

Thunderdome: America Just Saw the Worst Version of Joe Biden

Oldest president gives hate-filled State of the Union speech



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[Welcome to Thunderdome.](#) We all know what the best version of Joe Biden sounds like — a throwback to images of old Irish bipartisan politicking, itself an act of role-play for a senator who has more often than not been an angry partisan and constant fabulist both away from the cameras and in front of them. But at least there's something respectable about that caricature, when given the Jon Meacham veneer of gestures toward the other side of the partisan aisle, framed by misquotes of Saint Augustine, half-remembered fables and snatches from the worst entries in the Catholic hymn book.

There was no such respectability to be found in Joe Biden's State of the Union speech last night. It is without question the most divisive, vindictive and downright vile expression of American partisanship ever given from that honored stage. It marks a legacy-defining moment eradicating forever the idea of Biden as the deal maker, defender of norms and champion of some vague idea of bipartisan unity — this was Biden unhinged, spewing invective at half the country. He lied about them. He called them racists and bigots. And he used the most prominent speech he will give this year to promise even more division and vengeance against his foes.

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Biden even went so far as to attack, to their faces, the Supreme Court that has endured assassination attempts, harassment of their families and near constant illegal protests at their homes in recent years. Forget Chuck Schumer's warning: this was an insult and an assault to their faces that Biden and his team knew the Court would have to sit through silently, since they as an institution and as individuals still abide by the decorum and norms the Biden White House no longer respects.

State of the Unions are not off-the-cuff remarks to shouted questions from Peter Doocy. But this meandering spittle-flecked shoutfest had a similar tone — when grandpa stays up far past his bedtime ensconced in his BarcaLounger and deploys his fevered anger that the Eagles lost again against his trapped progeny. Biden's media friends will seek to spin this as “feisty,” “passionate” or “energetic” — but that's not what the nation saw or will remember from this speech.

Instead, this will be a campaign reset that didn't work. No amount of yelling will satisfy the progressive Gaza street demonstrators who blocked the White House's motorcade and delayed the start of the speech. No amount of angry

blame shifting will solve Biden's numerous problems that follow directly from his border policy. And no amount of zero sum threats to the Supreme Court will undo the abject failure of the Democratic attempt, with the White House's full assistance and endorsement of their partisan lawfare, to prosecute Donald Trump out of the 2024 election.

All in all, this speech sounded like the talk of an angry partisan loser, bitter at not being appreciated enough, desperately in need of a nap — not a triumphant, hopeful, optimistic incumbent ready to run on his record. If it's Joe Biden's last State of the Union, as all the polls currently indicate, it will cap his political career with an easy encapsulation of the worst aspects of his character. He should've stuck to "On Eagle's Wings."



Katie Britt's kitchen table response

Alabama Senator Katie Britt's been receiving a lot of praise as a young rising star in the Republican Party, one who might even merit consideration as a vice presidential choice. How many of the people who were writing that had ever heard her give a speech before last night? The *New York Times* called it “[tonally jarring](#)” but they also describe Biden's speech as “forceful,” so you can dismiss their take as typically partisan. Whatever you think of her response, it certainly didn't look like someone ready to run on a national ticket — especially compared to prior respondents such as Arkansas's Sarah Huckabee Sanders, Iowa's Kim Reynolds or South Carolina's Tim Scott.

It's one of the hallmarks of the State of the Union that people are always presenting the idea that the response to one could dramatically elevate an opposition party politician onto the national stage. This never works. In fact it often accomplishes the opposite effect, hampering the rise of a rising politician with a bungled speech that few people watch, but becomes an anchor for their career.

As theater, everything works against you — it's a politician giving a speech staring right down the barrel, bright lights all around them, where every verbal fumble is amplified and you don't even get a water break. Sometimes they put the politician in front of a group at a diner or sitting awkwardly in the round. Sometimes they are just standing in front of their weird state seal we've never seen before. There is no importance granted to the moment, and so the only thing that's important is when they fail.

The only truly successful State of the Union response in the past two decades came from [Virginia governor Bob McDonnell](#), whose team chose to give his address from the Virginia House of Delegates, giving it the feeling of a “State of the Union Junior.” It was short, optimistic, and to the point — and it hit all the right notes for the GOP at the time, establishing McDonnell as a politician

on the rise.

So then Barack Obama's Department of Justice directed the aspiring young lawyer, chief of the public integrity section, to go after McDonnell and eliminate a partisan threat — prosecuting him on trumped up charges that were eventually unanimously overturned by the Supreme Court. [That lawyer's name was Jack Smith.](#)

The lesson: the price of giving a good response to the State of the Union is high. Better for your career to not give one at all.

