

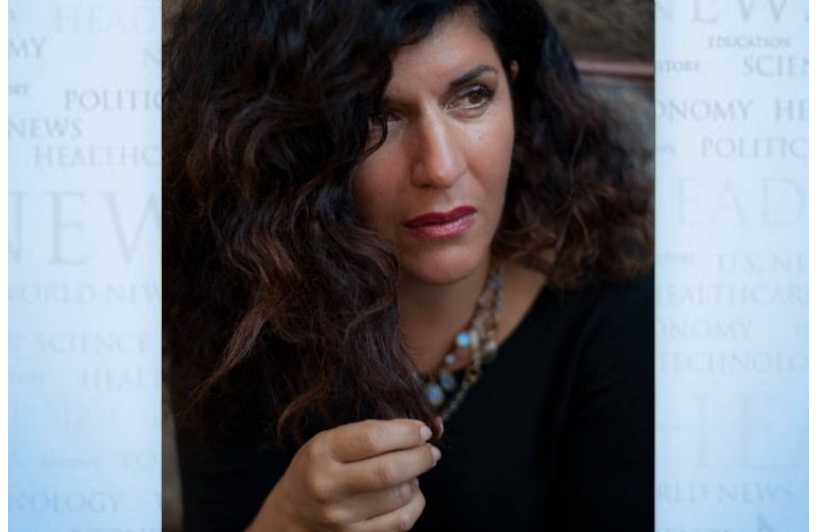


Written by [Salena Zito](#) on March 19, 2024

Biden's Speech Was Not the Win the Political Class Thought It Was

DELAWARE COUNTY, Pennsylvania — It is a bit jarring to observe the divide between what the legacy press, Democrats and cable news hosts observed when they watched President Joe Biden's State of the Union address, and how persuadable voters of both Republican and Democratic leanings reacted.

On the day after the speech, MSNBC's Joe Scarborough said Biden gave "his best speech of his presidency by far.... Strongest speech, and, most importantly, for people that were thinking, 'Oh, he's too old. He's too that, man' ... he gave a lot more than he got."



Salena Zito

CNN's Stephen Collinson wrote that Biden "projected vigor and forcefulness" and "was a trenchant master of the chamber of the House of Representatives, effectively wielding the theatrics of the presidency and commanding an hour of unfiltered primetime television."

However, in sitting with several voters whose presidential choices have been all over the place for the past 20 years, with some of them jumping from George W. Bush to Barack Obama to Donald Trump to Joe Biden, the president's comportment did not come off as strength.

Instead, many of them felt they were being yelled at.

Intellectually, they all understood why Biden needed to project vigor. They also all agreed that vigor and yelling are not the same thing.

These suburban Philadelphia voters say Trump's comportment is a bridge too far for them, but they also don't care much for Biden either. Where their votes go, they have no idea, but if you are a Democratic strategist sitting at home and thought Biden's performance shored up this voting bloc, you might want to go back to the drawing board.

NPR handled the coverage wisely. Reporter Tamara Keith spent some time with Karen Seagraves, 52, the kind of independent voter President Joe Biden's campaign needs to attract in states such as Pennsylvania, Michigan, Georgia, Wisconsin, Arizona and her home state of North Carolina.

Keith wrote an hour into Biden's speech that Seagraves said she wasn't feeling it.

"I think this entire thing has been lackluster," Seagraves told her, adding, "I can't think of a better word. Just — vanilla," she said.

As Biden touched on a laundry list of political promises, Seagraves said she thought his details were slim and that she still had no sense of what his plans were for the country, and at the end of the speech remarked she was left feeling it was an hour of her life she was never going to get back.



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Five years ago, the Democrats took control of this suburban county for the first time since the Civil War when the five-member council went from an all-Republican panel to an all-Democratic panel.

Much of that flip was blamed on Trump, although Delaware County voters have voted Democratic for president since Al Gore, so the flip is more nuanced and had an equal amount to do with the flight of liberal voters to the Philadelphia suburban counties over the past 20 years.

Trump is not going to win Delaware County. Nonetheless, the sentiments of some of the college-educated suburban voters who live here, who own small businesses or who commute to work in the city of Philadelphia are important in understanding if Biden is hitting his audience.

This is the challenge of 2024 and is very similar to what people experienced in 2016 when everyone who turned on the network news or the cable networks spent the whole summer and up until Election Day believing that Hillary Clinton was going to win.

Yet those of us reporting about what we heard and saw and experienced on the ground thought, "Wait a minute, the liberal media aren't telling the entire story nor focusing on the voters who would decide the election."

In the rare times the liberal media did focus on those voters, the voters were treated as caricatures, such as that they were all without a college education. Not true. College-educated men and women did vote for Trump, the reporters were just looking in the wrong counties.

Reporters focused on counties with a high education propensity such as Delaware County and ignored college-educated voters where the education achievement was mixed, as in Washington County.

The impression left after the post-State of the Union coverage was that Biden was back.

But polling done by ABC News after the speech showed 29% said that he had done better than they expected, 12% said it was worse than expected, and 24% said it was exactly what they expected.

A whopping 35% said they did not read, see or hear about the address.

When you dig deeper into the poll, voters gave Biden abysmal marks on the economy, inflation, crime and immigration, with Biden trailing Trump anywhere from 6 to 16 percentage points on those issues.

The misguided media narrative shows the importance of watching the people who will turn this election one way or another, rather than the people who share the media's worldview.

The day after the big speech, Biden came here as his first follow-up. The day began with a visit to Rose Valley, a wealthy majority-white suburb here in Delaware County where the median family income is \$118,637 and the poverty level hovered at 1%, to first visit the private home of cafe owner Jack Cunicelli. The Biden campaign promoted the visit as a "kitchen table conversation" with the Cunicelli family, who own 320 Market Cafe in Swarthmore.

Perhaps next time, a visit with a family to have a "kitchen table conversation" might be best done with a family struggling to make ends meet.

Biden later told reporters the oldest Cunicelli brother attended school with his son Hunter Biden in Delaware.

A HarrisX/Forbes overnight poll released five days after the address showed that the speech did indeed land flat with voters, with a whopping 59% saying it served to divide the country further.

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She reaches the Everyman and Everywoman through shoe-leather journalism, traveling from Main Street to the beltway and all places in between. To find out more about Salena and read her past columns, please visit the Creators Syndicate webpage at www.creators.com.

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