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JOE BIDEN, PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES: Folks -- as I've just demonstrated, while it often appears we do not agree, and that we do agree on a lot more things than we acknowledge, I signed 80 bipartisan bills into law last year -- from preventing government shutdowns, to protecting Asian Americans, from still too common hate crimes, to reforming military justice, and we'll soon be strengthening the Violence Against Women Act that I first wrote three decades ago.

(APPLAUSE)

[22:00:24]

It's important. It's important for us to show -- to show the nation that we can come together and do big things.

Tonight, I'm offering a unity agenda for the nation. Four big things we can do together in my view.

First, beat the opioid epidemic.

(APPLAUSE)

There's so much we can do. Increase funding for prevention, treatment, harm reduction, and recovery. Get rid of outdated rules and stop doctors and -- that stop doctors from prescribing treatments. Stop the flow of illicit drugs by working with state and local law enforcement to go after the traffickers.

If you're suffering from addiction, you know -- you should know you're not alone. I believe in recovery and I celebrate the 23 million -- 23 million Americans in recovery.

(APPLAUSE)

Second, let's take on mental health especially among our children whose lives and education have been turned upside down. The American Rescue Plan gave schools money to hire teachers and help students make up for lost learning.

I urge every parent to make sure your school, your school does just that, have the money. We can all play a part. Sign up to be a tutor or a mentor.

Children are also struggling before the pandemic -- bullying, violence, trauma, and the harms of social media. As Frances Haugen who is here tonight with us has shown, we must hold social media platforms accountable for the national experiment they are conducting on our children for profit.

(APPLAUSE)

Folks -- thank you. Thank you for the courage you've showed.

It's time to strengthen privacy protections. Ban targeted advertising to children. Demand tech companies stop collecting personal data on our children.

And let's get all Americans the mental health services they need. More people can turn for help and full parity between physical and mental health care if we treat it that way in our assurance.

(APPLAUSE)

Look -- the third piece of that agenda is support our veterans.

(APPLAUSE)

Veterans are the backbone and the spine of this country. They're the best of us. I've always believed that we have a sacred obligation to equip those we send to war and care for those and their family when they come home.

My administration providing assistance with job training and housing, and now helping lower income veterans to get V.A. care debt-free, and our troops in Iraq faced -- and Afghanistan have faced many dangers, one being stationed at bases breathing in toxic smoke from burn pits.

(APPLAUSE)

Many of you have been there. I've been in and out of Iraq and Afghanistan over 40 times. These burn pits that incinerate waste, the waste of war, medical, and hazardous material, jet fuel, and so much more. And they come home, many of the world's fittest and best trained warriors in the world, never the same -- headaches, numbness, dizziness. A cancer that would put them in a flag draped coffin. I know.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: (INAUDIBLE)

BIDEN: One of those -- one of those soldiers was my son, Major Beau Biden. I don't know for sure if the burn pit that he lived near that his hooch was near in Iraq and earlier than that in Kosovo is the cause of his brain cancer, the disease of so many other troops, but I am committed to find out everything we can, committed to military families like Danielle Robinson from Ohio, the widow of Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson.

He was born a soldier, Army National Guard, combat medic in Kosovo and Iraq, stationed near Baghdad just yards from burn pits the size of football fields. Danielle is here with us tonight.

[22:05:03]

They loved going to Ohio state football games.

(APPLAUSE)

And he loved building LEGOs with their daughter, but cancer from prolonged exposure to burn pits ravaged Heath's lungs and body. Danielle says Heath was a fighter to the very end. He didn't know how to stop fighting, and neither did she.

Through her pain, she found purpose to demand that we do better. Tonight, Danielle, we are going to do better.

(APPLAUSE)

The VA is -- the VA is finding (ph) new ways of linking toxin exposure disease, already helping more veterans get benefits. And tonight, I'm announcing we're expanding eligibility to veterans suffering from nine respiratory cancers. I'm also calling on Congress to pass a law to make sure veterans devastated by toxic exposure in Iraq and Afghanistan finally get the benefits and the comprehensive healthcare they deserve.

(APPLAUSE)

And fourth, and last, let's end cancer as we know it.

(APPLAUSE)

This is personal. This is personal to me, and to Jill, and to Kamala, and so many of you. So many of you have lost someone you love - husband, wife, son, daughter, mom, dad. Cancer's the number two cause of death in America, second only to heart disease.

Last month, I announced a plan to supercharge the Cancer Moonshot that President Obama asked me to lead six years ago. Our goal is to cut cancer death rates by at least 50 percent over the next 25 years, and I think we can do better than that. Turn cancers from death sentences into treatable diseases.

More support for patients and their families, to get there I call on Congress to fund what I call ARPA-H, Advanced Research Projects Agency for Health, patterned after DARPA in the Defense Department. Projects that led in DARPA to the internet, GPS, and so much more that make our forces more safer and be able to wage war with more clarity.

ARPA will have a singular purpose, to drive breakthroughs in cancer, Alzheimer's, and diabetes and more. A unity agenda for the nation. We can do these things, it's within our power and I don't see a partisan edge to any one of those four things.

(APPLAUSE)

My fellow Americans, tonight we've gathered in this sacred space, a citadel of democracy in this Capitol generation of generation of Americans have debated great questions amid great strife and have done great things. We fought for freedom, expanded liberty, debated totalitarianism and terror. We built the strongest, freest, and most prosperous nation the world has ever known.

