

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the text of U.S. Sen. Tim Scott's, R-S.C, GOP response to President Joe Biden's speech to a Joint Session of Congress Wednesday as provided by the office of the Senate minority leader:

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Good evening. I'm Senator Tim Scott from the great state of South Carolina.

We just heard President Biden's first address to Congress. Our President seems like a good man. His speech was full of good words. But President Biden promised you a specific kind of leadership. He promised to unite a nation. To lower the temperature. To govern for all Americans, no matter how we voted. That was the pitch. You just heard it again.

But our nation is starving for more than empty platitudes. We need policies and progress that bring us closer together. But three months in, the actions of the President and his party are pulling us further apart.

I won't waste your time tonight with finger-pointing or partisan bickering. You can get that on T.V. any time you want. I want to have an honest conversation. About common sense and common ground. About this feeling that our nation is sliding off its shared foundation, and how we move forward together.

Growing up, I never dreamed I'd be standing here tonight. When I was a kid, my parents divorced. My mother, my brother, and I moved in with my grandparents. Three of us, sharing one bedroom. I was disillusioned and angry, and I nearly failed out of school. But I was blessed.

First, with a praying momma. Then with a mentor, a Chick-Fil-A operator named John Moniz. Finally, with a string of opportunities that are only possible here in America.

This past year, I've watched COVID attack every rung of the ladder that helped me up. So many families have lost parents and grandparents too early. So many small businesses have gone under. Becoming a Christian transformed my life — but for months, too many churches were shut down.

Most of all, I am saddened that millions of kids have lost a year of learning when they could not afford to lose a day. Locking vulnerable kids out of the classroom is locking adults out of their future.

Our public schools should have reopened months ago. Other countries' did. Private and religious schools did. Science has shown for months that schools are safe. But too often, powerful grown-ups set science aside. And kids like me were left behind. The clearest case for school choice in our lifetimes.

Last year, under Republican leadership, we passed five bipartisan COVID packages. Congress supported our hospitals, saved our economy, and funded Operation Warp Speed, delivering vaccines in record time. All five bills got 90 or more votes in the Senate. Common sense found common ground.

In February, Republicans told President Biden we wanted to keep working together to win this fight. But Democrats wanted to go it alone. They spent almost \$2 trillion on a partisan bill that the White House bragged was the most liberal bill in American history! Only 1% went to vaccinations. No requirement to re-open schools promptly. COVID brought Congress together five times. This Administration pushed us apart.

Another issue that should unite us is infrastructure. Republicans support everything you think of when you think of 'infrastructure.' Roads, bridges, ports, airports, waterways, high-speed broadband — we're all in! But again, Democrats want a partisan wish list. They

won't even build bridges... to build bridges!

Less than 6% of the President's plan goes to roads and bridges. It's a liberal wish-list of Big Government waste... plus the biggest job-killing tax hikes in a generation. Experts say, when all is said and done, it would lower Americans' wages and shrink our economy.

Tonight we also heard about a so-called "Family Plan." Even more taxing, even more spending, to put Washington even more in the middle of your life — from the cradle, to college. The beauty of the American Dream is that families get to define it for themselves. We should be expanding options and opportunities for all families — not throwing money at certain issues because Democrats think they know best.

"Infrastructure" spending that shrinks our economy is not common sense. Weakening our southern border and creating a crisis is not compassionate.

The President is abandoning principles he held for decades. Now, he says your tax dollars should fund abortions. He's laying groundwork to pack the Supreme Court. This is not common ground.

Nowhere do we need common ground more desperately than in our discussions of race. I have experienced the pain of discrimination. I know what it feels like to be pulled over for no reason. To be followed around a store while I'm shopping. I remember, every morning, at the kitchen table, my grandfather would have the newspaper in his hands. Later, I realized he had never learned to read it. He just wanted to set the right example.

I've also experienced a different kind of intolerance. I get called "Uncle Tom" and the N-word — by 'progressives'! By liberals! Just last week, a national newspaper suggested my family's poverty was actually privilege because a relative owned land generations before my time. Believe me, I know our healing is not finished.

