WASHINGTON — President [*Joe Biden*](https://apnews.com/hub/joe-biden) and Utah Gov. Spencer Cox disagree on many issues but they were united Saturday in calling for less bitterness in ***politics*** and more bipartisanship.

“***Politics*** has gotten too personally bitter," said Biden, who has practiced ***politics*** since he was elected to the U.S. Senate in 1972. “It's just not like it was.” The Democratic president commented while delivering a toast to the nation's governors and their spouses at a black-tie White House dinner in their honor.

Biden said what makes him “feel good” about hosting the governors is "we have a tradition of doing things together. We fight like hell, we make sure that we get our points across. At the end of the day, we know who we work for. The objective is to get things done.”

Cox, a Republican and chairman of the [*National Governors Association*](https://www.nga.org/about/), preceded Biden to the lectern beneath an imposing portrait of Abraham Lincoln above the fireplace in the State Dining Room.

The Utah governor said the association “harkens back to another time, another era, when we did work together across partisan lines, when there was no political danger in appearing with someone from the other side of the aisle and we have to keep this, we have to maintain this, we cannot lose this,” he said.

Cox leads an initiative called “Disagree Better” that aims to reduce divisiveness. He had joked earlier in the program that he and Biden might be committing “mutually assured destruction” by appearing together at the White House since they're both [*up for reelection this year.*](https://apnews.com/hub/election-2024)

He told Biden that as state chief executives, governors “know just a very little bit of the incredible burden that weighs on your shoulders. We can't imagine what it must be like, the decisions that you have to make, but we feel a small modicum of that pressure and so, tonight, we honor you.”

Biden said he remembered when lawmakers would argue by day and break bread together at night. He is currently embroiled in stalemates with the Republican-controlled House over [*immigration policy,*](https://apnews.com/article/joe-biden-immigration-border-donald-trump-f0ca943f0f148e165bc6e8ebfd149f14) government funding and [*aid for Ukraine and Israel*](https://apnews.com/article/ukraine-aid-congress-senate-china-d7b4846de76a1dfe5d2207b7eb6eeead).

Cox went on to say that his parents taught him to pray for the leader of the country.

“Mr. President, I want you to know that our family prays for you and your family every night,” he said. “We pray that you will be successful because if you are successful that means that United States of America is successful and tonight we are always Americans first, so thank you.”

Colorado Gov. [*Jared Polis*](https://apnews.com/hub/jared-polis), a Democrat who is the association's vice chairman, also offered a toast.

“We have a lot more in common and a lot more that brings us together as Americans for love of country and love of the people of our country,” he said.

Vice President Kamala Harris and her husband, Doug Emhoff, were among Cabinet secretaries and White House officials who sat among the governors. The group included North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum, who in December ended his bid to become the Republican presidential nominee and challenge Biden.

Guests dined on house-made burrata cheese, an entree choice of beef braciole or cod almandine and lemon meringue tart with limoncello ice cream for dessert.

After dinner, the program moved to the East Room for a performance by country singer [*Trisha Yearwood.*](https://www.nga.org/about/)

The governors, in Washington for their annual winter meeting, heard from Biden and Harris on Friday during a separate session at the White House.