Oaths of allegiance signed by Revolutionary War soldiers, witnessed by General Washington, documents and artifacts related to the civil war, segregation, women’s suffrage and the civil rights movement were also on hand.

I noted then that it was an affirmation to me of the tumultuous seas through which our ship of state has sailed for more than 200 years, with many brilliant and inspired individuals at the helm, along with personalities ranging from mediocre to malevolent.

But our system of government had survived them all.

I noted then and echo today that serious challenges lie ahead, but any honest reckoning of our history and our prospects will note that we have confronted and survived more daunting challenges than we now face. Ours is a durable, resilient system of government, designed to withstand the foibles of those who from time to time occupy this place, including yours truly.

So, as I start a new chapter in the coming weeks, I am grateful for having had the privilege of serving here.

It is my sincere hope that those this in this body will always remember the words of Lincoln: “We shall nobly save, or meanly lose, the last best hope of earth. The way forward, he said, is “plain, peaceful, generous, just—a way which, if followed, the world will forever applaud and God will forever bless.

I yield the floor.

TO MEND THE NATION, WE MUST FIRST MEND THE SENATE

Mr. President, for more than four decades, I have had the distinct privilege of serving in the United States Senate, what some have called the world’s greatest deliberative body. Speaking on the Senate floor; debating legislation in committee; corralling the support of my colleagues on compromise legislation—these are the moments I will miss. These are the memories I will cherish forever.

To address this body is to experience a singular feeling—a sense that you are a part of something bigger than yourself, a minor character in the grand narrative that is America.

No matter how often I come to speak at this lectern, I experience that feeling—again and again. But today, if I’m being honest, I also feel sadness. Indeed, my heart is heavy. It aches for the times when we actually lived up to our reputation as the world’s greatest deliberative body. It longing for the times in which Democrats and Republicans would meet on middle ground rather than retreat to partisan trenches.

Now some may say I’m waxing nostalgic, yearning—as old men often do—for some golden age that never existed. They would be wrong.

The Senate I’ve described is not some fairytale but the reality we once knew. Having served as a Senator for nearly 42 years, I can tell you this: things weren’t always as they are now.

I was here when this body was at its best. I was here when regular order was the norm, when legislation was debated in committee, and when members worked constructively with one another for the good of the country. I was here when we could say, without any hint of irony, that we were members of the world’s greatest deliberative body.

Times have certainly changed.

Over the last several years, I have witnessed the subversion of Senate rules, the abandonment of regular order, and the full-scale deterioration of the judicial confirmation process. Polarization has ossified. Gridlock is the new norm. And like the humidity here, partisanship permeates everything we do.

On both the left and the right, the bar of decency has been set so low that jumping over it is no longer the objective. Limbo is the new name of the game. How low can you go? The answer, it seems, is always lower.

All the evidence points to an unsettling truth: The Senate, as an institution, is in crisis. The committee process lies in shambles. Regular order is a relic of the past. And compromise—one the guiding credo of this great institution—is now synonymous with surrender.

Since I first came to the Senate in 1978, the culture of this place has shifted fundamentally—and not for the better. Here, there used to be a level of congeniality and kinship among colleagues that was hard to find anywhere else. In those days, I counted Democrats among my very best friends. One moment, we would be locking horns on the Senate floor; the next, we would be breaking bread together over family dinner.

My unlikely friendship with the late Senator Ted Kennedy embodied the spirit of goodwill and collegiality that used to thrive here. Teddy and I were a case study in contradictions. He was a dyed-in-the-wool Democrat; I was a resolute Republican. But by
choosing friendship over party loyalty, we were able to pass some of the most significant bipartisan achievements of modern times—from the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Religious Freedom Restoration Act to the Ryan White bill and the State Children’s Health Insurance Program.

Nine years after Teddy’s passing, it’s worth asking: Could a relationship like this even exist in today’s Senate? Could two people with polar-opposite beliefs and from vastly different walks of life come together as often as Teddy and I did for the good of the country? Or are we too busy attacking each other to even consider friendship with the other side?

