

## Getting to know Joe

Back in August, I posted a photo from the Republican National Convention illustrating how the mere juxtaposition of two phrases can set up a meaning that no one intended to convey. For partisan balance, here's an example (below) of how the same unintended meaning (okay, one *supposes* it was unintended) can result from the juxtaposition of a speaker's words with her own gestures. The speaker is Jill Biden, wife of Vice President Joe Biden. What's interesting as well here is how, once this meaning is set up, the speaker's subsequent words must inevitably be understood within the context of the original unintended meaning, a fact that makes it very hard for the speaker, her husband, and the audience to keep from laughing both at what they're hearing and at the prospect of yet more unintended *double entendres*. One take-away from both this video and the earlier convention photo is that *meaning* itself is more social than we often suppose. It's common to think of meaning as residing *inside* consciousness — that of the speaker (or writer) or that of the listener (or reader). But in both these cases, meaning seems to reside *outside* both: in the shared understanding of certain words and gestures and in the shared practice of treating juxtaposition as itself a source of meaning. (H/t for the video to my in-law and facebook friend Rick Goldfarb.)