**Joe Biden’s Philadelphia Speech Transcript 2/6/2020 (3007 words, 22.5 minutes)**

“I can’t breathe. I can’t breathe.” George Floyd’s last words, but they didn’t die with him. They’re still being heard echoing all across this nation. They speak to a nation where too often, just the color of your skin, puts your life at risk. They speak to a nation where more than 100,000 people have lost their lives to the virus, and 40 million have filed for unemployment with the disproportionate number of those deaths in job losses, concentrated in black and Brown communities. And they speak to a nation where every day, millions of people, millions, not at the moment of losing their life, but in the course of living their life are saying to themselves, “I can’t breathe.”

It’s a wake up call to our nation, in my view, it’s for all of us, and I mean all of us. It’s not the first time we’ve heard those words. They’re the same words we heard from Eric Garner when his life was taken away six years ago. But it’s time to listen to those words, to try to understand them, to respond to them, respond with action. Our country is crying out for leadership, leadership that can unite us, leadership that brings us together, leadership that can recognize pain and deep grief of communities that have had a knee on their neck for a long time.

There’s no place for violence, no place for looting or destroying property or burning churches or destroying businesses. Many of them built by the very people of color who for the first time in their lives are beginning to realize their dreams and build wealth for their families, nor is it acceptable for our police sworn to protect and serve all people to escalate tension resort to excessive violence.

We need to distinguish between legitimate, peaceful protest and opportunistic violent destruction. We have to be vigilant about the violence that’s being done by this incumbent president to our economy and to the pursuit of justice.

When peaceful protestors dispersed in order for a president, a president, from the doorstep of the people’s house, the white house, using tear gas and flash grenades in order to stage a photo op, a photo op, in one of the most historic churches in the country, or at least in Washington, DC. We can be forgiven for believing the president is more interested in power than in principle. We’re just serving the passions of his base than the needs of the people in his care. For that’s what the presidency is, the duty to care, to care for all of us, not just those who vote for us, but all of us, not just our donors, but all of us.

The president held up the Bible at St. John’s church yesterday. I just wish he opened it once in a while instead of brandishing it. If he opened it, he could have learned something. We’re all called to love one another as we love ourselves, it’s really hard work, but it’s the work of America. Donald Trump isn’t interested in doing that work, instead he’s preening and sweeping away all the guard rails, the law that protected our democracy, guardrails that have helped make possible this nation’s path to more perfect union, a union that constantly requires reform and rededication. And yes, the protest from voices that are mistreated, ignored, left out or left behind, but it is a union, a union worth fighting for? And that’s why I’m running for president.

In addition to the Bible, the president might also want to open the US constitution once in a while. If he did, he’d find a thing called the first amendment and what it says in the beginning, it says the right of the people peaceably to assemble and to petition their government for redress and grievances. It’s kind of an essential notion building into this country.

Mr. President that’s America, that’s America. No horses rising up on their hind legs to push back peaceful protest, not using the American military to move against the American people. This is a nation of values. Our freedom to speak is a cherished knowledge that lives inside every American, almost from the time you’re a kid. We’re not allowing any president to quiet our voice. We won’t let those who see this as an opportunity to sow chaos, throw up a smoke screen, to distract us from real legitimate grievances at the heart of these protests. We can’t, we can’t leave this moment, we can’t leave this moment thinking that we can once again turn away and do nothing. We can’t do that this time. We just can’t. The moment has come for our nation to deal with systemic racism, to deal with the growing economic inequity that exists in our nation, to deal with the denial of the promise of this nation made to so many.

I’ve said from the outset of this election, that we’re in the battle for the soul of this nation, and we are in the battle for the soul of this nation. When we believe it may be most importantly, who we want to be, it’s all stake as truer today than it has ever been at least in my lifetime. And it’s this urgency, it’s in this urgency we can find a path forward.

The history of this nation teaches us that in some of our darkest moments of despair, we’ve made some of our greatest progress. Some of our darkest moments, the 13th, 14th, 15th amendments followed the civil war. The greatest economic growth in world history grew out of the great depression. Civil Rights Act of 1964 and ’60, the Voting Rights Act of ’65 came in the tracks of Bull Connors vicious dogs. To paraphrase Reverend Barber, “It’s the morning we find hope. It’s in the morning we find hope when we mourn.” But it’s going to take more than talk. We had talked before, we had protest before, we’ve got to now vow to make this at least an era of action and reverse the systemic racism with a long overdue concrete changes. The action will not be completed in the first hundred days of my presidency, if I’m fortunate enough to be elected, or even in my entire term. It’s going to take the work of a generation. But if this agenda will take time to complete, it should not wait for the first hundred days of my presidency to get started. A down payment on what is long overdue should come now, should come immediately.