Now is the hour. Our moment of responsibility, our test of resolve and conscience of history itself - it is in this moment that our character of this generation is formed. Our purpose is found, our future is forged. Well, I know this nation, we'll meet the test, protect freedom and liberty, expand fairness and opportunity. And we will save democracy.

As hard as those times have been, I'm more optimistic about America today than I've been my whole life, because I see the future that's within our grasp, because I know there's simply nothing beyond our capacity. We're the only nation on Earth that has always turned every crisis we've faced into an opportunity. The only nation that can be defined by a single word, possibilities.

So, on this night, on our 245th year as a nation, I've come to report on the state of the nation, the state of the union, and my report is this - the state of the union is strong because you, the American people, are strong.

(APPLAUSE)

[22:10:06]

We are stronger today -- we are stronger today than we were a year ago, and we'll be stronger a year from now than we are today. This is our moment to meet and overcome the challenges of our time, and we will as one people, one America, the United States of America!

(APPLAUSE)

God bless you all, and may God protect our troops! Thank you. Go get them!

(APPLAUSE)

RACHEL MADDOW, MSNBC HOST: We watched the president here speak with members of the United States after finishing his address.

(INAUDIBLE)

MADDOW: You see Pramila Jayapal there, leader of the congressional progressive caucus, literally embracing the president after his remarks, leaving the microphones open here, because we get a little bit of eavesdropping opportunities as the president greets, senators and members of Congress.

(INAUDIBLE)

MADDOW: The man with four stars on his epaulets that you see there is the chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Mark Milley.

As the president continues to circulate in the room, Democratic members of Congress and senators sticking with him, as he makes his way more slowly out of the room than he was able to make his way.

President Biden tonight giving the first formal State of the Union Address of his presidency. The first opportunity for such an address is the first one after the president has sworn in, and it's not technically the State of the Union, this one is.

President Biden is speaking for just over an hour, starting with forceful remarks on Ukraine, marked by an extended standing ovation directed toward the Ukrainian ambassador to the United States who was there tonight as a guest of First Lady Jill Biden.

We also saw another standing ovation from both sides of the aisle. President Biden tonight, his remarks on cracking down on Russian oligarchs, talking about seizing their ill gotten gains, talking about their luxury apartments, their yachts, their private jets. We saw both sides of the aisle jump up when the president talked about accelerating those forms of economic sanctions on the Russian state and its enablers, the president giving lengthy remarks on the economy, infrastructure, manufacturing jobs. Talking at length on COVID, including announcing some new initiatives on COVID, treatment and testing. Then initiative that was the news

tonight to get people tested in the pharmacy, and then instant access antivirals thereafter, talking about the very promising pill made by Pfizer which reduces your chances of being hospitalized by 90 percent.

Here's the president approaching the retiring Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer, let's listen.

(INAUDIBLE)

[22:15:58]

MADDOW: Shocking. Absolutely shocking.

President Biden at the end of his remarks tonight was the -- having gone through those high points which, we just mentioned, again, Ukraine, the economy, infrastructure, factory jobs, drug prices, insulin, long stretch on COVID. The president closed with what he called a unity agenda for the nation. And he did lay out a four-part agenda that is a four-part list of things that has strong bipartisan support for real.

Combating the opioid epidemic. The president notably making strong marks -- strong remarks tonight recognizing 23 million Americans who are in recovery, saying he believes in recovery.

Mental health, support for veterans including a lengthy discourse on the threat of burn pits in Iraq and Afghanistan, including talking about his belief that his own son Beau's brain cancer may have been caused, although he doesn't know for sure, may have been by the proximity of his living quarters while he was deployed in combat to an open burn pit. Also then closing with his cancer initiative.

President finishing up his remarks by saying, my report is this: the state of union is strong, because you, the American people, are strong. We are stronger than we were a year ago. We will be stronger year from now than we are today.

Nicolle, what do you make of the speech?

NICOLLE WALLACE, MSNBC HOST, "DEADLINE: WHITE HOUSE": Look, I don't think that President Biden gives soaring speeches, but the Ukraine section was soaring. And I think to call out Zelensky and talk about what the Ukrainian people are doing, groups of citizens blocking tanks with their bodies, from students to retirees, teachers turned soldiers defending their homeland -- I mean, that is the moment, that is the history being made as we speak.

I think the second thing that is really important in this country and to this president is that he made the most forceful turn away from life as we have known it for the last two years. He talked about taking off our masks. He talked about going back to the offices. It's very much tied in this city.

I think to the holistic approach around crime and economic revival, the president embraced that and talked about inhabiting our downtowns again, taking off our masks, being confident that we can be safe with vaccines and therapeutics. Big deal.

CHRIS HAYES, MSNBC HOST, "ALL IN": You know, I was thinking about the fact that the lying to me of the speech is, it's going to be okay. Which -- I found it very affecting line. Because, honestly, like, war and plague are the defining features of human life on the planet for much of civilization. And we have been living through -- we were living through one and are now watching another.

And people are anxious about what it will mean. We really have gone through the seismic once in a century trauma that has rippled through every single aspect of society. I mean, every part of life was disruptive for, the most that it has been a decades, maybe a century. And I thought that why it was profound.

