking about something different, something deeper.

Too many Americans seek not to overcome our divisions, but to deepen them.

We must seek not to build walls, but bridges. We must seek not to clench our fists, but to open our arms. We must seek not to tear each other apart, but to come together.

You don't have to agree with me on everything — or even on most things — to see that what we're experiencing today is neither good nor normal.

I made the decision to run for president after Charlottesville.

Close your eyes. Remember what you saw.

Neo-Nazis, white supremacists and the KKK coming out of the fields with torches lit. Veins bulging. Chanting the same anti-Semitic bile heard across Europe in the 1930s.

It was hate on the march, in the open. In America.

Hate never goes away. It only hides.

And when it is given oxygen, when it is given the opportunity to spread, when it is treated as normal and acceptable behavior we have opened a door in this country we must move quickly to close.

As President, I will do that.

I will send a clear, unequivocal message to the nation. There is no place for hate in America.

It will be given no license. It will be given no oxygen. It will be given no safe harbor.

In recent weeks and months, the country has been roiled by instances of excessive police force, by heart wrenching cases of racial injustice and lives needlessly and senselessly lost, by peaceful protests giving voice to the calls for justice, and by examples of violence and looting and burning that cannot be tolerated.

I believe in law and order. I have never supported defunding the police.

But I also believe injustice is real.

It's the product of a history that goes back 400 years, to the moment when black men, women, and children were first brought here in chains.

I do not believe we have to choose between law and order and racial justice in America.

We can have both.

This nation is strong enough to both honestly face systemic racism, and strong enough to provide safe streets for our families and small businesses that too often bear the brunt of this looting and burning.

We have no need for armed militias roaming America's streets, and we should have no tolerance for extremist white supremacist groups menacing our communities.

If you say we should trust America's law enforcement authorities to do their jobs as I do, then let them do their job without extremist groups acting as vigilantes.

And if you say we have no need to face racial injustice in this country, you haven't opened your eyes to the truth in America.

There have been powerful voices for justice in recent weeks and months.

George Floyd's 6-year old daughter Gianna, who I met with, was one such voice when she said, "Daddy changed the world."

Also, Jacob Blake's mother was another when she said violence didn't reflect her son and that this nation needed healing.

And Doc Rivers, the basketball coach choking back tears when he said, "We're the ones getting killed. We're the ones getting shot ... We've been hung. It's amazing why we keep loving this country, and this country does not love us back."

Think about that. Think about what it takes for a Black person to love America. That is a deep love for this country that for far too long we have never fully recognized.

What we need in America is leadership that seeks to deescalate tensions, to open lines of communication, and to bring us together.

To heal. And to hope.

As President, that is precisely what I will do.

We have paid a high price for allowing the deep divisions in this country to impact how we have dealt with the coronavirus. 210,000 Americans dead and the numbers climbing. It's estimated that nearly another 210,000 Americans could lose their lives by the end of the year.

Enough. No more.

Let's set the partisanship aside. Let's end the politics. Let's follow the science.

Wearing a mask isn't a political statement. It's a scientific recommendation.

Social distancing isn't a political statement. It's a scientific recommendation.

Testing. Tracing. The development, ultimately approval and distribution of a vaccine isn't a political statement. These are scientific-based decisions.

We can't undo what has been done. We can't go back. But we can do better. We can do better starting today.

We can have a national strategy that puts the politics aside and saves lives.

We can have a national strategy that will make it possible for our schools and businesses to open safely.

We can have a national strategy that reflects the true values of this nation.

The pandemic is not a red state versus blue state issue. The virus doesn't care where you live or what political party you belong to.

It infects us all. It will take anyone's life. It is a virus — not a political weapon.

There's another enduring division in America that we must end: The divisions in our economic life that give opportunity only to the privileged few.

America has to be about mobility. It has to be the kind of country where an Abraham Lincoln - a child of the distant frontier, can rise to our highest office.

America has to be about the possibilities. The possibilities of prosperity.

Not just for the privileged few. But for the many — for all of us.

Working people and their kids deserve an opportunity.

Lincoln knew this. He said that the country had to give people "an open field and a fair chance."