Mr. President, many factors contribute to the current dysfunction. But if I were to identify the root of our crisis, it would be this: the loss of comity and genuine good feeling among Senate colleagues.

Comity is the cartilage of the Senate—the soft connective tissue that cushions impact between opposing joints. But in recent years, that cartilage has been ground to a nub. All movement has become bone on bone. Our ideas grate against each other with increasing frequency—and with nothing to absorb the friction. We hobble to get any bipartisan legislation to the Senate floor, much less to the President’s desk. The pain is excruciating, and it is felt by the entire nation.

We must remember that our dysfunction is not confined to the Capitol. It ripples far beyond these walls—to every state, to every town, and to every street corner in America.

The Senate sets the tone of American civic life. We don’t mirror the political culture as much as we make it. It’s incumbent on us, then, to move the culture in a positive direction, keeping in mind that everything we do here has a trickle-down effect. If we are divided, then the nation is divided. If we abandon civility, then our constituents will follow.

And so, to mend the nation, we must first mend the Senate. We must restore the culture of comity, compromise, and mutual respect that used to exist here. Both in our personal and public conduct, we must be the very change we want to see in the country. We must not be enemies but friends. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory...will yet swell...when again touched...by the better angels of our nature.

These are not my words but the words of President Abraham Lincoln. They come from a heartfelt plea he made to the American people long ago on the eve of the Civil War. Lincoln’s admonition is just as timely today as it was then. If ever there were a time in our history to heed the better angels of our nature, it is now.

How can we answer Lincoln’s call to our better angels? In the last year, I have devoted significant time and energy to answering that question. Today, I wish to put flesh on the bones of Lincoln’s appeal.

Our challenge is to rise above the din and divisiveness of today’s politics. It is to tune out the noise and tune into reason. It is to choose patience over impulse, and fact over feeling. It is to reacquaint ourselves with wisdom by returning to core principles.

Today, allow me to offer a prescription for what ails us politically. Allow me to share just a few ideas that—when put into practice—can help us not only fix the Senate but put our nation back on the right path.

Heeding our better angels begins with civility. While our politics have always been contentious, an underlying commitment to civility has held together the tenuous marriage of right and left. But the steady disintegration of public discourse has weakened that marriage, calling into question the very viability of the American experiment.

As the partisan divide deepens, one thing becomes increasingly clear—we cannot continue on the current course. Unless we take meaningful steps to restore civility, the culture wars will push us ever closer toward national divorce.

We would do well to remember that without civility, there is no civilization. Civility is the indispensable political norm—the protective wall between order and chaos. But more than once, that wall has been breached.

Consider recent events: the pipe bomb plot in the midterm election, the terrorist attack in Charlottesville last year, and the shooting at the Congressional baseball practice before that. These are stark reminders that hateful rhetoric, if left to ferment, becomes violence.

Restoring civility requires that each of us speak responsibly. That means the President. That means Congress. And that means everyone listening today.

We live in a media environment that favors outrage over reason, and hyperbole over truth. The loudest voices—not the wisest ones—now dictate the terms of public debate. For evidence, simply turn on the TV. But be sure to turn down the volume.

The media deserves some culpability in creating this environment by adopting outrage as a business model. But we are complicit when we use words to provoke rather than to persuade, to divide rather than to unite. We only make the problem worse when the object of our discourse becomes to belittle the other side—to own the libs, for example, or to disparage the deplorables. If you’re looking to convert someone to your side, humiliating them is probably not the best place to start. Who among us would make friends with the same person who would make him a fool?

Put simply, pettiness is not a political strategy. It is the opposite of persuasion, which should be the ultimate aim of our dialogue. Our better angels call on us to persuade through gentle reason. They call on us to inspire and unite rather than to provoke and incite. In short, they call on us to embrace civility.

In addition to embracing civility, we must rediscover a forgotten virtue, one
that lies at the heart of our nation’s founding: pluralism. Pluralism is the adhesive that holds together the great American mosaic. It is the idea that we can actually be united by our differences, not in spite of them.