The other thing that I thought was very kind of like classic Democratic meat and potatoes about the speech was, here's a bunch of really popular stuff that we want to do. And, look, if you're thinking about who the speeches for, this is a guy who had an approval rating of 52, 53 percent that's probably is now around 30 to 40, right?

There's 14 percent of the population are winnable back. These are people that are not turned off to him. These are not people who are celebrating the trucker rally in Canada, right?

WALLACE: They got omicron.

HAYES: Right.

WALLACE: Right. I mean, these are the people -- these are the people that voted for him, who supported him in the beginning, and a big part of the speech tonight was like, let's lower prescription drugs, that polls at 65, 70 percent.

Let's raise taxes on the richest corporate -- like these are good meat and potatoes, here's an agenda, that that 14 percent that I need back can get behind.

MADDOW: Let's not talk about infrastructure weakening more. We are now going to have an infrastructure decade. By the way, that was one of 80 bipartisan bills that I supported. That's back to the center for Joe Biden.

[22:20:01]

JOY REID, MSNBC HOST, "REIDOUT: Well, I think this was a reminder of why people elected Joe Biden, right? Joe Biden was Joe Bidening for most of this, most of this speech.

I mean, a really strong open, I agree with Nicolle on Ukraine and defending democracy, really put down his state there saying, lie will triumph over darkness, freedom will triumph over tyranny, really sat down his stake. This is -- he is a foreign policy president fundamentally, that was his skill set, when he was United States senator.

And I really think you can really see his gravitas, the things that make him easy to deal with world leaders, because he truly does believe that. A lot of the rest of it was very classic Joe Biden. He is a fundamentally bipartisan individual.

So, the hits he didn't take I found interesting.

HAYES: Yeah.

REID: He had an opportunity, as you said earlier, Nicolle, to take a really solid hit at Republicans for having supportive Vladimir Putin, he did not take it. This is one year --

MADDOW: He did even hint at it. There is a way to do that in a way that doesn't name names, but to shame the people who -- he steered clear. He's a much higher minded person than all of us, who said he should.

REID: He should do.

He did not mention the January 6 insurrection, because if you want to talk about a profound hit to our democracy, there is nothing more profound than a violent physical attack on the very building he's standing in. That did not make it into the speech, I found that interesting.

The one place that Biden felt comfortable attacking Republicans was on tax cuts, was on the tax cuts for the rich, because that, to your point, Chris, is widely popular. The rich should be paying more taxes. So he didn't take hits that were obvious in a speech that was fundamentally about protecting democracy, but that's how he is.

So people want red meat Democratic politics, you will never get that from Joe Biden. That is just not who he is. It's not what he does. But I think particularly the first part of the speech was really strong.

CLAIRE MCCASKILL, MSNBC POLITICAL ANALYST: I think he did a pretty good job at getting away from talking about the names of bills. I hated that he called it the American Rescue Plan. Nobody knows what the American rescue plan is. It's like build back better. At least he got away from that. And instead of talking about Build Back Better, he talked about the components, the most popular components of Build Back Better, that would help American families that are struggling right now with high costs.

But maybe the most important thing he did, I believe, was establish his role as a leader of freedom loving countries in opposing a demagogue that is trying to put people under his thumb by and illegal and outrages aggression on Ukraine. And I think he laid out how he led, he laid out how he planned, and I think that was probably where he was strongest in terms of regaining his role with those 14 percent, Chris --

HAYES: Yeah.

MCCASKILL: That he needs to regain that position of strength, that he can lead. And I think he did really well with a part of the speech. I wish it had been most of the speech, instead of just the first third.

MADDOW: He said, I know the news about what's happening can seem alarming but I want you to know that we are going to be okay. When the history of this era is written, Putin's war in Ukraine will have left Russia weaker and the rest of the world stronger. Well, it should've taken something so terrible for people around the world to see what's at stake, now everyone sees a clearly. We see the unity among the leaders of nations, a more unified Europe, and a more unified west.

We see unity among the people who are gathering in cities and large crowds around the world, even in Russia, to demonstrate their support for the Ukraine, and the battle between democracy and autocracy,

democracies are rising to the moment. The world is clearly choosing the side of peace and security. This is a real test.

That has been this through line from day one. You're right, Joy, that he did not talk about January six. He talked about voter suppression. He talked about the need to protect voting rights and he made a case for that deep into the speech.

But this is a moment where earlier in his presidency, he would've talked about the assault, the literal physical violent assault on the citadel of American democracy, and he didn't, because he's marginalizing that in terms of American experience. I believe that's the strategic thinking there, even if the scaffolding, you know, the fencing goes up around the capital for this speech.

But he is saying, listen, autocracy versus democracy is the question of our time. Our democracy stands not only as a beacon but stands as the point of -- the tip of the spear -- the point of the spear, in terms of defending democracy everywhere ensuring that democracies can perform.

That is going -- that is the theme song that he played on day one in his inaugural. And he will hit it again and again and again even as Donald Trump, forgive me, receives smaller and smaller and smaller on the political life.

REID: Yeah. You know, I think the another thing that he did here I thought was important, I think that is the tent pole of Joe Biden sort of -- that's a through line of his presidency, he's trying to restore the sense that democracies can function, and that's all the bipartisan talk about making democracies function. But, you know, the dark cloud over the Biden presidency has been COVID.

It's been the ongoing malaise of still having to mask up and not be able to go indoor -- eat indoors, and go to the gym and people just feeling completely exhausted out of that.

