

## Plan for hope

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Just a fortnight after the riots that marked such an ignominious end to Donald Trump's four years in office, the eyes of the world were on the US Capitol once again this week as Joe Biden was sworn in as the 46th President of the United States.

President Biden struck a note of hope in his inauguration speech. He was realistic in acknowledging that the division sewn into the fabric of the United States cannot and will not be undone overnight, but hopeful that the country can look ahead.

It was a clarion call for unity – perhaps even an end to the pendulum politics that has been swinging from one extreme to another. In a world plagued by populism, Biden told us what we needed to hear before we even realised we needed to hear it. His speech also showed empathy gained from a life humbled by personal tragedy.

He said: "Let us listen to one another. Hear one another. See one another. Show respect to one another. Disagreement must not lead to disunion."

[Massive task ahead](#)

Of course, Biden moves into the Oval Office at a time of great difficulty, with more than 400,000 dead from COVID-19 and the country riven by political conflict. But there are already positive signs, with a clear move away from his predecessor's taste for playing to the political base towards a more evidence-based approach, following the science, allowing doctors and specialists to lead without political interference and employing people with experience into this new administration.

The task ahead is massive but Biden seems to offer the steady hand his country needs amid so much uncertainty, and his commitment to delivering 100 million vaccines in his first 100 days in office is a meaningful and promising start.

Biden's list of the challenges ahead should remind us that we share more than just a language with our



friends across the Atlantic.

He said: "We face an attack on democracy and on truth. A raging virus. Growing inequity. The sting of systemic racism. A climate in crisis. America's role in the world. Any one of these would be enough to challenge us in profound ways. But the fact is we face them all at once, presenting this nation with the gravest of responsibilities."

In the UK we should remember that we have our own deep political divisions; our per-capita death rate from COVID-19 is even worse than that of the US; we too are increasingly economically polarised, suffering the consequences of a decade of austerity; we are also sadly not immune to the blight of systemic racism; and the climate emergency is as much our problem as America's.

It's time to step up, said Biden: "We'll press forward with speed and urgency, for we have much to do in this winter of peril and significant possibilities, much to repair, much to restore, much to heal, much to build, and much to gain."

So do we.

## Time for unity

In terms that must surely have infuriated his predecessor, President Biden set out his priorities: "The cry for survival comes from the planet itself, a cry that can't be any more desperate or any more clear. And now a rise of political extremism, white supremacy, domestic terrorism that we must confront and we will defeat.

"To overcome these challenges, to restore the soul and secure the future of America requires so much more than words. It requires the most elusive of all things in a democracy: unity."

He added: "Every disagreement doesn't have to be a cause for total war."

With these words, Biden offered a new path for the divided citizens of America. A path defined by a sense of common purpose and collaboration; a middle way through the polarised political landscape.

It was a remarkable speech that showed true leadership; it was inclusive, unifying, resolute and, perhaps above all, hopeful.

It was also a long time coming. This was not a speech that was thrown together in a few days. Biden first became a senator in 1972 when he was just 29. He was re-elected to the Senate six times. He ran for president in 1988 and ran again in 2008. He was Vice President throughout Barack Obama's eight years in the White House. This is a man whose eye has been on the top job for a very long time. The flurry of executive orders signed in the first hours of his presidency shows that he comes to the Oval Office prepared – that he planned for hope.

As we said at the end of our [2020 Festival of Governance Review](#), we all have an opportunity to create something new and better. To do that we must enrich our understanding and broaden our perspective.

Whatever happens in 2021, let's together make it in the spirit of Renaissance 2.0, born in 2020.

# illuminations



## illuminations

- **Plan for hope** – Joe Biden’s speech felt like the first glimmer of light at the end of a dark and difficult night. His words were carefully chosen to inspire unity and hope. They did not attempt to belittle the challenges ahead but faced them honestly and resolutely. Leaders everywhere should learn something from this.
- **A new path for leadership** – Finding consensus from disagreement in an inclusive, engaging way should be the aspiration of all leaders. The challenge is to not focus on the person who shouts loudest in the boardroom but to listen to all and find common ground.
- **Experience, evidence, expertise** – difficult times call for cool, experienced heads that are prepared to embrace diversity, resist populism and encourage all stakeholders to feel they have a stake in the game.

If you have any questions or comments about this briefing, please call us on 07732 681120 or email [advice@good-governance.org.uk](mailto:advice@good-governance.org.uk)