Hundreds of thousands gather on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., for President Barack Obama’s second inauguration, a crowning moment after what had been a bruising campaign.

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Transcript

Calling for Unity, Obama Asks Nation to Work Together

BRIAN WILLIAMS, anchor:
And good evening from Capitol Hill, where President Barack Obama has been inaugurated for a second term in office. And while the contrast to his first inauguration four years ago were obvious and numerous, it was still a sight to behold here today, a uniquely American spectacle; not a peaceful transition of power, but a continuation of a Presidency. And the 44th President took the occasion in one of the shorter speeches of its type of the modern era to lay out a second-term agenda. It was at times a challenge, a call to action, a reaffirmation, a call for equality, and it capped off another historic day for the newly-reelected President.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA: I, Barack Hussein Obama, do solemnly swear.
WILLIAMS: For the 44th President of the United States, his position already cemented in the history books, this was the crowning moment--his reward after a bruising campaign, his entry into the even more exclusive club of two-term Presidents.

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Thank you.
WILLIAMS: The President’s day started with morning services at the place they call for good reason the church of the Presidents, St. John’s across the street from the White House. Across Washington, hundreds of thousands of people were already beginning to gather on the National Mall. As the Obamas left church, choirs performed at the Capitol for the early arrivals.

CHOIR (singing): This land was made for you and me.
WILLIAMS: Back at the White House and following tradition, the President hosted Congressional leaders
for coffee. While across town on the inaugural stand, distinguished guests took their places—the justices of the Supreme Court, former President and Mrs. Carter, former President and Secretary Clinton. At midmorning, the Presidential procession left the White House and made its way to the Capitol. A journey of just under two miles, though, the political distance lately has been much greater.

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Thank you. I miss this place.

WILLIAMS: At the Capitol, the assembled crowd got its first glimpse of the Obama family. Daughters Malia and Sasha, everyone remarking at once how much they have grown since this same event four years ago. Then, First Lady Michelle Obama. And finally, the Man of the Hour.

MAN: Ladies and gentlemen, the President of the United States, Barack H. Obama.

WILLIAMS: In honor of Martin Luther King Day, the inaugural invocation was delivered by Myrlie Evers-Williams, widow of the slain civil rights leader Medgar Evers.

MYRLIE EVERS-WILLIAMS: One hundred and fifty years after the Emancipation Proclamation and 50 years after the March on Washington, we celebrate the spirit of our ancestors.

WILLIAMS: Vice President Biden was sworn in by Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor.

JUSTICE SONIA SOTOMAYOR: So help me God.

VICE PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN: So help me God.

JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Congratulations.

JAMES TAYLOR (singing): Oh beautiful, for spacious skies…

WILLIAMS: Then James Taylor’s rendition of America the Beautiful.

TAYLOR (singing): For amber waves of grain.

WILLIAMS: And then the moment was at hand. The President swore his oath on two bibles. One was Abraham Lincoln’s, the other Doctor Martin Luther King Junior’s.

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Preserve, protect, and defend--


CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: So help you God.

PRESIDENT OBAMA: So help me God.

CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Congratulations, Mister President.

WILLIAMS: And unlike four years ago, Chief Justice Roberts and the President made it through, using the correct wording.

SENATOR CHUCK SCHUMER: Barack H. Obama.

WILLIAMS: And then came the President’s second inaugural address.

PRESIDENT OBAMA: This generation of Americans has been tested by crises that steeled our resolve and proved our resilience. A decade of war is now ending. An economic recovery has begun. We must make the hard choices to reduce the cost of health care and the size of our deficit. But we reject the belief that America must choose between caring for the generation that built this country and investing in the generation that will build its future. The commitments we make to each other—through Medicare and Medicaid and Social Security—these things do not sap our initiative, they strengthen us. They do not make us a nation of takers. They free us to take the risks that make this country great. We will respond to the
threat of climate change, knowing that the failure to do so would betray our children and future generations. We, the people, still believe that enduring security and lasting peace do not require perpetual war. And we must be a source of hope to the poor, the sick, the marginalized, the victims of prejudice. Our journey is not complete until our gay brothers and sisters are treated like anyone else under the law. Our journey is not complete until we find a better way to welcome the striving, hopeful immigrants who still see America as a land of opportunity. Our journey is not complete until all our children, from the streets of Detroit to the hills of Appalachia to the quiet lanes of Newtown, know that they are cared for and cherished and always safe from harm. Progress does not compel us to settle centuries-long debates about the role of government for all time, but it does require us to act in our time. With common effort and common purpose, with passion and dedication, let us answer the call of history and carry into an uncertain future that precious light of freedom. Thank you. God bless you. And may He forever bless these United States of America.