MADDOW: (INAUDIBLE) feeling shackled.

[22:25:04]

REID: Exactly. And I think that, you know, I thought that mentioning, look, we are 77 percent fully vaxxed in this country, 75 percent, or 77 percent reduced to -- hospitalizations have been reduced 77 percent and saying we can now go back to a normal life, as much as I can't still process the nearly million people who have died from COVID, people do want to move past that era of malaise.

And so, I think that this was a test to treat the news that he broke today, saying, you can't get tested and treated on the spot if you have COVID, and sort of making you feel like, even if COVID is still out there, it's going to be okay. It will become more normal. Our lives will become more normal.

HAYES: And to me, the story, when you look at his campaign and his approval ratings, is that, look, it was -- back to normal. We're sort of -- it was like, if you had to give the bumper sticker, right -- back to normal.

And they came in, people got vaxxed, and that first spring felt back to normal. My brother got married, right? We all got together and thought, we're back baby! Here -- I'm giving a best man speech from my bro. And then, whoa, wait a second. Not so back to normal.

And that's where the approval ratings go from 52, 53, down to 30, 39. It's like, it's not rocket science what's going on here.

WALLACE: The other thing that happened is the delta hit, Afghanistan happen. So the twin pillars of who he is, this trusts did, steady hand in foreign policy conversations, fell with Afghanistan. And this guy who said get vaccinated, it will all be over, fell with the delta wave.

And I think that what he has done, not just in his speech but in his presidency in the last month, is he has told us that COVID doesn't -- it becomes endemic. That was a turn that he was unable to make with the vaccine push. The vaccine push allowed us to put us on the road, but he redefined what living with the pandemic's and the speech tonight in these policies.

And I agree, that if you test, you test positive, you go home with the pills. Even if you don't take, I had the pills on my shelf, I was testing you. When should I take them?

There's a psychological piece to like, if I feel bad, I have the pills on myself I can take them. So he is putting that in everyone's cupboard. You will go home with a positive test and pills that will keep you out of the hospital.

I think, though, on the foreign policy piece, I don't think that he is marginalizing January 6 because it is not disconnected from this fight between democracies and autocracies. I just think -- I mean, I still think it burns him. I think he didn't want to stand in that chamber and divide the chamber with his rhetoric on 1/6.

MADDOW: In terms of the COVID transition that you're talking about, Nicolle, I thought that was some of what he said there around COVID actually surprised me in terms of how he phrased. And he described it as a new moment in the fight against COVID-19, meaning an ongoing fight.

HAYES: Yes.

MADDOW: I know some are talking about living with COVID. Tonight, I say, we will never just accept living with COVID, we will continue to combat the virus as we do other diseases, which is our plain English way of saying it's endemic. We find other diseases.

Talking about the test to treat initiative, which you've been talking about, Joy, exactly, talking about Paxlovid, talking about the access to that Pfizer pill, which does reduce your chances of being hospitalized by 90 percent. But he said, I cannot promise a variant will not come. But I promise you that we will do everything in our power to be ready if it does.

He's not saying this is over. We are not talking about freedom from COVID. We are talking about being able to handle it now.

WALLACE: Exactly.

HAYES: I think that's a really -- it's both important because it's true, but it's also important you know because you can't -- we've been around this merry-go-round how many times, right, with another surge. You just can't tell people do X, and it's done, because that's been part of the trust issue.

MADDOW: Joining us now from the U.S. Capitol is Senator Amy Klobuchar, Democrat from the great state of Minnesota who we caught on camera couple of moments during the speech tonight.

Senator Klobuchar, I should mention part of a bipartisan group of senators who traveled to Ukraine in January to meet with President Zelensky. They were also part of the bipartisan congressional delegation last month to the Munich security conference, just days before the invasion.

Senator, we are happy to see you tonight. Thanks for making time to be here.

SEN. AMY KLOBUCHAR (D-MN): Thanks, Rachel.

MADDOW: What do you make of the president's speech tonight?

KLOBUCHAR: You know, I thought he did what he needed to do in a big way. Obviously, as we were just talking about, the pandemic where we are, getting through it, acknowledging the pain people have been through, then the solutions for the challenges for the future.

But I thought the most -- biggest moment for me was just the way he brought people together, not just the world, big deal, on Ukraine, but also the Congress.

[22:29:38]

Literally, every person standing multiple times, standing with Ukraine and the people of Ukraine, and respecting their courage, but also respecting the commander, respecting the commander-in-chief.

And that was a big moment given everything that he's done to bring the world together.

MADDOW: Senator, looking across the world to what is happening in Ukraine, is there anything that the Congress and Senate can meaningfully do to advance what we've been able to offer the people of Ukraine? And to punish Russia more for what they've done? Does Congress have an important role to play here now?

KLOBUCHAR: as you can see the president and the administration have a lot of power on sanctions. But there's more we can do in terms of aid -- humanitarian aid for the refugees. This is a horrific crisis.

And then, of course, continue our help with ammunition and weapons and the like. So that's what we are debating right now this week. I think we need to get it done as soon as possible.

But so much of this is proving to the world what Vladimir Putin is, getting that intelligence out. I think he thought he was going march into Ukraine to rose petals and instead it was Molotov cocktails. The people of Ukraine -- big hearts, big country -- they are determined to resist. And we in America must stand with them.