In 2015, after the shooting of Walter Scott, I wrote a bill to fund body cameras. Last year, after the deaths of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd, I built an even bigger police reform proposal. But my Democratic colleagues blocked it. I extended an olive branch. I offered them amendments. But Democrats used the filibuster to block the debate from even happening. My friends across the aisle seemed to want the issue more than they wanted a solution. But I'm still working. I'm still hopeful.

When America comes together, we've made tremendous progress. But powerful forces want to pull us apart. A hundred years ago, kids in classrooms were taught the color of their skin was their most important characteristic — and if they looked a certain way, they were inferior. Today, kids again are being taught that the color of their skin defines them — and if they look a certain way, they're an oppressor.

From colleges to corporations to our culture, people are making money and gaining power by pretending we haven't made any progress. By doubling down on the divisions we've worked so hard to heal.

You know this stuff is wrong. Hear me clearly: America is not a racist country. It's backwards to fight discrimination with different discrimination. And it's wrong to try to use our painful past to dishonestly shut down debates in the present.

I'm an African-American who has voted in the South all my life. I take voting rights personally. Republicans support making it easier to vote and harder to cheat. And so do voters! Big majorities of Americans support early voting, and big majorities support Voter I.D. — including African-Americans and Hispanics. Common sense makes common ground.

But today, this conversation has collapsed. The state of Georgia passed a law that expands early voting; preserves no-excuse mail-in voting; and, despite what the President claimed, did not reduce Election Day hours. If you actually read this law, it's mainstream. It will be

easier to vote early in Georgia than in Democrat-run New York. But the left doesn't want you to know that. They want people to virtue-signal by yelling about a law they haven't even read.

Fact-checkers have called out the White House for misstatements. The President absurdly claims this is worse than Jim Crow. What is going on here? I'll tell you. A Washington power grab.

This misplaced outrage is supposed to justify Democrats' sweeping bill that would take over elections for all 50 states; send public funds to political campaigns you disagree with; and make the bipartisan Federal Elections Commission... partisan! This is not about civil rights or our racial past. It's about rigging elections in the future.

And, no — the same filibuster that President Obama and President Biden praised when they were Senators, that Democrats used just last year, has not suddenly become a racist relic just because the shoe is on the other foot.

Race is not a political weapon to settle every issue the way one side wants. It's too important.

This should be a joyful springtime for our nation. This Administration inherited a tide that had already turned. The coronavirus is on the run! Thanks to Operation Warp Speed and the Trump Administration, our country is flooded with safe and effective vaccines. Thanks to our bipartisan work last year, job openings are rebounding.

So why do we feel so divided and anxious? A nation with so much cause for hope should not feel so heavy-laden. A President who promised to bring us together should not push agendas that tear us apart. The American family deserves better. And we know what better looks like!

Just before COVID, we had the most inclusive economy in my lifetime. The lowest unemployment ever recorded for African-Americans, Hispanics, and Asian-Americans. The lowest for women in nearly 70 years. Wages were growing faster for the bottom 25% than the top 25%. That happened because Republicans focused on expanding opportunity for all Americans.

We passed Opportunity Zones, criminal justice reform, and permanent funding for Historically Black Colleges and Universities for the first time ever. We fought the drug epidemic, rebuilt our military, and cut taxes for working families and single moms like mine.

Our best future won't come from Washington schemes or socialist dreams. It will come from you — the American people. Black, Hispanic, white and Asian. Republican and Democrat. Brave police officers and Black neighborhoods. We are not adversaries. We are family! We are all in this together.

And we get to live in the greatest country on Earth. The country where my grandfather, in his 94 years, saw his family go from cotton to Congress in one lifetime.

So I am more than hopeful — I am confident — that our finest hour is yet to come. Original sin is never the end of the story. Not in our souls, and not for our nation. The real story is always redemption.

I am standing here because my mom has prayed me through some very tough times. I believe our nation has succeeded the same way. Because generations of Americans, in their own ways, have asked for grace — and God has supplied it.

So I will close with a word from a worship song that helped me through this past year. The music is new, but the words draw from Scripture.

(May) the Lord bless you and keep you,

Make His face shine upon you

And be gracious to you...

May His presence go before you,

And behind you, and beside you...

In your weeping and rejoicing,

He is with you...

May His favor be upon (our nation), for a thousand generations

And your family... and your children...

And their children.

Good night, and God bless.