

VALEDICTORY SPEECH TO THE 9TH HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES BY REP. FEMI
GBAJABIAMILA, SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES (2019 – 2023).
WEDNESDAY, 7TH JUNE 2023.

PROTOCOLS

Honourable colleagues, fellow Nigerians:

1. I thank God almighty, by whose grace and mercy we have gathered here once more in the people's House to do our duty even as our time in the 9th House of Representatives comes to an end.
2. This will be the last time I address you from this dais as the Speaker of the 9th House of Representatives. It has been the honour of my life to serve our beloved country from this honourable House. I am profoundly grateful to the people of Surulere 1 Federal Constituency for allowing me to represent them for the last twenty years. And I am grateful to you, my dear colleagues, for the honour and privilege of serving as Speaker of the 9th House of Representatives for the last four years. All glory belongs to the almighty God, who ordains our destinies and guides our path.
3. In the years since I first stepped into this hallowed chamber, the House of Representatives has changed profoundly, just as our country has changed too. Yet, in all that time, I have not witnessed change on a scale and with such speed as has been the case in the last four years. We have lived through a global pandemic that nobody anywhere saw coming. We have governed at a time of global crises and relentless transformations to the global economy. We have seen our nation's politics come of age with a new generation of young people determined to have a seat at the table and prepared to fight for it, whatever the cost. Just in the last few days, we have seen the end of a subsidy regime that has distorted the energy market in our country for over thirty years.
4. When change happens at this scale and with such an unrelenting pace, it creates challenges and opportunities almost in equal measure. Over the last four years,

this House of Representatives has worked to ensure that our country can overcome these challenges and take advantage of the moment to achieve economic, social, and political transformations that benefit all the Nigerian people. We elevated the debates in the House of Representatives and made this chamber the arena for informed exchanges about Nigeria's future and the welfare of all our nation's people. We have left our mark in every sector of our national life and positively impacted people's lives across our country.

5. We introduced discipline into the appropriations process by implementing a January to December budget cycle that ended the policy instability and economic uncertainty of the previous irregular budget cycles. We reformed the oversight process to ensure greater collaboration between the arms of government. We made it easier for citizens to access details of budget expenditures so that they, too, can be part of the process of ensuring accountability in the administration of public funds. We did not yield our constitutional obligation to ensure faithful compliance with the letter and spirit of the Appropriation Act by the Ministries, Departments and Agencies of the government.

6. While the strategic importance of the oil and gas sector to Nigeria's socioeconomic well-being has long been apparent, successive administrations failed to put in place a functional statutory regime to allow that sector to function optimally. We ended that legacy of lethargy with the passage of the Petroleum Industry Act (PIA). With the Deep Offshore and Inland Basin Production Sharing Contracts Act, we went even further to put the sector on the right footing. These statutory reforms rightfully ought to have happened a long time ago. Now, we must ensure that the reforms contained in these Acts are dutifully implemented as part of a broader energy policy suited to the realities of technological advancements and the evolving demands of the global energy market.

7. We passed the Police Act to change the nature of relations between the police and citizens in our country and ensure that police officers who fall short of their responsibilities can be quickly held accountable. The Act expressly prohibits police officers from arresting citizens for civil wrongs, imposes an obligation on the police to inform citizens of their rights at the point of arrest, and mandates the police to ensure that persons arrested have access to their families and legal representation. In addition, the Act established the Police Complaints Units as a statutory organ accessible to the public to report police misconduct and empowered to initiate action when such reports are received.
8. These reforms did not end police misbehaviour in our country; soon enough, there was a national reckoning. We responded by working with the Nigeria Bar Association (NBA) to establish a new framework of accountability to hold erring members of the Police Force to account for their conduct in the performance of their duties and compel the Nigerian Police Force (NPF) to take responsibility for the failures of training and discipline that leads to such wrongful conduct. And we appropriated the sum of Five Hundred Million Naira through the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) to compensate victims of police brutality nationwide. I sincerely hope that the work of police reform will continue in the House of Representatives until we achieve a system of policing that meets our nation's needs and reflects the best of us.
9. When in March 2020, the covid-19 virus entered our shores, we became bound with the world in experiencing a tragic disruption to our economic, political, and social lives, unlike anything we have ever witnessed. This House of Representatives responded by taking active measures to protect the Nigerian people, including those who work here in the National Assembly. We passed the Emergency Economic Stimulus Bill to grant companies a rebate on Companies Income Tax, suspend import duties on medicines, medical equipment, personal protective equipment, and other essential medical materials and defer mortgage

obligations on residential mortgages by contributors to the National Housing Fund.