I call on the Congress to act this month on measures that will be the first step in this direction, starting with real police reform. Congressman Jeffries has a Bill to outlaw choke Kohl’s. Congress should put it on the president’s desk in the next few days. There are other measures, to stop transferring weapons of war to police forces, improve oversight and accountability, to create a model use of force standard, that also should be made law this month. No more excuses, no delays. If Mitch McConnell can bring in the United States Senate to confirm Trump’s on qualified judicial nominees who will run rough shot over our constitution, now it’s time to pass legislation that will give true meaning to our constitutional promise of equal protection under the law.

Looking ahead in the first hundred days of my presidency, I’ve committed to creating a national police oversight commission. I’ve long believed we need real community policing. We need each and every police department in the country to understand a comprehensive review of their undertaking, a comprehensive review of their hiring, their training, their de-escalation. Some have already done it, some are in the process of doing it. The federal government should give, give the cities, the States the tools and the resources they need to implement reforms. More police officers meet the higher standards of their procession, most of them do it. All the more reason why bad cops should be dealt with severely and swiftly. We all need to take a hard look at the culture that allows for the senseless tragedies to keep happening.

And we need to learn from the cities and the precincts that are getting it right. We know though, in order to have true American justice, we need economic justice as well. Here too, is there’s much to be done. As an immediate step, Congress should act now to rectify racial inequities that allow COVID-19 recovery funds to be diverted from where they live.

I’ll be setting forth my agenda in economic justice and opportunity in the weeks and months ahead, but it begins with healthcare. Healthcare should be a right, not a privilege. The quickest route to universal coverage in this country is to expand on Obamacare. We can do it, we should do it. But this president, even now, in the midst of a public health crisis with a massive unemployment, well, wants to destroy it. He doesn’t care how many millions of Americans will be hurt because he’s consumed with this blinding ego when he comes to the Barack Obama, president Obama. The president should withdraw his lawsuit to strike down Obamacare and the Congress should prepare to pass the Act I proposed to expand Obamacare to millions more so everyone is covered.

This last few months, we’ve seen America’s true heroes, healthcare workers, docs, nurses, delivery truck drivers, grocery store workers. We’ve come up with a new phrase for them, essential workers, essential workers. We need to do more than praise them. We need to pay them. We need to pay them because we weren’t clear before, it’s clear now. This country wasn’t built by wall street bankers and CEOs. It was built by the great American middle class, which is built by unions and our essential workers.

I know there’s enormous fear and uncertainty and anger in the country. I understand. I know so many Americans are suffering, suffering loss of a loved one, suffering economic hardship, wondering can I feed my family tomorrow? What’s going to happen? Suffering under the weight of a generation after generation, after generation, of hurt and inflicted on people of color, on black, brown and native communities in particular. Like many of you, I know what it means to grieve. My losses are not the same as losses felt by so many, but I know what it feels like when you think you can’t go on. I know what it means to have that black hole in your chest where your grief is being sucked into it.

Just a few days ago, marked the fifth anniversary of my son Beau’s passing of cancer. And there’s still moments when the pain is so great, it no different than the day I sat in that bed as he passed away. But I also know that the best way to bear loss and pain is to turn it into, that anger and anguish into purpose. And Americans know what our purpose is as a nation, it has to be guided, it has to be guided, it’s guided us from the very beginning.

It’s been reported the day that president John F. Kennedy was assassinated, little Yolanda King came home from school and jumped in her daddy’s arms and said, “Oh daddy,” she said, “Now we’re never going to get our freedom.” Through daddy was reassuring, strong and brave, he said, “No, don’t worry, baby. It’s going to be okay. It’s going to be all right.” Amid the violence and fear, Dr. King, he persevered. He was driven by his dream, of a nation where justice runs down like water and righteousness like a mighty stream. Then in 1968, hate cut him down in Memphis. Two days before Dr. King was murdered, he gave a final Sunday sermon to Washington, where he told us that though the arc of the moral universe is long, he said it bends towards justice. And we know we can bend it because we have, we have to believe that’s still, that’s our purpose. It’s been our purpose in the very beginning, to become a nation where all men and women are not only created equal, but they’re treated equally, not just created equal, but treated equally, to become a nation, to find in Dr. King’s words, not only by the absence of tension, but by the presence of justice. It’s not enough just to not have tension, but justice.