MADDOW: We've just got about a minute left before we're expecting the Republican response. In that limited time, let me just ask you if you agree with the president's decision to not take a swat tonight at the people on the American right who have been pro Putin? Who have been excusing Putin, who've been apologizing for him and indeed have been demonizing Ukraine.

The president stayed away from that and that could've been some low hanging fruit for him in terms of sort of red meat for his base.

KLOBUCHAR: Well, what I see him do though was go after the Republicans hoping the top 1 percent, the Trump tax cuts, all of that. To me that means a lot to people in their everyday lives.

I think his role as commander-in-chief when it came to Russia, when it came to Ukraine was bringing people together. We know that crazy stuff is going on, we know they've got a significant number of people who believe that.

But his job was to bring in Democrats and Republicans in one country and to show the people of the Ukraine we stand with them. So I think it was the right decision.

MADDOW: Senator Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota, we do appreciate you making time for us on a busy night. Senator, it's great to see you.

KLOBUCHAR: Great. Hi, Claire. See you later.

CLAIRE MCCASKILL, MSNBC POLITICAL ANALYST: Hi, Amy. See you.

MADDOW: I will tell you that we are coming up in about 40 seconds or so, 30 seconds or so for the Republican response. This year it will be given by the governor of Iowa, Kim Reynolds. She's going to be delivering it from Des Moines. You know, watch with -- watch with an open heart.

The response to the State of the Union is always difficult for anybody giving it just in terms of the contrast in staging. Governor Kim Reynolds chosen by her party tonight. Here she is from Iowa.

[START OF LIVE EVENT: GOP RESPONSE TO PRESIDENT BIDEN'S STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS]

GOVERNOR KIM REYNOLDS (R-IA): Good evening. I'm Kim Reynolds, governor of the great state of Iowa.

Like you, I just watched the president's address. I listened as the governor of our state, as a mom, and a grandmother of 11, who's worried our country is on the wrong track.

We're now one year into his presidency and instead of moving America forward, it feels like President Biden and his party have sent us back in time to the late 70s and early 80s when runaway inflation was hammering families, a violent crime wave was crashing our cities, and the soviet army was trying to redraw the world map.

Even before taking the oath of office, the president told us that he wanted to quote, "Make America respected around the world again. And to unite us here at home."

He's failed on both fronts. The disastrous Afghanistan withdrawal did more than cost American lives. It betrayed our allies and emboldened our enemies.

North Korea is testing missiles again at an alarming rate. The Speaker of the House recently warned our Olympic athletes not to speak out against China. And now, Russia has launched an unprovoked full scale military invasion of Ukraine, an attack on democracy, freedom, and the rule of law.

Now all Americans must stand united in solidarity with the brave people of Ukraine as they courageously defend their country against Putin's tyranny as they fight for their freedom.

But we shouldn't ignore what happened in the run up to Putin's invasion. Waiving sanctions on Russian pipelines while eliminating oil production here at home. Focusing on political correctness, rather than military readiness. Reacting to world events instead of driving them.

Weakness on the world stage has a cost, and the president's approach to foreign policy has consistently been too little too late.

It's time for America to once again project confidence. It's time to be decisive. It's time to lead.

[22:34:53]

REYNOLDS: But we can't project strength abroad if we're weak at home. And that's what I want to discuss with you tonight.

The president and Democrats in Congress have spent the last year either ignoring the issues facing Americans or making them worse. They were warned that spending trillions would lead to soaring inflation. They were told that their anti-energy policies would send gas prices to new heights.

But they plowed ahead anyway, raising the price at the pump by 50 percent and pushing inflation to a four-year high. Four decades ago, when our nation was last reeling from inflation, I was a young working mom just starting out. My husband Kevin worked days while I watched our girls, and then we would literally switch.

We would pass in the yard as he was coming home, and I was leaving to work evenings at a local grocery store. From across that check out counter, I saw the pain of inflation on my neighbor's faces. I saw what happens when prices rise faster than wages.

The Biden administration believes inflation is a quote, "high class problem". I can tell you, it's an "everybody" problem. I saw moms' and dads' paychecks buy them less and less. I watched working people choose which essentials to take home, and which ones to leave behind. And now, President Biden's decisions have a whole new generation feeling that same pain.

When I took the oath of office five years ago, I promised Iowans that I would never lose sight of who I was working for. That I wouldn't become detached from the problems they were facing, from the problems that I had faced myself.

But you don't have to check groceries to see one high inflation does to people. You just need to step outside the D.C. bubble, talk to Americans about what's on their mind, ask them what are your concerns? What keeps you up at night? And they'll tell you.

And I can tell you what's not on that list. They won't tell you that spending trillions more and bankrupting their children is the answer to their problems. They won't tell you that we should be paying people not to work. And they certainly won't tell you that we should give billions in tax giveaways to millionaires and billionaires in Democrat-controlled states like California and New York and New Jersey.

But that's what the Biden administration has been pushing for over the last year. And that's all part of Build Back Better. Thankfully, the president's agenda didn't pass. because even members of his own party said enough is enough.

Well, the American people share that view. Enough is enough. And it's not just with D.C. spending, Americans are tired of a political class trying to remake this country into a place where an elite view tell everyone else what they can and cannot say, what they can and cannot believe.