10. We also passed the Emergency Relief and Assistance Bill to provide a limited salary guarantee for low-income permanent employees of companies registered and operating in Nigeria, relieve legal consumers of electricity in Nigeria of the burden of electricity charges for a limited period and suspend for a fixed period, the implementation of the Value Added Tax (VAT) provisions of the Finance Act 2020. Whilst these legislations did not pass in the Senate and never became law, they provided the framework for the federal government's policy response to the pandemic, as the policy ideas contained therein were adopted and variously implemented through executive orders and subsequent legislations.
11. We worked to establish, under emergency conditions, a fully functioning care facility in the Federal Capital Territory under the management of the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC). We intervened to prevent potentially devastating strike action by doctors and ensure that the medical professionals at the fore of our response to the pandemic were remunerated correctly and provided the allowances due to them. We reviewed the statutory framework for managing infectious disease outbreaks and proposed the Infectious Disease Bill to reform an area of our laws that hadn't been examined for a century. In an act of service for which I remain proud and thankful, members of this House volunteered their salaries to the covid relief fund to support the needs of the most vulnerable in our society.
12. The legislative legacy of the 9th House of Representatives includes the Companies and Allied Matters Act and the Nigeria Start-Up Act, two critical legislations aimed at changing the way we do business in Nigeria by streamlining regulations, reducing red tape, and setting the conditions for the private sector to innovate, thrive and grow. Our legacy also includes the comprehensive electoral reforms in

the Electoral Act that have changed forever for good the way we conduct elections in Nigeria. While we recognise the need to continue to work to improve election management in Nigeria, we must acknowledge the vast improvements that have happened since the return to democracy. And we take pride in our contribution to these improvements over the last four years.

13. Through the constitutional review process, the House of Representatives sought to restructure our government to make it more effective, reorganise our politics to make it more inclusive, enshrine efficient mechanisms for holding the institutions of state to account and put an end to the debilitating conflicts that even now continue to tear our nation apart. We made an audacious attempt to create a constitution that addresses once and for all the fundamental issues that distract from nation-building. The constitutional amendments we enacted devolved power and responsibilities over critical areas of our national life in an effort to spur innovation and healthy competition at the subnational level. By our joint effort, we achieved financial independence for state houses of assembly and state judiciary, granting greater autonomy to these arms of government in line with democratic best practice.
14. To succeed in our shared ambition of building a prosperous and peaceful country, we must do everything within our power to ensure that our daughters and those yet to be born can grow up in a more open, more equal society than their mothers did. Unfortunately, we did not succeed in removing some of the constitutional barriers that have long stood in the way of women's full and unhindered participation in the politics, governance and economy of our nation. This issue must continue to be at the fore of our national conversations. I hope the 10th House of Representatives will take up the mantle and do better than we did.
15. Beyond legislative interventions, the 9th House of Representatives will be remembered for our efforts to change how we do the business of parliament, most notably for introducing information technology tools through the e-parliament

project and establishing the National Assembly Library Trust Fund. The National Assembly Library Trust Fund will ensure that the National Assembly is operationally suited to meet the needs of the Nigerian people by providing modern library and research infrastructure, training and capacity development for legislators and aides and operating as a resource centre for the legislature, and all who have any interest in legislative endeavours.

16. This 9th House, with unwavering courage and determination, defended the rights and dignity of the Nigerian people abroad from every attempt to dehumanise and victimise our people. Our interventions on behalf of Nigerians in China during the pandemic put an end to recurrent incidents of abuse, just as our efforts on behalf of Nigerians in South Africa and Ghana caused the governments of those nations to step up action to protect the lives and property of our citizens in those countries. From Ghana to South Africa, from China to the United States of America, we made it clear that this parliament will defend the rights of our citizens to conduct their legitimate businesses without fear of molestation and that the wellbeing of Nigerians remains our business whether home or abroad. This model of parliamentary diplomacy has become a legitimate tool for back-channel interventions to resolve conflicts involving our citizens around the world. It is an approach that ought to be sustained and improved.
17. We convened a Summit on National Security to examine our national security and defence infrastructure and identify critical areas of improvement. I hope that work to ensure our borders are secure and our people are safe will continue in the next assembly and throughout government. Through the Conference of Speakers and Heads of African Parliaments (CoSAP), we have initiated a new and promising framework for interparliamentary cooperation across the continent to address our shared challenges and build better networks for collaboration, progress, and prosperity. This effort should continue in the best interests of our country and continent.

18. Honourable colleagues, despite the considerable investments we have made to improve our public infrastructure and the numerous reforms we have enacted to change how we administer the government, our country faces many significant challenges. These challenges have caused many of our fellow citizens to wonder if the promise of democracy will ever become real in their lives. Too many of our young people have lost faith entirely and are choosing in droves to seek their fortunes and their futures in other lands. We are losing some of our best and brightest, and if we don't act now, the consequences of this loss will shortly become painfully evident.

