

## President Biden Displays Character of Past Presidents

By Don Sutherland

In all of his conduct leading up to Wednesday's inauguration and in his inaugural address, President Joe Biden demonstrated that he is of the caliber of the many good Presidents who preceded him.

The character of a leader is often defined, both in how he or she handles victory and how he or she handles defeat. Genuine leaders are magnanimous in victory and gracious in defeat. By those criteria, the United States has been blessed with good, even great leaders, more often than not.

Following the bitterly-fought election of 1800 that saw Thomas Jefferson defeat John Adams, who had been seeking re-election, the young nation reached its first crossroads in the transfer of power. Adams, who was the target of withering attacks, could easily have taken the low road. He could have made it as difficult as possible for his successor to take office. Adams chose otherwise.

In a letter to Jefferson dated February 20, 1801, Adams wrote:

*In order to save you the trouble and expence of purchasing horses & carriages, which will not be necessary, I have to inform you that I shall leave in the stables of the United States seven horses and two carriages with harness the property of the United States. These may not be suitable for you, but they will certainly save you a considerable expence as they belong to the studd of the Presidents Household.*

In a reply to Jefferson dated March 24, 1801, Adams concluded, "This part of the Union is in a state of perfect Tranquility and I see nothing to obscure your prospect of a quiet and prosperous Administration, which I heartily wish you."

Adams understood that his nation's success now depended in good measure on Jefferson's success. The election was in the past. Jefferson was now the President of all Americans.

The March 4, 1801 edition of the *National Intelligencer* conveyed similar sentiments. On the day Jefferson was to be sworn into office, the newspaper laid out its expectations for the nation's third President and how his work would benefit the United States:

*The people of the United States have done their duty; and it now devolves on those, to whom they have confided the guardianship of their rights, to do theirs. That they will discharge their duty with a dignity, justice and impartiality, that while it shall reflect honor on themselves, will confer lasting benefits upon their country...*

The lesson following the 1800 election and almost all other elections is that difficult races need not yield to perpetual pettiness among the defeated. Genuine leaders rise above the intense conflict of election battles once the will of the people has become known from the counted votes.

On account of its leaders who rose above the raging storms of bitterness that devour lesser individuals, the United States has had more than two centuries' time to pursue the "more perfect Union" set forth in the preamble of its Constitution.

That historic journey resumed last Wednesday with the inauguration of President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris.