

U.S. SENATOR BEN CARDIN



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January 23, 2021

Dear Fellow Marylander:

This week, America started to write a new chapter of history with President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris. Two weeks after an armed insurrectionist crowd invaded the United States Capitol with the intent of overturning the election results, our nation witnessed the peaceful transfer of power as defined by our Constitution.

As President Biden said in his inaugural address on Wednesday: *"Through a crucible for the ages America has been tested anew and America has risen to the challenge. Today, we celebrate the triumph not of a candidate, but of a cause, the cause of democracy."*

I was overjoyed to attend the swearing-in ceremony and be there to affirm the resiliency of our democracy. It was an inaugural like no other before it. The emotions across the sparse crowd were palatable. For the most part, we stood together as Americans – not Democrats or Republicans or independents. We all understood the urgency of the moment. It was a turning point in history and essential for the forward progress and endurance of our nation.

As President Biden said: *"We look ahead in our uniquely American way – restless, bold, optimistic – and set our sights on the nation we know we can be and we must be."*

In more “normal” times, many Marylanders would have attended the celebration or events surrounding the inauguration. Like you, I would have given anything to have tens of thousands of everyday people on the National Mall rather than thousands of National Guard troops on patrol. While I was a huge fan of the virtual inauguration parade and concert, which brought this experience into living rooms from coast to coast, I do look forward to a future time when we can gather safely as a nation to mark these magical moments together.

As the president said: “Few periods in our nation’s history have been more challenging or difficult than the one we’re in now ... To overcome these challenges – to restore the soul and to secure the future of America – requires more than words. It requires that most elusive of things in a democracy: Unity.”

I am an optimist but also a realist. The inauguration of Joe Biden as president of the United States is an opportunity to start anew. It’s a chance to restore alliances and renew the American spirit. We will not simply forget the last four years, but we can agree to learn from it and right the wrongs that put Americans at risk and cost people their livelihoods and their lives.

Together, we can celebrate the first woman, first Black and first South Asian vice president in our nation’s history. The loud thunder you heard on Wednesday was not only applause for the new administration, but the shattering of another glass ceiling by a remarkably qualified and strong American who will lead this country with experiences no one who has come before her has ever brought to the office. Congratulations, Madam Vice President!

Despite the uplifting spirit of the inauguration of our 46th president, the realist in me understands how close we came to losing so much of what it means to be America. Our country has never been perfect but it has been a beacon around the world because of what we aspire to be. Freedom and opportunity, truth and the rule of law have been bedrock, but not always accessible to all. That two such Americas exist is not a new concept but we now have a president who aims to bridge that gap and heal the divide rather than merely pit one person against another in fear or hate.

As President Biden said: “I know the forces that divide us are deep and they are real. But I also know they are not new. Our history has been a constant struggle between the American ideal that we are all created equal and the harsh, ugly reality that racism, nativism, fear, and demonization have long torn us apart. The battle is perennial. Victory is never assured. Through the Civil War, the Great Depression, World War, 9/11, through struggle, sacrifice, and setbacks, our ‘better angels’ have always prevailed. In each of these moments, enough of us came together to carry all of us forward. And, we can do so now.”

If you did not have the opportunity to watch the presidential inaugural ceremony or any of the events of this week, I urge you to do so. Watch with an open heart and open mind of what America could be when we all work and play together. The problems of our nation are not sugar-coated or brushed aside, but viewed through a prism of what could be when we try to connect with one another.

Lastly, if you only watch one thing from the full week of events, [please watch](#) the incredible recitation of America's Youth Poet Laureate Amanda Gorman. You can read her poignant words below, but I promise you that the presentation of this young woman, who stands on the shoulders of American greats like Robert Frost and Maya Angelou, will touch your soul.

Thank you and stay well.



Ben Cardin

"The Hill We Climb" – *by Amanda Gorman. Written for and recited at the inauguration of President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris*

When day comes we ask ourselves, where can we find light in this never-ending shade? The loss we carry, a sea we must wade. We've braved the belly of the beast. We've learned that quiet isn't always peace. In the norms and notions of what just is isn't always justice.

And yet, the dawn is ours before we knew it. Somehow, we do it. Somehow, we've weathered and witnessed a nation that isn't broken, but simply unfinished. We, the successors of a country and a time where a skinny Black girl descended from slaves and raised by a single mother can dream of becoming president, only to find herself reciting for one.

And yes, we are far from polished, far from pristine, but that doesn't mean we are striving to form a union that is perfect. We are striving to forge our union with purpose, to compose a country committed to all cultures, colors, characters and conditions of man.

And so, we lift our gazes not to what stands between us, but what stands before us. We close the divide because we know, to put our future first, we must first put our differences aside. We lay down our arms so we can reach out our arms to one another. We seek harm to none and harmony for all. Let the globe, if nothing else, say this is true. That even as we grieved, we grew. That even as we hurt, we hoped; that even as we tired, we tried; that

we'll forever be tied together, victorious. Not because we will never again know defeat, but because we will never again sow division.

Scripture tells us to envision that everyone shall sit under their own vine and fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid. If we're to live up to our own time, then victory won't lie in the blade, but in all the bridges we've made. That is the promise to glade, the hill we climb if only we dare it. Because being American is more than a pride we inherit; it's the past we step into and how we repair it. We've seen a forest that would shatter our nation rather than share it, would destroy our country if it meant delaying democracy. And this effort very nearly succeeded.

But while democracy can be periodically delayed, it can never be permanently defeated. In this truth, in this faith we trust, for while we have our eyes on the future, history has its eyes on us. This is the era of just redemption. We feared it at its inception. We did not feel prepared to be the heirs of such a terrifying hour, but within it, we found the power to author a new chapter, to offer hope and laughter to ourselves.

So, while once we asked: "How could we possibly prevail over catastrophe?" Now we assert, "How could catastrophe possibly prevail over us?"

We will not march back to what was, but move to what shall be: a country that is bruised, but whole; benevolent, but bold; fierce and free. We will not be turned around or interrupted by intimidation, because we know our inaction and inertia will be the inheritance of the next generation. Our blunders become their burdens. But one thing is certain, if we merge mercy with might, and might with right, then love becomes our legacy, and change our children's birthright.

So, let us leave behind a country better than one we were left. With every breath from my bronze-pounded chest, we will raise this wounded world into a wondrous one. We will rise from the gold-limned hills of the West. We will rise from the wind-swept Northeast where our forefathers first realized revolution. We will rise from the lake-rimmed cities of the Midwestern states. We will rise from the sun-baked South. We will rebuild, reconcile and recover in every known nook of our nation, in every corner called our country our people diverse and beautiful will emerge battered and beautiful.

When day comes, we step out of the shade aflame and unafraid. The new dawn blooms as we free it. For there is always light. If only we're brave enough to see it. If only we're brave enough to be it.

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