

ABC News Live

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9:43:39 a.m.

28 seconds

RICK KLEIN: So much of this speech seemed like it was designed to go directly at the former President. To make no mistake about the fact that Biden sees this as a major moment. This is not an attempt to reach across the aisle, to try to heal divisions by saying, well, Republicans are going to have an epiphany as he once said and work with me. This was denunciation of everything that Trump has come to represent and it was as sharp of a speech that we have seen from President Biden on the subject of politics.

(....)

9:45:15 a.m.

44 seconds

YVETTE SIMPSON: But here's the thing that was so sobering, even as he put it as poignantly as he could and made all those statements and even calling out the hypocrisy of Republicans by challenging only the election they lost and not the ones that they won, I know that there are tens of millions of people who heard every word and still don't believe he has a rightful place as the president of the United States. That shows the divide that we still have to fill here in our country and that was sobering to me as I thought about that when he was giving those words. But, yes, the work ahead of us is still real and it's big and we need to have action on voting rights this year. We need to make sure we combat gerrymandering that is happening, that will change our maps for a generation if we don't combat that right now and I hope that after today that we will get to the work of getting that done in short order.

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9:46:33 a.m.

47 seconds

DEVIN DWYER: I heard this speech as an acknowledgment that the Big Lie is metastasizing in this country. Things are getting worse. All that gauzy talk about unity in the inaugural a year ago has sort of washed away and that's why we saw this pivot. You know, the President talked about it, alluded to it, but more Republicans now than a year ago think the election was stolen. We have seen more states passing restrictive laws. All of those things are very troubling, sobering indeed. In fact, I have been following the legislation in the states. 19 states, dozens of restrictive measures to secure elections. And let's not forget, all of us want a secure vote next November in the midterms, of course, but a lot of these restrictions that states are passing are predicated on the fact that the last election was flawed.

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9:47:46 a.m.

6 minutes and 47 seconds

KYRA PHILLIPS: Barbara, the President asking what kind of nation are we going to be? Barbara, how about the Republican Party? What type of Republican Party do they want to be now?

BARBARA COMSTOCK: Well, I think it was a very strong speech. And let me tell you, I still am a Republican. Although I have fewer fellow Republicans that I really can support, like Liz Cheney and Adam Kinzinger, Mitt Romney. But I think the beauty of the January 6th committee is there are going to be texts as we've already seen, say, texts from Sean Hannity, texts from, you know, Mark Meadow's phone, that are going to show exactly what Joe Biden said, everybody knew on that day, in days leading to that, that this was a crock. That the former President lost and not only was he defeated, not only is he a loser, he's an extremely sore loser and the people around him knew that and were saying it. His family, I mean, Trump Jr. that day said this has gone too far. That's from the guy who stood there on the Mall and said, "hey, we're coming after you." Then when he saw what he created, he was horrified. His daughter, the texts that she received that day, those will be coming out in the January 6th record. And so, we're going to see this timeline, those 187 minutes that Trump sat there gleefully watching the TV and as Stephanie Grisham, his wife's chief of staff said, he was enjoying that these people were fighting for him. So, as this public record is carefully documented and – and a timeline is laid out that while people were being beaten up and were suffering, this President didn't care. And now, he's tried to perpetuate this Big Lie this past year, he is going to be diminished. It's hard work. It's not going to be easy. But what you have to keep doing and I encourage the media to do is to show those statements of what those people said on January 6th. There should be nobody who can come on TV without being confronted by their texts and statements that they made on those days leading to January 6th and after and be confronted with them because what they said privately to the President and what they've said publicly since are two different things. And it's going to be shown for the fraud that it is. And I thank my friends, you know, Liz Cheney and Adam Kinzinger for their courage because it's not been easy and the kind of death threats that they're getting and threats coming from others because of Trump's just sore, loser, revenge tour that he's on is not going to survive the test of time. I don't believe he will run again. I don't think he'll be the nominee. I agree with Jonathan Karl and his great book and if he somehow is the nominee, Republicans will lose and deservedly so.

PHILLIPS: Mark Updegrove, you're our historian here, and the President even mentioned in his address rewriting history. He said, can these Republicans who called the rioters patriots, he – he said they're trying to rewrite history here and blame the insurrection on a – on a rigged election. Can history be rewritten here?

MARK UPDEGROVE: Well, he put it very firmly, the – the future of the country is at stake right now. There's no question about it. What he said is what kind of a nation are we going to be? Joe Biden needed to deliver a powerful statement about democracy today. This was FDR after Pearl Harbor. This is Lyndon Johnson after Selma. This is George W. Bush after 9/11. Joe Biden wasn't able to make a statement after – after January 6th. He waited for his inauguration and he wanted to unite the nation, so he really didn't dwell on what had happened. He moved forward. He's been calling Trump the former guy. He's been trying to put that aside. But today he had to take President Trump on because this is the one who is propagating this lie that's holding us back as a nation and I think Joe Biden did that very forcefully, very powerfully today. We've never heard a sitting president rebuke a former President in the manner that Joe Biden did today, but it was necessary for us to move on as a nation. This was nothing less than Americanism versus authoritarianism. And so, Biden had to make the kind of powerful, unambiguous statement that he did today. Sometimes, presidents are called on to make a statement like Biden did today. And I think he delivered.

