

Conservatives Should Embrace the President's Solid Inaugural Message

President Joe Biden could have focused on any issue he wanted in his inaugural address. His base would have loved the whole thing to be about climate change or racial justice. Biden touched on some of these policy issues, but he focused most of his address on something totally different: national unity.
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By Neil Patel
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If anyone reading this doesn't believe that Biden correctly identified the issue of our time, I'm not even sure what to say. It's issue one, two and three.

We just went through a summer of left-wing street violence, and now we have the right-wing variety as well. Our corporate and media barons are setting up blacklists and speech codes. Censorship is in. Debate is out. People don't disagree anymore. We don't have to. We can segregate ourselves from anyone who may possibly disagree with us, so it's easier to hate them. We each watch and read things that reinforce our biases. All of these things make it easier to demonize our opponents.

Given the past year, it would be comforting to think things can't get any worse. But they can. Some of the political realignments occurring across racial and geographic lines this election cycle bring reason for optimism that maybe we can change our politics and culture for the better. But the energy in the country is still with those -- on the left and on the right -- who are more interested in destroying what's in their path than they are in reconciliation in any form. Where our current cycle leads is the end. No more America. A once-great country torn to shreds by a people who forgot what a unique and amazing place they once had.

All of us who do want our country to start healing should be thrilled by the Biden speech. Every inaugural address pays homage to some national healing and to being a president for the whole country, but Biden took it much further. Former President Donald Trump's inaugural was about returning power to the American people, rebuilding the middle class and his "America First" agenda. Former President Barack Obama's first inaugural address focused on national responsibility coming out of the financial crisis. Obama's second-term address went through a liberal policy wish list. And former President George W. Bush famously focused his second inaugural address on freedom and democracy around the world. Biden, on the other hand, focused almost entirely on national unity: "Today, on this January day, my whole soul is in this: bringing America together. Uniting our people. And uniting our nation. I ask every American to join me in this cause."

It was a perfect speech for the moment we are in as a country. And it raises the question of who is going to join this cause and who isn't.

First, the president is going to need to shut down those in his own party who have expressed a desire to destroy Trump supporters and drive them from the public sphere. The thoroughly preventable and tragic attack on our Capitol has driven a renewed push from the left to censor and blacklist political opponents. This advocacy is not limited to those on the fringes of left-wing politics. Corporate America is on board. Censorship and blacklisting are, of course, not American ideals. Repression of that type will certainly not lead to any level of national reconciliation. It will deepen

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the divide. Biden to live up to the standards he set in his own speech, is going to have to pull the reins on some of his own supporters who are pushing in this destructive direction.
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National reconciliation will also require Biden to push back on some of the more extreme policy proposals from his base. Blowing up the Senate filibuster is perhaps the biggest test. The filibuster rules requiring a 60-vote supermajority consensus have stood the test of time. Democrats criticize figures such as Sen. Mitch McConnell for obstructing Obama's agenda, but its noteworthy that McConnell refused to blow up the filibuster when pressured to by some in his own party. By blowing up the filibuster, McConnell could have passed all sorts of more conservative legislation. He still refused. Many on the right fault him for it. But he did so for the good of our country.

Consensus is hard to obtain, but it insulates us from radical shifts from one side to the other and adds a much-needed level of stability to our country. The Democrats now have the White House, the House and a tie-breaking vote in the Senate. If they want to blow up the filibuster and ram through super liberal legislation, there is little Republicans can do to stop them. They face the same test that McConnell passed. Based on his inaugural speech, Biden should encourage his party to keep the filibuster and operate with at least a small level of bipartisan consensus.

Those of us on the right also have a role. Conservatives are not going to agree with all or many of Biden's policies. On economics, social policy and national security, there are serious principled disagreements in our country. Nobody is saying conservatives should cave on those. What we don't need to do, though, is demonize our opponents. Biden is a liberal, but he clearly loves our country. People on both sides of the aisle who have known him through his many decades in public service will also tell you that he's a decent guy who treats those around him well. You hear this from senators but also from people like the Naval stewards who worked at Biden's residence during the Obama years. These characteristics -- love of country and good treatment of those around you -- are marks of good character. So was his speech.

Neil Patel co-founded The Daily Caller, one of America's fastest-growing online news outlets, which regularly breaks news and distributes it to over 15 million monthly readers. Patel also co-founded The Daily Caller News Foundation, a nonprofit news company that trains journalists, produces fact-checks and conducts longer-term investigative reporting. The Daily Caller News Foundation licenses its content free of charge to over 300 news outlets, reaching potentially hundreds of millions of people per month. To find out more about Neil Patel and read features by other Creators writers and cartoonists, visit the Creators website at www.creators.com.

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