They're tired of people pretending the way to end racism is by categorizing everybody by their race. They're tired of politicians who tell parents they should sit down, be silent, and let government control their kids' education and future.

Frankly, they are tired of the theater where politicians do one thing when the cameras are rolling, and another when they believe you can't see them.

Where governors and mayors enforce mandates but don't follow them. Where elected leaders tell their citizens to stay home while they sneak off to Florida for sun and fun. Where they demand that your child wear a mask, but they go maskless.

So you've heard the excuses. They were just holding their breath, but it's the American people who are waiting to exhale. Waiting for the insanity to stop.

We now live in a country where violent crime is out of control. Liberal prosecutors are letting criminals off easy and many prominent Democrats still want to defund the police.

You know, it seems like everything is backwards. The Biden administration requires vaccines for Americans who want to go to work or protect this country. But not for migrants, who illegally crossed the border. The Department of Justice treats parents like domestic terrorists, but looters and shoplifters roam free.

[22:39:48]

REYNOLDS: The American people are left to feel like they're the enemy. This is not the same country it was a year ago. The president tried to paint a different picture tonight, but his actions over the last 12 months don't match the rhetoric. It's not what he promised when he took office.

But it doesn't have to be that way. There is an alternative. Across the nation, Republican governors and legislators are showing Americans what conservative leadership looks like.

What it means to respect the people we serve. To hear them out, to stand up for them and walk alongside them. We know that our problems require bold action, but we also know that bold action doesn't have to mean government action. It's Americans making their own decisions for their own families and future.

Republican governors face the same COVID-19 virus head on but we honored your freedoms and saw right away that lockdowns and school closures, they came with their own significant costs. That mandates weren't the answer. And we actually listened to the science. Especially with kids in mask and kids in schools.

What happened and is still happening to our children over the last two years is unconscionable. Learning loss, isolation, anxiety, depression. In so many states our kids have been left behind and so many will never catch up.

That's why Iowa was the first state in the nation to require that schools open their doors. I was attacked by the left, I was attacked by the media, but it wasn't a hard choice, it was the right choice. And keeping schools open is only the start of the pro parent, pro family revolution that Republicans are leading in Iowa and states across this country.

Republicans believe that parents matter. It was true before the pandemic and it has never been more important to say out loud. Parents matter. They have a right to know and to have a say in what their kids are being taught.

Families also have every right to live in a safe and a secure community. And that begins with a safe and secure country. But the Biden administration has refused to secure our border. They've refused to provide the resources to stop human trafficking, to stop the staggering influx of deadly drugs coming into our neighborhoods. They've refused to protect you.

With Texas and Arizona leading the way I, along with Republican governors from several states, have sent resources to the border. And we've actually gone to the border, something that our president and vice president have yet to do since taking office.

On the economy, the contrast couldn't be more stark. While Democrats in dc are spending trillions, sending inflation soaring, Republican leaders around the country are balancing budgets and cutting taxes because we know that money spent on Main Street is better than money spent on bureaucracy.

Today, I signed legislation that eliminates Iowa's tax on retirement income and sets our tax rate at 3.9 percent. That's less than half of what it was just four years ago.

And it shouldn't come as a surprise that out of the top 20 states with the lowest unemployment rates, 17 have Republican governors. Republicans may not have the White House, but we're doing what we can to fill the leadership vacuum.

And on the issues that are affecting Americans, Republicans are leading. We're standing up for parents and kids. We're standing up for life. We're keeping our community safe and thanking those in uniform. We're fighting to restore America's energy independence. And that includes biofuels. We're getting people back to work, not paying them to stay home. Most of all, we're respecting your freedom.

Behind me stands Iowa's capital, where we display our state motto, "Our liberties we prize and our rights we will maintain". And those aren't just empty words, it's a belief that the greatness of this state and this country lies in our people, not government.

[22:44:49]

REYNOLDS: You shouldn't have to wake up every morning and worry about the next thing the government is going to do to you, your business, or your children.

If we as elected leaders are doing our job, then the government is working well but operating in the background. It's supporting the ingenuity and spirit of our people, not drowning them out. It's keeping them safe, not restricting their freedom.

That's what I believe, that's what's Republicans believe, and that's what Republicans doing.

I am so blessed to be the governor of Iowa, where people are humble, hardworking, and patriotic. We take care of each other and yes, we are as they say, Iowa nice.

But you don't have to be from Iowa to see that those are the values of America at its best. All of America. Over the last few years, I have put my faith in Iowans, and they haven't let me down.

I encourage this president to do the same. To put his faith in you, the American people, who have never wavered in your belief in this country, regardless of who leads it. Because you know, you've shown, that the soul of America isn't about who lives in the White House, it's men and women like you in every corner of this nation, who are willing to step up and take responsibility for your communities, for your neighbors and ultimately for yourselves.

By that most important measure at least, the State of our Union is indeed strong.

Thank you. God bless you. And God bless the United States of America.

[END OF LIVE EVENT]

MADDOW: That is the official Republican response to tonight's State of the Union from President Joe Biden. That was Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds speaking from the Iowa State Capitol.

And I would just say, that is one of the hardest jobs in national politics. Even if you are a great speaker, going after the State of the Union is difficult because the staging contrast will always make you look diminished in comparison.

So spare a thought for a Governor Reynolds, that is a difficult thing. I will say that it is traditionally thought that the opposing party's State of the Union response is sometimes seen as a testing ground or maybe even a springboard to national ambitions. I don't think that will -- I don't think there's any risk of that this evening.