PHILLIPS: You know, mark, I'm curious because we have these political discussions all the time, but from a historical perspective, as someone who has written about so many presidents, followed so many presidencies, the changes, the trials and tribulations, what stands out to you the most about this moment in time, this moment in history? And why is it so important for us to continue to remember this moment in history as we move forward?

UPDEGROVE: You know, you have to contextualize moments like this in order to cement history. Think about Lincoln at Gettysburg, Lincoln went back to that hallowed battleground and he talked about what it all meant. Not only on that day but for the future of this nation and he did so masterfully. That's the kind of speech that Biden had to make today. We're at a crossroads in our country. There was no certainty after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7th, 1941, that we would defeat tyranny. There was no certainty after 9/11 that there wouldn't be another attack. You have to tell America and the world what America stands for. And again, I think Joe Biden did that today and in order to do that, he did something that he didn't want to have to do. He took on a former President. Again, that is unprecedented. We've never seen a President do what – what Joe Biden did today. As I mentioned before, that's what really strikes me. But he has to do that in order to defeat the whole notion that – that the – the election last year was not free and fair, in order to – in order to move on as a nation and to be our – our most ideal selves. Joe Biden's task today was formidable, but again I think – I think he delivered.

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9:55:26 a.m.

1 minute and 41 seconds

KLEIN: I am struck, Kyra, by how few defenders there are of Trump's version of January 6th. The idea these were peaceful patriots. It gets a lot of play but that's a very small minority of actual members of Congress, sitting Republican officials. Most aren't trying to – to brush aside the reality of the crimes that were committed. They were crimes, as courts of law are litigating, a year ago. But what is also true, is that there's a band of officials who are running for – for elected office in many states, including some of the most contested ones from last time, who are more clearly in the Trump camp. They are running explicitly to try to change the machinery of government in a way that would have made it easier to actually do the things that President Trump said needed to be done back in 2020 and early 2021. They say that there was an election that was stolen. And they are running now for positions like governor and attorney general and secretary of state and the United States Senate and the United States House. And there's a possibility that they win and they beat some people like Brad Raffensberger, the Republican secretary of state in Georgia, the Brian Kemp, the governor of Georgia, Liz Cheney, the congresswoman from Wyoming, who's the vice chair of the January 6th committee. They all have primary challengers who are four square Trumpers. And that's the threat that you hear President Biden today trying to confront. We didn't hear a lot of gauzy talk about how Republicans are going to come together in this moment. This was, I think, a very clear-eyed call to arms for Democrats and for Republicans like Congresswoman Comstock who say that there needs to be reckoning with what the party represents and voters ultimately are ultimately going to have their say in the elections that will color this year.

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10:00:13 a.m.

2 minutes and 47 seconds

KYRA PHILLIPS: It was definitely a moment in history, a crazy time in history, a presidency I don't think any of us will ever forget. Jon Karl, you've got the number of books to prove that you will never forget what you experienced. But Terry Moran, you and I had a number of conversations about the Trump administration and now what it's like with the Biden administration. What an absolute, just polar opposite type of experience. As you listened to Joe Biden give that speech and just thinking back to the day of the insurrection and the words that came out of the former President, Donald Trump's mouth what a difference, number one. But Biden laid out, what kind of nation are we going to be? Are we going to be one of truth or are we going to be one of a Big Lie? As you listen to his words, what are you thinking about? Your reflections and especially after covering now both administrations and looking at the time we're in right now.

TERRY MORAN: You know, Kyra, thinking of the way Joe Biden got into the race for President, in 2020. He said he wanted to fight the battle for the soul of America, and he used those words again today. He's seen as his mission a man from another generation in an America that is struggling with change, an effort to restore the soul of America, as he understands it in an old-fashioned way, in some ways that he believes is still very much alive and is really the current that can keep the American democracy healthy. But January 6th shows how daunting a task that is. I spoke this week with a Capitol Hill police lieutenant. Ted Hopkins is his name. He was on the front lines here on Capitol Hill that day, and he said that it was like fighting a cult. His word: cult. Said he couldn't believe it was real, and, in fact, many of the attackers that day were literally living in a different reality, and millions of Americans now who weren't at the Capitol, who didn't take up any kind of violence but, they, too, embraced full heartily a provably false version of the 2020 election. And of their political opponents, and no court, no committee of Congress, no journalist, no president is going to convince them otherwise. They've done [MAKES QUOTE MARKS] their own research on Facebook. They've been caught up in right-wing media conspiracy theories, and that is where they are. That's the challenge that Joe Biden faces. No previous President has ever faced a challenge really like this. If we don't share a common reality, how can we share a common soul?

PHILLIPS: Hmm.