In a pluralist society, we can be polar opposites in every respect yet still associate freely with one another. I can be white, conservative, and Christian, and my friend can be black, progressive, and Muslim. We can be different but united precisely because we are united by our right to be different. That, in a nutshell, is pluralism.

Pluralism is the alchemy that makes out of many, one possible. It is the means by which we have been able to weave together the disparate threads of a diverse society more successfully than any nation on earth. At the heart of pluralism is the understanding that our country was built not on a collection of common characteristics but on a common purpose.

When we approach political problems from a pluralist perspective, we recognize that the majority of our disagreements are not matters of good vs. evil but good vs. good. Pluralism acknowledges that there is more than one way to achieve the good life. Accordingly, it seeks to accommodate different conceptions of the good rather than pit them against each other.

The adversary of pluralism is zero-sum politics, which we embrace at our own peril. Zero-sum politics tempts us to view life through an absolutist prism—one that filters all nuance and recasts everything as an either-or fallacy. This distorted way of thinking renders every policy squabbles as a Manichean struggle for the soul of the country. If the Republican tax bill passes, it will be Armageddon. If a Democrat takes the White House, it will be the end of America as we know it. Funny how these prophecies never will be the end of America as we know it. If the Republican tax bill passes, it will be Armageddon. If a Democrat takes the White House, it will be Armageddon. If a Democrat takes the White House, it will be Armageddon. If a Democrat takes the White House, it will be Armageddon. If a Democrat takes the White House, it will be Armageddon.

Nowhere is the pluralist approach more needed than in the fraught relationship between religious liberty and LGBTQ rights. As my colleagues know, I’ve made religious liberty a priority of my public service. Of all the hundreds of pieces of legislation I’ve passed during my 42 years in the Senate, the one that I’m most pleased with, and the one that I hope will most define my legacy, is the Religious Freedom Restoration Act. Religious liberty is a fundamental freedom. It deserves the very highest protection our country can provide.

At the same time, it’s also important to take account of other interests, especially those of our LGBTQ brothers and sisters. We are in the process now of working out the relationship between religious liberty and the rights of LGBTQ individuals here in America. There are some who would treat this issue as a zero-sum game, who would make the religious community and LGBTQ advocates into adversaries. This is a mistake.

Pluralism shows us a better way. It shows us that protecting religious liberty and preserving the rights of LGBTQ individuals are not mutually exclusive. I believe we can find substantial common ground on these issues that will enable us to both safeguard the ability of religious individuals to live their faith and protect LGBTQ individuals from invidious discrimination. We must honor the rights both of believers and LGBTQ individuals. We must, in short, find a path forward that promotes fairness for all.

In my home state, we were able to strike such a balance with the historic Utah Compromise, a bipartisan anti-discrimination law that both strengthened religious freedoms and offered special protections to the LGBTQ community. No doubt we can replicate that same success on a federal level.

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Before President Lincoln beckoned us to our better angels, he warned that a house divided against itself cannot stand. That warning is especially relevant in our time. Today our house is as divided as any time since the Civil War.

Each year, red and blue America drift further apart. As progressives move to the coasts and conservatives retreat to the interior, we increasingly sort ourselves by geography. We also sort ourselves by ideology, with media diets catered to quiet our cognitive dissonance and confirm our pre-conceived notions. It’s a sad consequence of the Information Age that Americans can now live in the same city but inhabit completely different worlds.

Something has to give; the status quo cannot hold. These are, or should be, the United States of America. While that name has always been more aspirational than descriptive, it at least gives us an ideal to strive for.

To achieve the unity that is our namesake we must reject the politics of division, starting with identity politics. Identity politics is nothing more than dressed-up tribalism. It is the deliberate and often unnatural segregation of people into categories for political gain. This practice conditions us to define ourselves and each other by the groups to which we belong—in other words, the things that divide us rather than unite us.

When institutionalized, identity politics causes us to lose sight of our shared values. In time, we come to see each other not as fellow Americans united by common purpose but as opposing members of increasingly narrow social subgroups. And thus begins the long descent into intersectional hell.