All right. Joining us here in New York is our colleague Lawrence O'Donnell. Lawrence, it's great to see you.

LAWRENCE O'DONNELL, MSNBC HOST: Great to see you.

You know, Rachel, the standard -- the difficulty for this speech for Republicans and response has actually been dramatically lowered since the threshold was set by Marco Rubio. She cleared that because there were no water accidents at all during the speech. And in the end -- she said a lot -- but in the end it turns out the headline is she completely agrees with Joe Biden, the State of the Union is strong. That's what it came down to.

MADDOW: It is, I think, the notable thing she wore a Ukraine pin on her lapel, she referenced it but the U.S. flag and the Ukrainian flag side by side is a gesture from the Republican that I think is in keeping with the kind of bipartisan response the president got tonight in talking about Ukraine.

O'DONNELL: But her treatment of Ukraine as you would expect from the Iowa governor was minimal. And so this was not someone chosen for their ability to rise to that moment.

MADDOW: No. She did blame the war on --

(CROSSTALK)

O'DONNELL: She did not mention whether she agrees with her party's leader that Vladimir Putin is a genius. She left that out, we don't know.

But the rest of the speech was in the past. It was the dark days of masks for everyone and lockdowns, and all that stuff, so if the recovery from the pandemic continues to improve the way it is, these speeches are going to stay the same.

This is going to be the speech in September. This is going to be the speech in August. And so it's kind of a political bet on a new variant because without a new variant that is powerful, this speech is going to feel increasingly odd.

She's talking about a world in which, you know, students are prevented from going to schools. That doesn't exist anymore. She's talking about kids being masked forever. That doesn't exist anymore. Masks coming off in New York City public schools.

So that whole thing is over but they believe it's still working, and of course, even though Joe Biden said, "fund the police", she said Democrats want to defund the police.

There was kind of the Biden fund the police line was obviously in anticipation of, no matter what, they're going to try to stick him with that.

In the Biden speech, you know, that's the best line in the Biden speech was written by the other president. That was "light will win over darkness". That was President Zelenskyy's line.

[22:49:53]

O'DONNELL: And then the Biden speech was basically, seize the yachts and fund the police, and fund the police to seize the yachts. That will be the headline for all of the people who don't follow this really closely. Those things will jump out.

MADDOW: Well he did talk --

(CROSSTALK)

MCCASKILL: And secure the border. Not only -- I mean that's the thing that Biden did here tonight. He is -- the things they're going to talk about, I agree with you completely, it's all going to be about the tyranny of masks and vaccinations, crime, the border, repeat -- those three.

NICOLLE WALLACE, MSNBC HOST: They're doing it though because -- I mean Glenn Youngkin hopefully is calling and asking for a (INAUDIBLE) speech back. It worked in Virginia. And Republicans are not innovative campaigners. They take a winning formula. Right.

I mean they are not innovative. And they have this infrastructure that will be totally immune to the facts about children not wearing masks. I mean no -- I mean children have been in school the entire time Joe Biden has been president.

O'DONNELL: Right.

WALLACE: But that does not matter. And I actually -- my thought listening to the response was that the speeches were inverted. President Joe Biden knew exactly what Republicans were going to say about him. His speech pre- butted everything he said.

MADDOW: Exactly.

WALLACE: And but, that is the line of attack when Youngkin used it. It was used to great effect. And you're right. That is the speech they'll give all year.

MADDOW: I do think the importance of response, opposition party response to the State of the Union is whether anybody notices what's in it. And I do think in this case, it is not -- I mean no disrespect intended to Governor Reynolds, but I don't think anybody is going to remember anything from the speech.

So it's going to be a speech -- it's going to be a night that's remembered for the president's speech, I think, not for the Republican response. There was no own goal. Like the water incident with Marco Rubio or the really embarrassing Bobby Jindal one.

But I think the president is going to remain the president.

JOY REID, MSNBC HOST: I do think -- she did try to use the Youngkin formula about teaching -- telling people what they can say and what they can think. But the Republican Party is actively in Republican states telling people what they can read.

So the problem is their policies are counter to her sort of we're the party of freedom line. They're also now the party of active book bans which are incredibly unpopular, which are going to get tremendous pushback, and which are a huge opportunity for Democrats if they choose to use it.

MADDOW: And Texas turning in local parents who you suspect might have (INAUDIBLE) so they can be investigated right away.

WALLACE: Exactly.

MADDOW: Let's bring in to the conversation now New York Democratic Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who knows something about right- wing, misconstrual, and out of context taken in comments.

Congresswoman, it's great to see you. Thanks making time to being here tonight.

REP. ALEXANDRIA OCASIO-CORTEZ (D-NY): Of course.

MADDOW: What was your reaction to what the president laid out tonight both domestically and in terms of the crisis abroad? How did you like what you heard?

OCASIO-CORTEZ: Well, you know, I think that the president started off his speech with a very, very strong opening in really I think reassuring Americans on our country's stance in response to the crisis in Ukraine right now. I think that he really went in with a goal to build bipartisan and speak to building a bipartisan consensus, speaking to those themes.

And I think that he was very strong, as was mentioned earlier, about pre- butting a lot of Republican talking points.