[Though this background music does improve things.](#)

Doing battle over the Kennedy legacy

The third candidate running for president, Robert F. Kennedy Jr., was clearly on the mind of the Biden team last night. Maria Shriver was a guest of Jill Biden, and the president made a point of saying that the assassination of Bobby Kennedy was what inspired him to enter public service.

Biden has [repeatedly made this claim](#) in recent years, along with other times where he's invoked a false depiction of the Kent State shootings as motivating his entry into politics. As is typical of Biden, this is full of convenient fictions: he had already been politically active throughout his college and law school years; the Kennedy killing happened after he had already graduated, not during his senior semester; and he was on record as supporting Republicans in 1968, not Democrats. But from the get-go, Biden's entry into politics was wrapped in Kennedy tropes designed to evoke comparisons to the first family of

Democratic politics. [Just read this from TIME magazine in 1972:](#)

He would, in all likelihood, also be one of the few senators ever to jump motorcycles as a hobby. A college football and rugby enthusiast, Biden keeps his athletic trim by skiing and playing an extremely rough brand of touch football. That kind of exuberant roughhousing, coupled with his star-quality good looks, seems to cast Biden, an Irish Catholic, in the Kennedy mold. The Kennedy comparison is encouraged by the intense involvement of his family in the current campaign: Joe's sister is his campaign manager, his brother is his fund-raising director, his mother is his state "coffee coordinator." His wife Neilia, a pretty blonde, keeps her own energetic speaking schedule.

But for RFK Jr., this isn't standing in the way of him [sliding into serious spoiler territory](#):

Kennedy's campaign said Tuesday that it cleared the signature threshold in Nevada, while his allied super PAC has already said sufficient signatures in Arizona and Georgia have been collected.

In Nevada, Biden beat former President Trump by fewer than 40,000 votes in 2020. Biden won Arizona by fewer than 11,000 votes and Georgia by fewer than 12,000 votes in 2020.

Kennedy has already qualified for the ballot in Utah, and his campaign has filed the necessary signatures to be on the ballot in New Hampshire. Kennedy supporters collected the required signatures in Hawaii...

The super PAC behind Kennedy's campaign, American Values 2024, said it has gathered enough signatures to get him on the ballot in Arizona, Georgia and South Carolina, and it is closing in on Michigan.

The American Values super PAC pledged last year to spend up to \$15 million on Kennedy's ballot access mission.

"We are currently prioritizing closing out Michigan and will focus on both Texas and New York when signature-gathering commences," AV24 said in a statement to Axios.

So at this stage, realistically, the Real Junior Kennedy will at least be on the ballot in Arizona, Georgia, Hawaii, Michigan, Nevada, South Carolina, Utah. Those seven states alone include three of the most important swing states, and account for seventy-one electoral votes. [With SOTU responses like this from RFK, that number is only likely to grow](#) — much to the chagrin of the Biden White House.



One more thing

The one thing Democrats should have hoped for from last night's State of the Union was a projection of confidence on the number one issue for swing state voters: immigration, where the White House has been incredibly slow to respond to the absolute travesty they have created on the border. You would have expected it to come near the top of a true SOTU, perhaps only after the economy given the priorities of the electorate. Instead, as [Chris Bedford notes at *The Spectator*](#), the topic of immigration didn't come up until very late in the speech, and when it did, Biden left his fellow Democrats dissatisfied:

It wasn't until after 10 p.m., when viewership numbers would have declined, that the president made it to immigration — a top issue in exit polls, and a wedge that has been generating public criticism of the White House from prominent Democrats, most prominent among them, New York City mayor Eric Adams. Thursday night, he sparred instead with Republicans, earning the ire of some Democrats for the most dramatic moment of the night, which culminated in his naming Augusta University student Laken Riley, who was murdered in February.

“Lincoln [sic] Riley, an innocent young woman who was killed by an illegal,” he yelled back at Greene, holding up a pin she'd given him on his way to the podium. “To her parents I say, my heart goes out to you.”

The move was a dramatic turnaround for the president, and betrays the White House knows how unpopular Democratic policies have been with American voters. That reality is slow to catch on with his colleagues, however. “He should've said undocumented,” former speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi opined. And as Biden sparred with Republican hecklers, working to blame the GOP for his border crisis, roughly half of his own party decline to applaud the amnesty bill he promised to sign.

As with so many issues, the White House hasn't figured out how to navigate

this one — and given that [it's their own party that has been radicalized on the issue](#), it's doubtful they will any time soon.

Until then, RIP.

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