And that's what we're going to do in the America we're going to build — together.

We fought a Civil War that would secure a Union that would seek to fulfill the promise of equality for all.

And by fits and starts — our better angels have prevailed just enough against our worst impulses to make a new and better nation.

And those better angels can prevail again — now. They must prevail again — now. A hundred years after Lincoln spoke here at Gettysburg then Vice President Lyndon B.

Johnson also came here and said: "Our nation found its soul in honor on these fields of Gettysburg ... We must not lose that soul in dishonor now on the fields of hate."

Today we are engaged once again in a battle for the soul of the nation.

The forces of darkness, the forces of division, the forces of yesterday are pulling us apart, holding us down, and holding us back.

We must free ourselves of all of them.

As president, I will embrace hope, not fear. Peace, not violence. Generosity, not greed. Light, not darkness.

I will be a president who appeals to the best in us. Not the worst.

I will be a president who pushes towards the future. Not one who clings to the past.

I am ready to fight for you and for our nation. Every day. Without exception, without reservation. And with a full and devoted heart.

We cannot — and will not — allow extremists and white supremacists to overturn the America of Lincoln and Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass.

To overturn the America that has welcomed immigrants from distant shores.

To overturn the America that's been a haven and a home for everyone no matter their background.

From Seneca Falls to Selma to Stonewall, we're at our best when the promise of America is available to all.

We cannot and will not allow violence in the streets to threaten the people of this nation.

We cannot and will not walk away from our obligation to, at long last, face the reckoning on race and racial justice in the country.

We cannot and will not continue to be stuck in a partisan politics that lets this virus thrive while the public health of this nation suffers.

We cannot and will not accept an economic equation that only favors those who've already got it made.

Everybody deserves a shot at prosperity.

Duty and history call presidents to provide for the common good. And I will.

It won't be easy. Our divisions today are of long standing. Economic and racial inequities have shaped us for generations.

But I give you my word: If I am elected President, I will marshal the ingenuity and good will of this nation to turn division into unity and bring us together.

We can disagree about how to move forward, but we must take the first step.

And it starts with how we treat one another, how we talk to one another, how we respect one another.

In his Second Inaugural, Lincoln said, "With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds."

Now we have our work to reunite America, to bind up the nation's wounds, to move past shadow and suspicion.

And so we — you and I, together — press on, even now.

After hearing the Second Inaugural Address, Frederick Douglass told the president:

“Mr. Lincoln, that was a sacred effort.”

We must be dedicated now to our own sacred effort.

The promise of Gettysburg, that a new birth of freedom was at hand, is at risk.

Every generation that has followed Gettysburg has been faced with a moment — when it must answer this question — whether it will allow the sacrifices made here to be in vain.

This is our moment to answer this essential American question for ourselves and for our time.

And my answer is this:

It cannot be that after all this country has been through. After all that America has accomplished, after all the years we have stood as a beacon of light to the world, it cannot be that here and now, in 2020, we will allow government of the people, by the people, and for the people to perish from this earth.

No. It cannot. It must not.

We have in our hands the ultimate power: the power of the vote. It is the noblest instrument ever devised to register our will in a peaceable and productive fashion.

And so we must.

We must vote.

And we will vote no matter how many obstacles are thrown in our way. Because once America votes, America will be heard.

Lincoln said: “The nation is worth fighting for.”

So it was. So it is.

Together, as one nation, under God, indivisible, let us join forces to fight the common foes of injustice and inequality, of hate and fear.

Let us conduct ourselves as Americans who love each other — who love our country and who will not destroy, but will build.

We owe that to the dead who are buried here at Gettysburg.

And we owe that to the living and to future generations yet to be born.

You and I are part of a great covenant, a common story of divisions overcome and of hope renewed.

If we do our part. If we stand together. If we keep faith with the past and with each other, then the divisions of our time can give way to the dreams of a brighter, better, future.

This is our work. This is our pledge. This is our mission.

We can end this era of division.

We can end the hate and the fear.

We can be what we are at our best:

The *United* States of America.

God bless you. And may God protect our troops.