WILLIAMS: Following the President, the music, poetry, and pageantry of the day beginning with Kelly Clarkson.

KELLY CLARKSON (singing): Let freedom ring.

WILLIAMS: Then poet Richard Blanco.

RICHARD BLANCO: The I Have A Dream, we all keep dreaming.

WILLIAMS: And Beyonce.

BEYONCE KNOWLES (singing): And the home of the brave. The brave.

WILLIAMS: And when it was over, the President paused as if to take it in one last time. Then it was back to business, a signing ceremony making cabinet nominations official. Senator Reid was given the pen from the President’s pocket.

PRESIDENT OBAMA: And that’s yours.

WILLIAMS: Followed by a Congressional luncheon in the Capitol’s Statuary Hall. Lobster and bison and apple pie and talk of getting along.

SENATOR SCHUMER: If you don't like the food, you can't blame it on one party or the other.

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Thank you everybody. God bless you and God bless America.

WILLIAMS: After that a moment to review the passing troops on the Capitol steps. Then into the motorcade and the whole caravan headed back to the White House with a lot of folks waiting to see them along the way. Today’s inaugural parade extended a tradition that started with George Washington himself. It included a more recent tradition in our modern age of lockdown security, actually getting out of the car and walking. Jimmy Carter started it 36 years ago. It's been done just about every time since. Today was no exception. For a President, who complains that his job often keeps him from being out among the people, it's about as close as the Secret Service would allow for today. We had an enormous team covering this enormous event here today. We want to bring just two members of that team on at first to talk about what we just witnessed. Our Political Director and Chief White House Correspondent Chuck Todd is with us. And David Gregory, Moderator of Meet the Press, and I might add former Chief White House Correspondent. David, we'll start with you. This speech was not short on specifics. In fact it was unusual for the number of specifics and a speech of its kind. What stuck out at you?
DAVID GREGORY (Moderator, Meet the Press): A shorter speech, but a lot of substance there. Here you have a President talking about the need for economic restoration, but he's got a theory of the case. He's talking about lifting up the middle class. A robust defense of a progressive vision of what government ought to do, defending Medicare and Social Security. He'll make modifications. But in this era of budget cutting, he doesn’t want to go too far, that’s the case he made, and I wrote it down. He wants to tackle gun violence, advance gay rights, marriage equality, tackle climate change, and immigration. And this was just the inaugural address. We understand there's more to come, of course, in the State of the Union. All of this against a difficult backdrop where there is going to be trench warfare over the budget. This is a confident President who wants to get about building, I think, a durable, democratic majority in the country.

WILLIAMS: Well, Chuck Todd, that second part of what David just said is where you come in. And--and the question is, how does anything get done? I talked to so many people today who said some-- to some effect of if they can get along at lunch, if the friendliness we saw today on that platform and at that meal happen today, can't these two sides get along and get something out of this Congress?

CHUCK TODD (NBC News Political Director): Well, it all begins in March at the end of the day. That’s when they're going to have this big debate, funding the government and this ideological battle that’s been going on for the first four years of the President’s term and the President basically declaring ideological victory that’s saying, hey, the country made a choice. We’re moving not center right, but center left with--with a progressive priorities here but it's all about March, Brian. Can they get this done? Can they balance this budget in some form or another, come to an agreement? Because if they can't do that, he can't get immigration done, he can't get gun control done, he can't get a lot of these other things he talked about today done until they get past this budget impasse.

WILLIAMS: All right. Chuck Todd on a cold night after a cold day on the North Lawn of the White House where the reviewing stand is. David Gregory, our thanks to you as well.