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Promises to Keep: On Life and Politics

Joe Biden

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“Nearly forty years after I first got involved, I remain captivated by the possibilities of politics and public service. In fact, I believe that my chosen profession is a noble calling. That’s why I wanted to be a part of it.” –Joe Biden

As a United States senator from Delaware since 1973, Joe Biden has been an intimate witness to the major events of the past four decades and a relentless actor in trying to shape recent American history. He has seen up close the tragic mistake of the Vietnam War, the Watergate and Iran-contra scandals, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the reunification of Germany, the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, a presidential impeachment, a presidential resignation, and a presidential election decided by the Supreme Court. He’s observed Nixon, Ford, Carter, Reagan, Clinton, and two Bushes wrestling with the presidency; he’s traveled to war zones in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa and seen firsthand the devastation of genocide. He played a vital role by standing up to Ronald Reagan’s effort to seat Judge Robert Bork on the Supreme Court, fighting for legislation that protects women against domestic violence, and galvanizing America’s response (and the world’s) to Slobodan Milosevic’s genocidal march in the Balkans. In *Promises to Keep*, Biden reveals what these experiences taught him about himself, his colleagues, and the institutions of government.

With his customary candor, Biden movingly recounts growing up in a staunchly Catholic multigenerational household in Scranton, Pennsylvania, and Wilmington, Delaware; overcoming a demoralizing stutter; marriage, fatherhood, and the tragic death of his wife Neilia and infant daughter Naomi; remarriage and re-forming a family with his second wife, Jill; success and failure in the Senate and on the campaign trail; two life-threatening aneurysms; his relations with fellow lawmakers on both sides of the aisle; and his leadership of powerful Senate committees.

Through these and other recollections, Biden shows us how the guiding principles he learned early in life–the obligation to work to make people’s lives better, to honor family and faith, to get up and do the right thing no matter how hard you’ve been knocked down, to be honest and straightforward, and, above all, to keep your promises–are the foundations on which he has based his life’s work as husband, father, and public servant.

Promises to Keep is the story of a man who faced down personal challenges and tragedy to become one of our most effective leaders. It is also an intimate series of reflections from a public servant who refuses to be cynical about political leadership, and a testament to the promise of the United States.

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