

July 6, 2024

Dear President Biden:

I write as your admirer, your supporter and your fellow politician. I write also as your friend who has treasured your compassion and wisdom. . .

But I write you now, above all, as a fellow citizen who shares your mad love for American democracy and freedom. We are under siege every day by the autocrats and monarchists, from Moscow to Mar-A-Lago, and the decisions we make will be historic for the fate of our country and our freedom.

I am not writing to presume to tell you what to *do*, Mr. President, because that is up to you and Jill and your family entirely. You will be the best judge of that. But I am writing to remind you of who you *are*. As a truly great and magnificent leader, you belong to all of us. Sometimes it will be hard for you to perceive, much less fully comprehend, the substance and character of your own greatness.

I write to remind you of your true greatness as a leader.

In our times, you have always been the ringing clear voice of democracy in a world being ripped apart by strongmen and dictators. You gave a speech in January of this year after visiting Valley Forge to mark the third anniversary of the political coup against us which Donald Trump masterminded, a rupture in the fabric of American life which left several people dead and nearly destroyed democratic elections and the peaceful transfer of power under our Constitution.

In that speech you made us see that America's choice in 2024 is not between two individuals but between two forms of government and two ways of life. You spoke against the authoritarian cult of power worship which says, "I alone can do it" and "I can stand in the middle of Fifth Avenue and shoot somebody and I wouldn't lose voters."

Mr. President, you called us to revive the essential project of the American Founders. "Is democracy still America's sacred cause?" you asked. That, you said "is the most urgent question of our time, and it's what the 2024 election is all about."

"Donald Trump's campaign is about him, not America," you said. "Our campaign is different. For me and Kamala, our campaign is about America. It's about you. It's about every age and background that occupy this country. It's about the future we're going to continue to build together."

You invoked the courage the American revolution showed in fighting for the rights of the many over the avarice and pride of the few. You told us that George Washington's "mission was clear. Liberty, not conquest. Freedom, not domination. National independence, not individual glory."

"America made a vow," you told us, and it was not a vow to one party, much less to one person. It was the very opposite of the politics of vanity and self-importance.

“Never again,” you said, “would we bow down to a king.”

Your greatness, Joe, is that you have shown with your life and your career not only that we will never, ever, bow down to a king but that we will never have to, because we the people have the creative power each day to begin the world over again in freedom. As you put it in your speech in Pennsylvania, “On that cold winter of 1777, George Washington and his American troops at Valley Forge waged a battle on behalf of a revolutionary idea that everyday people — like where I come from and the vast majority of you — not a king or a dictator — that everyday people can govern themselves without a king or a dictator.”

Your presidency will always be known as one of the finest in American history. Record investment in public infrastructure and science. Dramatic reductions in prescription drug prices for people in Medicare and billions of dollars saved by giving the government power to negotiate with the drug companies. Heroic defense of the people of Ukraine against Putin’s illegal, fascist invasion.

By stepping forward to run for president in 2020, you stopped Donald Trump from destroying America. Your presidency rescued us from becoming a failed state under Trump’s indifference to the loss of hundreds of thousands of lives in the COVID crisis.

You did not do these things alone and you never claimed to. You let us see that democracy is the system that allows all of us to work together to take care of common things. Democracy is the system where we take turns.

There is a remarkable passage in that Valley Forge speech of yours which I cannot get out of my mind. You observed that, “in the rotunda of the Capitol, there’s a giant painting of General George Washington — not President Washington — and he is resigning his commission as Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army.”

You say that, “The artist that painted that portrait memorialized that moment because he said it was ‘one of the highest moral lessons ever given to the world.’”

You go on: “George Washington was at the height of his power. Having just defeated the most powerful empire on Earth, he could have held onto the power as long as he wanted. He could have made himself not a future president but a future monarch, in effect.” If Washington actually walks away from his power, as Napoleon said, he will be “the greatest man who ever lived.”