Today in America is hard to keep faith that justice is at hand. I know that, you know that. Pain is raw. The pain is real. The president of United States must be part of the solution, not the problem, but this president today is part of the problem and accelerates it. When he twitted the words, “When the looting starts, the shooting starts,” they weren’t the words of the president, they were words of a racist Miami police chief in the 60s. When he tweeted that “Protestors would have been greeted with the most vicious dogs, when people would have been really hurt.” They weren’t the words of a president. They were the kind of words Bull Connor would have used unleashing his dogs on innocent women and children.

The American story is a story about action and reaction. That’s what actually works. We can’t be naive about it. I wish I could say that hate began with Donald Trump and will end with him. It didn’t, and it won’t. American history isn’t a fairy tale with a guaranteed happy ending. The battle for the soul of this nation has been a constant push and pull for more than 240 years, a tug of war between the American ideal that we’re all created equal, and the harsh reality that racism has long torn us apart. The honest truth is that both elements are part the American character, both elements. At our best, the American ideal wins out. But it’s never a route, it’s always a fight and the battle is never fully won. But we can’t ignore the truth that we’re at our best when we open our hearts rather than to clench our fist.

Donald Trump has turned this country into battlefield [inaudible 00:19:39] by old resentments and fresh fears. He thinks division helps him. His narcissism has become more important than the nation’s wellbeing that he leads. I ask every American, I mean this in the bottom of my heart, ask every American, look at where we are now and think a new. Is this who we are? Is this who we want to be? Is this we want to pass onto our children and our grandchildren, fear, anger, finger pointing rather than the pursuit of happiness? Incompetence and anxiety, self absorption, selfishness? Or do we want to be the America we know we can be? The America we know in our hearts, we could be and should be.

Look, I look at the presidency as a very big job and nobody will get it right every time, and I won’t either, but I promise you this I won’t traffic in fear and division. I won’t fan the flames of hate. I’ll seek to heal the racial wounds that have long plagued country, not use them for political gain. I’ll do my job and I will take responsibility. I won’t blame others. I’ll never forget. I will never forget. I promise you. This job is not about me, it’s about you, it’s about us. I worked not only to rebuild a nation, but to build it better than it was, we are the only nation in the world that goes through a crisis and comes out better. To build a better future, that’s what America does, to build a better future. We build a future. It may in fact be the most American thing to do, build the future.

We hunger for liberty the way Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglas did. We thirst for the vote like Susan B. Anthony and Ella Baker and John Lewis did. We strive to explore the stars, cure disease, make an imperfect union more perfect than is been. We may come up short, but at our best we try.

My fellow Americans, we’re facing a formidable enemies. They include not only the Coronavirus and a terrible impact on the lives and livelihoods, but also the selfishness and fear that have loomed over our national life for the last three years. And I choose those words advisedly, selfishness, and fear. Defeating those enemies requires us to do our duty. And that duty includes remembering who we should be, who we should be. We should be the America of FDR and Eisenhower, of Rosa parks and Martin Luther King Jr. Of Joan and Neil Armstrong. We should be the America that cherishes life, liberty, and courage, and above all, we should be the America that cherishes each other. Each and every one of us.

We’re a nation in pain. We must not let our pain destroy us. We’re a nation enraged. We cannot let our rage consume us. We’re a nation that’s exhausted, but we will not allow our exhaustion defeat us. As president, is my commitment to all of you to lead on these issues and to listen, because I truly believe in my heart of hearts, we can overcome. When we stand together finally as one America, we will rise stronger than we were before. We’ll move that arc closer to justice. We’ll reach out to one another. So speak out for one another and please, please, to what’s recently been happening, take care of one another. This is the United States of America. There’s never been anything we’ve been unable to do when we set our mind to do it and we’ve done it together. Together, united, that’s what we are at our best.

May God bless you all and may God protect our troops. Thank you.