

The lies and absurdities in Biden's State of the Union address

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If anyone tuned in to Joe Biden's State of the Union address still expecting to hear a serious speech about any of the metastasizing and intersecting crises confronting United States and the world, they would have left disappointed. Biden's speech was a vulgar attempt to paper over an immense domestic crisis by presenting the US as internally united against one man: Vladimir Putin.

In an earlier period, when the United States occupied the position of a rising capitalist power, its politicians at least felt an obligation to keep the population somewhat informed about what was taking place. Biden's speech, however, included no serious commentary about any of the most pressing issues confronting the country and the world. It was a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying the remarkably low intellectual level of the individuals running the US government.

The speech was so contradictory as to border on the politically absurd. Biden proclaimed America was united as National Guard soldiers protected the Capitol building from the threat of right-wing demonstrations. He said the United States was defending democracy against dictatorship abroad as the 150 Republicans who attempted to establish a dictatorship at home stood and applauded. He called for peace and diplomacy while warning Putin he would "pay a price" and that the US would "inflict pain" on Russia.

Biden attempted to blame Vladimir Putin for the ills afflicting the American population. Gas prices are going up because of Vladimir Putin. Democracy is under threat from the international machinations of Vladimir Putin. America's domestic divisions are exacerbated by misinformation emanating from the evil mind of Vladimir Putin. Referencing the economic crisis that has befallen Russia as a result of US-led sanctions, Biden declared: "Putin alone is the one to blame." One does not have to sympathize with Putin's reactionary and dangerous invasion of Ukraine to understand these claims as self-

serving and false.

Biden's effort to blame Putin for America's problems was contradicted by the fact that Biden acknowledged the real threat to democracy from within the American ruling class itself.

"We will save democracy," Biden said as he liberally used the passive voice to say that voting rights are "under assault" and that "laws have been passed" to "subvert the entire election." Biden did not reference that such assaults on democratic rights were led by Republicans whom he referred to as his "colleagues." He did not mention that the Republican Party's national leadership just endorsed the view that the January 6 coup constituted "legitimate political discourse." He made no reference of the fact that several weeks ago he declared that he believed American democracy would not survive the decade.

Biden touted the "bipartisan efforts" of Congress and said Putin had mistakenly believed the United States was divided. Putin "thought the West and NATO wouldn't respond" to the invasion of Ukraine. "He thought he could divide us at home, in this chamber and in this nation. He thought he could divide us in Europe as well. But Putin was wrong. We are ready. We are united, and that's what we did. We stayed united."

The United States was fighting for "lightness over darkness" in eastern Europe, Biden said, echoing George W. Bush's proclamation that his administration's murderous wars were justified by the need to confront an "axis of evil."

But for all his efforts to present the US as unified, Biden was forced to admit that America was riven by massive levels of inequality and unprecedented internal division. There are "so many families that are living paycheck to paycheck, struggling to keep up with the rising cost of food, gas, housing and so much more," Biden said, also referencing the extreme cost of health care and child care. He acknowledged that tens of millions of Americans

suffer from drug and alcohol abuse, that the country confronts a “mental health” crisis due to overwork and stress.

Passing by these symptoms of social and cultural crisis, Biden declared that divisions within the US are not so great in comparison with the division between nation states. “Folks, while it often appears that we do not agree, and that—we do agree on a lot more things than we acknowledge.” But this was contradicted by Biden’s acknowledgment that Americans “see each other as enemies.” Biden appealed to Americans to “start seeing each other for who we are: fellow Americans. We can’t change how divided we’ve been. It was a long time in coming.”

How was it “a long time coming”? How did America become so unequal? How did the country become fertile ground for the type of anti-vaccination sentiment that has facilitated the spread of the pandemic? Biden made no attempt to answer these questions.

To address those divisions that do exist, Biden presented what he called his “unity agenda for the nation,” which rests on several magical formulas. Biden will help corporations profit by raising the wages of workers, he said. He will protect civil liberties by increasing funding for the police. He will respect the rights of immigrants by securing the border. He will cut the deficit by expanding social programs.

Every Democrat in the audience knew that the legislative proposals Biden laid out in his speech were already dead in the water. Members of his own party in the Senate blocked his bills that would moderately expand the right to vote. While Biden called for expanding the child income tax credit and spending for community colleges, he failed to mention that his own administration and Senate Democrats cut these programs from the infrastructure bill passed last year.

Ultimately, the speech failed in its immediate aims. The attempt to convey strength only revealed the underlying weaknesses.

“The state of the union is strong because you, the American people, are strong,” Biden proclaimed, adding, “We are stronger today than we were a year ago.” But Biden began his speech by saying, “We meet tonight in an America that has lived through two of the hardest years this nation has ever faced.” Half a million people in the US have died over the year in which Biden has supposedly made America stronger.

He acknowledged that Americans are “tired, frustrated and exhausted” with the immense social suffering

inflicted by the COVID-19 pandemic. “Close to a million people sit at a dining room table or a kitchen looking at an empty chair because they lost somebody,” he said, understating the number of people who have lost a close friend or relative by a factor of 10. Biden’s speech writers used this passing reference to the COVID death toll as a rhetorical segue to a declaration that the pandemic was over and that all restrictions would be lifted immediately.

As for his claim to “give workers a fair shot” while boasting that he comes from Delaware, which he called “the land of corporate America,” Biden explained to whom he owes his rise to political prominence: “There are more corporations incorporated in [Delaware] than every other state in America combined. And I still won 36 years in a row.”

In the speech there was a strong sense of corporatism. Biden’s guests included the CEO of Intel and a trade union bureaucrat with the United Steel Workers. He praised both for helping promote “American” industry, especially through the production of microchips, a strategically critical device necessary for weapons manufacturing and war.

Beyond Putin, Biden lacked subjects upon which he could unite the country. The other elements of his “unity agenda” included opposition to cancer and support for children with diabetes and the elderly.

Biden’s speech, like his war with Russia, will solve none of the underlying social divisions produced by the capitalist system. On the contrary, the lies and war threats will only deepen the divisions and further erode the democratic foundations of the country, strengthening the forces of reaction that are always rallied in times of war. The solution is the building of a mass socialist movement in the working class capable of freeing the world’s productive forces from the control of a ruling class that is recklessly paving the way to world war.



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