19. How do we ensure a healthy, vigorous, growing economy that provides opportunities for all who work hard to succeed through their labour and ingenuity? How do we protect our people from the marauders and insurgents, the petty criminals and assorted villains who wish to harm them, whether for profit or in service of other agendas? How do we restore faith in our young people so that so many of them no longer feel like the only way to achieve their best aspirations is to chase their fortunes in far away, often hostile lands? These are the critical questions all of us in government must answer or risk the unforgiving judgment of history. With each new day, we have an opportunity to make the hard choices and take the necessary actions to guarantee our nation's future. With each new day, we have less time to act and a more outstanding obligation to act quickly.

20. As you are all aware, the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, His Excellency Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu GCFR, has nominated me to continue serving the people of Nigeria as Chief of Staff in the Presidency. I am humbled by this new call to duty, and I am grateful to all of you who have reached out to me. I have long believed that the ultimate end of all political and governance efforts must be to achieve measurable improvements in the lives of the people on whose behalf we hold office. This fundamental belief in the responsibility of government to be a force for good has been my guiding light. It will continue to

be so in my new endeavours. I humbly ask for your prayers and support in this new chapter. I assure you that in this new role, I will work to ensure a cordial and productive relationship between the executive and legislative arms of government whilst respecting the independence and prerogatives of the legislature.

21. For everything, there is a time and season, and we are obligated each season to do the most and the best we can in the time we have. This is a good rule for politics and for life itself. The 9th House of Representatives is ending, and the 10th will shortly be convened. All of us, those whose time in office is ending, and those for whom duty continues, will face the judgment of history. I urge you to keep this in mind and let your actions be guided by the desire to ensure that you are not found wanting by man or God in the final judgment. As a member and Speaker of this honourable House, I have travelled the length of this country, and I have been amazed by the talent and capacity, dogged determination, and resilience of the Nigerian people. The abundance of these qualities among our people assures me that if government lives up to its responsibilities, our people are ready to do the rest. So, we must live up to our responsibilities; there is no other option.

22. I want to express my sincere appreciation to the civil servants and aides who have toiled tirelessly with me during my time here; I thank you all most sincerely for your service. I want you to know that the roles you play in keeping this institution running are crucial to achieving the kind of country we desire. I urge you to please take pride in performing those roles credibly at all times. Reach for excellence in all you do, and resist the cynicism and pessimism that encourages laziness and ineptitude. I also wish to thank our compatriots in the media for their dedicated efforts in ensuring that the exercise of state and economic power is fair and proper and in service of the greater good. A lot of the work we do in the legislature would not be possible without the support and partnerships of civil society organisations and development partners. I want to especially thank the Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC), the Nigeria Bar Association (NBA), Konrad

Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) and several others who have proven worthy partners in progress.

23. For the better part of my adult life, I have traversed the halls of this complex, legislated from the chamber of this hallowed House and built relationships with people from across the country, colleagues past and present. I have met and established genuine bonds of brotherhood with some of the most amazing human beings, and together we have shared experiences that strengthened those bonds. As I transition into my new role, a role unlike the one I have had for these many years, I ask for your support and best wishes as we continue to work together to advance the cause and fulfil the promise of Nigeria. I will miss all of you, and I will miss this House. I want you to rest assured that wherever the road takes me, I will carry you all in my heart fondly because you have enriched my life in ways words alone cannot fully express.
24. Nigeria is an unfinished story, a long tale of promise and peril, and our final chapters have not been written yet. Some persist in believing that this grand nation is a victim of history, that our destiny has already long been written, and that we cannot escape from it. I do not subscribe to this view. In fact, I reject it entirely. Indeed the world today is being remade by profound and powerful forces, and it may seem our destiny no longer lies within our control. But we are a proud and resilient people with a limitless capacity for excellence. All that we hope to be, we can. All that we desire is within reach. Our greatest successes as a nation will come when we work together across party lines, without considering differences of tribe and tongue, religion and creed towards the shared goals of our nationhood – peace and prosperity, equity and justice for all.
25. As we bring this 9th House of Representatives to a close, I am proud to say that by our joint effort at nation-building, we have ensured that the cause of Nigeria will long endure and the dreams of our nation's founding fathers will not die. We came, we saw, and while there is much yet to conquer, we have done our duty to

God and country. I came to this honourable House twenty years ago, filled with hope for our nation's future. I leave this office today with hope unbroken, and my enthusiasm to serve remains undiminished. I am more confident that our best days are ahead and that we can build a future where our nation is a beacon of excellence, a refuge and a place of pride for all who salute our flag and swear allegiance to our constitution. This is a future worth fighting for; this is the future I will never stop fighting for.

26. Thank you, goodbye, God bless you, and God bless the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

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