“And, by the way,” you say, “when Washington got elected president, he could have stayed for two, three, four, five terms, until he died. But that wasn’t the America he and the American troops at Valley Forge had fought for.”

“In America,” you say, “genuine leaders — democratic leaders, with a small ‘d’— don’t hold on to power relentlessly. Our leaders return power to the people. And they do it willingly, because that’s the deal. You do your duty. You serve your country.”

“We’re not perfect,” you say. “But at our best, we face head-on the good, the bad, the truth of who we are. We look in the mirror and ultimately never pretend we’re something we’re not. That’s what great nations do. And we’re a great nation. We’re the greatest nation on the face of

the Earth. We really are.”

“That’s the America I see in our future. We get up. We carry on. We never bow. We never bend. We speak of possibilities, not carnage. We’re not weighed down by grievances. We don’t foster fear. We don’t walk around as victims.”

“We take charge of our destiny. We get our job done with the help of the people we find in America, who find their place in the changing world and dream and build a future that not only they but all people deserve a shot at.”

Mr. President, you are a leader who has always empowered the political leaders and people around you. As Vice-President, you helped empower Barack Obama, our first African-American President whom you served with loyalty and energy. As President, you empowered Kamala Harris, our first woman Vice-President, our first African-American and Asian-American Vice President, and deployed her to fight passionately for the rights of the people. Above all, you have empowered all the American people to participate in strong democracy and a vibrant economy.

And that is, finally, what has also made you a great leader: you are a great politician, in the finest sense of the word. You know that politics in a democratic society is a place where nobility is a product of character and life choices, not of money, celebrity and social class or heredity and blood. As a great politician, you listen carefully to your fellow politicians and, most of all, you listen carefully to the people. Common sense, Tom Paine taught us, is the sense we have in common when we speak and listen and rigorously reason together. Common sense is the sixth sense we acquire together in strong democracy. And it is through the exercise of careful common sense you can empower us again to have faith in our capacity to carry on the great work you have begun.

Everything we believe in is on the line in the next four-and-a-half months. We have an overriding obligation to defeat the forces of resurgent monarchy and oppression. Everything else pales in comparison to this struggle, even your magnificent policy achievements.

No one envies the choice you must make now, Mr. President, but remember this as the great politician you are and have always been. The hard questions that have been raised about your mental and physical stamina . . . are not just *medical* and *scientific* questions now. They are also *political* questions because both political leaders and tens of millions of voting citizens have formed judgments based on the events of the last few weeks. The judgment you must make in turn, therefore, is not only a *private medical* judgment about how you feel but a *public political* one about how others feel because, in the end, the people will decide the fate of this election and of our democracy itself. Political dialogue is the pathway to our survival and our success here. This could be a moment of sweeping opportunity for us.

I want to leave you with a final thought about baseball, the American game where even the finest pitchers have only around 110 pitches in them before their arms tire and begin to give out. In the eighth inning of the seventh game of the 2003 American League Championship Series against the New York Yankees, Pedro Martinez, one of the greatest pitchers in Red Sox history, began to tire badly after 118 pitches and he gave up three straight hits and a run from Derek Jeter. The Red Sox Manager, Grady Little, visited the mound and Martinez vigorously protested that he was fine and he

could continue and give it his all despite all the statistics about what happens when pitchers play after throwing for so long. Little kept him in and the Yankees proceeded to tie the game at the next at-bat with a two-run single and then went on to win the game with an 11th inning home run by Aaron Boone.

There is no shame in taking a well-deserved bow to the overflowing appreciation of the crowd when your arm is tired out, and there is real danger for the team in ignoring the statistics.

Your situation is tricky because you are both our star pitcher and our Manager. But in democracy, as you have shown us more than any prior president, you are not a Manager acting all alone; you are the co-Manager along with our great team and our great people. Caucus with the team, Mr. President. Hear them out. You will make the right decision.

With boundless admiration, affection and solidarity,

Jamie Raskin (MD-8)

Member, United States House of Representatives