Our better angels call on us to resist identity politics by recommitting ourselves to the American idea, the
idea that our immutable characteristics do not define us. It’s the idea that all of us—regardless of color, class or creed—are equal, and that we can work together to build a more perfect union. When we heed this call, we can achieve unity. And ideas—not identity—can resume their rightful place in our public discourse.

Mr. President, this is the last request I will ever make from this lectern—that as a Senate and as a nation, we listen to our better angels; that we recommit ourselves to comity; that we restore civility to the public discourse; that we embrace wholeheartedly the principles of pluralism; and that we strive for unity by rejecting the rhetoric of division.

When we heed our better angels—when we hearken to the voices of virtue native to our very nature—we can transcend our tribal instincts and preserve our democracy for future generations. That we may do so is my humble prayer.

Now, Mr. President, before I close, let my parting words be words of gratitude. There are countless people I need to thank, but first and foremost, I wish to thank the good people of Utah. Without you, I could have accomplished nothing. The landmark reforms that I passed in Congress have always been a joint effort—drafted by me under constant guidance from people like you. In that sense, the legislative legacy I leave behind is not mine but ours. Representing the Beehive State has been the privilege of a lifetime. Thank you for 42 years.

I likewise wish to thank my family—my sweet wife Elaine and our six children, who have stood by me through thick and thin. And of course, I wish to thank my congressional colleagues, especially Leader McConnell and Speaker Ryan, and the countless other public servants I have had the privilege of working with over the years. These are friendships I will treasure forever.

I also wish to thank my protective detail—the 20-plus men and women who have worked day and night to keep me safe over the years. These officers are like family to me.

As all of you know, a Senator is only as good as his staff, which is why I need to recognize mine today. My Finance Committee Staff, led by Jeff Wrase, has helped me accomplish things I never could have accomplished on my own.

In particular, I wish to thank my personal staff—the countless men and women who have served alongside me over the years. Because of you, I have been able to pass more bills into law than any legislator alive today. Thank you. Let me take just a moment to recognize them personally.

Thanks to my Chief of Staff Matt Sandgren, I am ending this term on a crescendo of legislative activity, having introduced more bills this Congress than at any other time during my Senate service. In the last two years, we’ve also enacted a historic number of bills into law. My staff has not let up in the final stretch—not one bit. We’ve been a legislative powerhouse to the very end, and I’ve got Matt Sandgren to thank for that. I’ve had many chiefs of staff, but I think I saved the best for last.

My Utah staff also played a critical role in my legislative success. A huge thank you to Melanie Bowen, Sharon Garn, Annette Riley, Heather Barney, Sean Firth, Cloe Nixon, Jessa Reed, Ron Dean, Matt Hurst, Nathan Jackson, Courtney Brinkerhoff, and Emily Wilson. And here in DC, a huge thank you to Matt Jensen, James Williams, Matt Whitlock, Corey Messervy, Ruthie Montoya, Celeste Gold, Sam Lyman, Chris Bates, Peter Carey, Brendan Chestnut, Kristin McIntosh, Jacob Olidort, Ally Riding, Dianne Browning, Heather Campbell, Nick Clason, Jeff Finegan, Will Holloway, Rick James, Bailee Flitton, Abdul Kalumbi, Monique Laing, Karen LaMontagne, Keri Lyn Michalke, Romel Nicholas, Lauren Paulos, Jordan Roberts, Margo Robbins, and Samantha Ryals. This truly is the best staff on Capitol Hill.

Last, and perhaps most importantly, I wish to thank my Father in Heaven, who has allowed me to serve for much longer than my detractors would have hoped. Each time I walk into this chamber, I am humbled by the significance of it all. And I am reminded of a passage of scripture, one of my favorites: For of him unto whom much is given much is required. Truly, God has given me so much. In return, I’ve tried to give back as much as I could. I hope He will accept my best efforts.

Now before I get any more sentimental, I should note that this is a final floor speech—not a final goodbye. Three weeks from now, I will no longer hold office, but I will continue to hold a special place for all of you in my heart. I look forward to continuing these special friendships even long after I have left the Senate.

Thank you, again, to everyone. May God bless all of you. May He bless the Senate, and may He bless the United States of America.

With that Mr. President, I yield the floor.