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Trump Is at the Peak of His Power. The Question Is for How Long.

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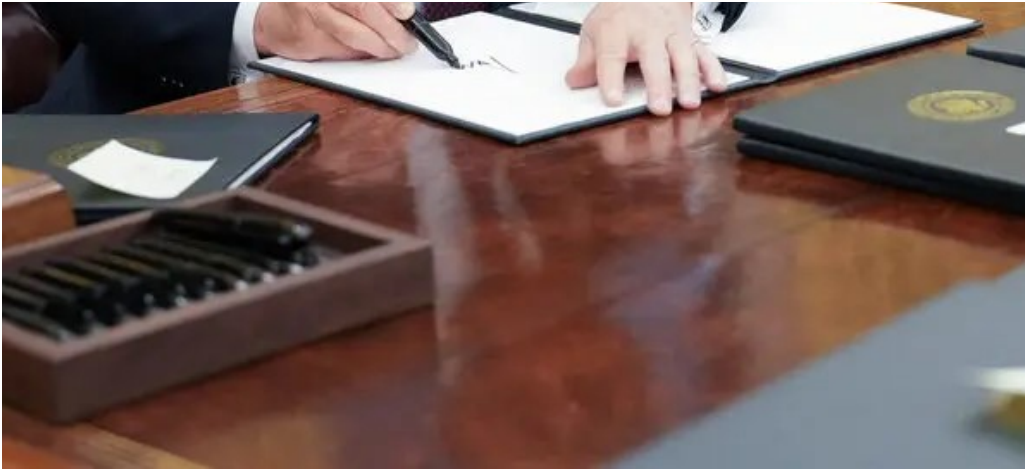
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political memo

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In many ways, Mr. Trump has been given the rarest of opportunities: a second chance to impose a sweeping first-term-style vision, with fresh congressional majorities, just as he had in 2017. Credit...Doug Mills/The New York Times

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Presidential inaugurations that usher a new party into power almost always feel like the dawn of an era — Reagan, Clinton, Bush, Obama — but the second inaugural of Donald J. Trump felt fundamentally different.

The Trump era actually began eight years ago — with a Biden intermission — and President Trump's return this week cemented his standing as the G.O.P.'s unquestioned leader while marking the failure of the so-called resistance movement.

Today, Republicans are defined by a single man more than perhaps either party has been in decades — all while Mr. Trump's tenure has an expiration date in four years, less than half the time he has already dominated the nation's political scene. The Democratic Party is less defined by a particular politician or vision than it has been in years — and is roiled by fierce debates about what the party stands for and how vigorously to oppose Mr. Trump.

“Here I am,” Mr. Trump said in his inaugural address. “The American

people have spoken.”

Mr. Trump is at once a president at the absolute peak of his powers yet also closer to a lame-duck period than any newly inaugurated predecessor in the modern era. The great uncertainty is how that contradiction plays out — in terms of his ability to enact his agenda and to sustain his unmatched hold on Republican voters.

He is already racing [to use his authority while he has it](#), with a raft of sweeping executive orders on immigration and energy, and is also unraveling diversity initiatives in the federal government. He moved so swiftly that he began by signing his first orders at a post-inauguration rally, even before he had returned to the White House as president. [Mr. Trump's honeymoon](#) with the public could last, or his pursuit of so expansive an agenda so quickly could spark intense backlash.

So much of what has already happened with Mr. Trump has been unprecedented — denying the 2020 election; stoking the riot on Jan. 6, 2021; his indictments; his conviction — that it can feel disorienting to delineate the impractical from the impossible, such as his comments [winking and nodding](#) at a third term.

“I stand before you now as proof that you should never believe that something is impossible to do,” Mr. Trump said in his speech on Monday. “In America, the impossible is what we do best.”

Robert Blizzard, a Republican pollster, said that Mr. Trump had both a unique opportunity and a need to move quickly.

“Voters wanted change and they got it,” he said. “Recent presidents — Bush, Obama, Trump and Biden — all saw their public approval erode during their term. So the clock is ticking.”