I do think that there are some things that were left unsaid in which we're really going to have to work on as a party. In order to really speak to constituencies that have historically supported the president, whose turnout we need and whose support we need right now and in the coming years, that perhaps haven't heard their issues spoken to in the way that they wanted to hear it.

Things like student loan debt, our overall -- larger themes and crises in education, as well as the piece on immigration was really just glossed over. And we have over ten -- you know, anywhere between 10 to 13 million immigrants in this country that feel desperate for a path to citizenship. We heard, you know, some speaking to dreamers, but dreamers want their families to be able to stay. They don't want to be separated from their parents either.

So I think there are some things left a little bit to be desired for key constituencies in the Democratic base, but the president's goal was very clear. He was laser focused on really projecting a theme of unity. And I think he stuck to that.

REID: Representative Ocasio-Cortez, it's Joy Reid. You know, I'm curious what you made of the president's choice to talk about releasing oil from the strategic reserve and really focusing on making sure to lower gas prices even as we ratchet up sanctions against Russia for what they are doing in Ukraine.

But not really taking a moment in the speech to talk about the other possible policy which you were very much in support of which is to move away from fossil fuels, to move away from oil and natural gas. It was something that even George W. Bush did when he was giving his State of the Union speech during the sort of Iraq conflict.

President Biden did not go there. What do you make of that?

[22:54:58]

OCASIO-CORTEZ: You know, I think that it definitely was a lost opportunity because the entire country does support. There is profound bipartisan support to a long term shift away from fossil fuels. The vast majority of Americans do support ending fossil fuel subsidies, for example.

And not only that but the opportunities to build wind and solar out as well as many other forms of clean energy can have the potential to create millions of union jobs in the United States.

You know, when we talk about releasing strategic reserves, these are short term solutions in order to prevent price shocks. But at the end of the day, we are really building our infrastructure we are only speaking to ways in which we are going to be increasingly reliant on fossil fuels. We're only going to, I think contribute to increased volatility in the future.

You know, what's happening right now, Russia is very, very much reliant on the rest of the world buying its oil. We are releasing oil reserves right now in order to ease that but we shouldn't be reliant on fossil fuels to begin with and that would really solve a lot of these issues.

So you know, I think that there was a lot more to be desired there. EVs, while they are great, they are not the main form of transit for millions of people who live in urban or urban-adjacent areas in the United States.

And so we need to hear more about our transition to clean energy beyond just you know, weatherizing our windows, which is incredibly important and EVs, but we really need to hear more I think about mass transit, trains, high speed rail, and renewable energy.

MADDOW: Congresswoman Ocasio-Cortez, one of the things that you were just talking about in terms of the president's treatment of the issue of immigration, talking to immigrants, talking about dreamers, for example.

I want to get your take on something that we know is coming which is the massive refugee crisis that we are about to see in Europe, that is caused by the Russian attack on Ukraine. So far, authorities say there's already two-thirds of a million people who have been displaced. We will likely see millions of people displaced.

And not just in our country, but around the world. We have seen refugees and immigrants, not just scapegoated but demonized in a way that tends to cross over into all sorts of politics.

Now that we know a huge new migration is going to start because of that war, do you have caution or words of advice or lessons learned for your own party, for American politics generally, on how to be smarter about those politics in terms of how to be smarter about those politics, about the inevitable demonization of those victimized people?

OCASIO-CORTEZ: Absolutely. Well, first and foremost, I think the world is watching and many immigrants and refugees are watching. And how the world treats Ukraine should be -- and Ukrainian refugees should be how we are treating all refugees in the United States. I mean especially when you look at such stark juxtapositions where so many of the factors are in common, with Syria, for example.

The way the world treated Syrian refugees versus the way that the world is greeting Ukrainian refugees is a very stark contrast. And you know, I think that the way that we are looking at immediate granting of TPS to Ukrainian refugees, which is what we need to be doing, as well as many others, is something that we really need to keep in mind.

Because I do believe that, for example, the thousands of people who try to seek legal refuge on our southern border, how Haitian refugees have been treated by the United States, not just in past administrations, but frankly this one, is not right.

And we really need to make sure that when we talk about accepting refugees, that we are meaning it for everybody, no matter where you come from. But I do believe that this also presents a profound opportunity because of the amount of extraordinary support for Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees.

If we grant TPS to Ukrainian refugees, this is also an opportunity to finally create a path to citizenship for TPS recipients, a lot of people don't know that TPS recipients by and large do not really have a concrete path to citizenship. And many of them here for decades.

So I think that this is also, while there is a risk, there's also a profound opportunity for us to make the crooked path straight on this issue.

MADDOW: New York Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, thank you so much for your time tonight. I know this is like kind of Christmas and birthday and everything all wrapped up in one in Washington. We appreciate you making time.

OCASIO-CORTEZ: Thank you. Thank you very much.

MADDOW: All right. You know, it's interesting talking with Congresswoman Ocasio-Cortez. She's obviously one of the most, if not the most visible member of the progressive wing, sort of strong progressive wing of the Democrats in the House.

[22:59:58]

MADDOW: Seeing the chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus Pramila Jayapal after President Biden's speech finished up, seeing her being the first person on the floor of the chamber today to actually not just talk to the president, but give him a hug, is a reminder about how much progressives are expecting from this administration and from this president.

It is 11:00 now here on the east coast. President Biden has wrapped up his State of the Union address.

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