Among the Republican base Mr. Trump's popularity has not fluctuated

nearly as much as it has with the broader American public, affording him a steady level of support that has allowed him to impose his will on the G.O.P. even when perceived as weakened politically.

In many ways, Mr. Trump has been gifted the rarest of opportunities: a second chance to impose a sweeping first-term-style vision, with fresh congressional majorities, just as he had in 2017. Eight years ago, there was a serious debate inside the Republican Party about whether Mr. Trump was an aberration and whether his takeover could be managed or unwound.

No longer.

That was especially clear on Monday, when Mr. Trump's former vice president, Mike Pence, appeared onscreen at the Capital One Arena entering the inauguration. [He was booed](#) as loudly as some Democrats for having crossed his former boss.

Mr. Trump, meanwhile, was celebrated at two rallies in that same arena, at a post-inaugural luncheon on Capitol Hill and at lavish inaugural parties all across Washington over the weekend. Tech titans once critical of him attended his inauguration and were seated with his cabinet and his family. More celebrities and cultural leaders came to town than in 2017. And Mr. Trump won the popular vote for the first time in three tries.

“The president won a decisive mandate,” Senator John Thune of South Dakota, the new Senate Republican majority leader, said on Fox News on Monday, adding: “And we want to do everything we can to be supportive and to be good partners.”

As ever, Mr. Trump will govern his own way. He delivered three speeches on Monday — an inaugural address, a speech to the overflow crowd indoors at the Capitol and another at the arena — instead of the

usual single speech.

“I was saved by God to make America great again,” he declared in the Capitol Rotunda.

But his role will now involve, eventually and inevitably, a plan of succession. His elevation of JD Vance as vice president has made him [the obvious inheritor](#). Republicans are already quietly speculating that the 2028 field — the first without Mr. Trump since 2012 — could be jumbo-size. Vivek Ramaswamy, a former 2024 presidential candidate, is already making plans [to seek the Ohio governorship](#) in 2026, having bowed out of the new so-called Department of Government Efficiency.

Curt Anderson, a veteran Republican strategist, estimated that 98 percent of the Republican Party is aligned with Mr. Trump — “other than a stray dog here and there.” And he said that even most of Mr. Trump’s quiet skeptics are, for now, “too afraid to oppose him.”

“He’s going to get a lot done, and this shock-and-awe strategy is excellent,” Mr. Anderson said of the planned early blitz of activity.

On Monday, while Mr. Trump’s inauguration was underway, the Democratic National Committee sent a fund-raising email that asked a pointed, poignant question.

“Are you ready to keep fighting?”

The answer is not yet clear. There has been no outburst equivalent to the Women’s March of 2017 among progressive activists. And the party is grappling with the loss of the White House — again — to Mr. Trump, who not only won the popular vote for the first time but also cut into Democratic support among nonwhite working-class voters.

In his inaugural address, Mr. Trump made explicit his promise not to

forget Black and Hispanic voters who cast their ballots for him. At the same time, he delivered the speech surrounded by some of the nation's wealthiest elites in tech and beyond; [among them](#): Elon Musk, Mark Zuckerberg, Jeff Bezos, Bernard Arnault, Sergey Brin, Miriam Adelson and Tim Cook.

Democrats tallied up the wealth of inauguration attendees and arrived at a startling figure — more than \$1 trillion. It's a sum that reinforced the warning that former President Joseph R. Biden Jr. had offered [in his farewell address](#), cautioning against both the “rise of a tech-industrial complex” and “an oligarchy” taking shape. Mr. Biden called both a danger to the nation.

For now, Democrats, long allied with the tech industry, are still seeking a new political posture, as corporate chieftains of Silicon Valley have so visibly curried favor with Mr. Trump throughout the transition.

Gavin Wax, a Trump ally and president of the New York Young Republican Club, said that Mr. Trump had the freedom not to be bogged down by “the political necessities” of seeking re-election.

“Second-term curses happen because they are second terms,” Mr. Wax said. “This is a second first term with a way better team.”

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