

Cheers, fireworks: Trump sweeps in for his big day

WASHINGTON (AP) — With fireworks heralding his big moment, Donald Trump swept into Washington Thursday on the eve of his presidential inauguration and pledged to unify a nation sorely divided and clamoring for change. The capital braced for an onslaught of crowds and demonstrators — with all the attendant hoopla and hand-wringing.

“It’s a movement like we’ve never seen anywhere in the world,” the president-elect declared at a celebratory evening concert Thursday night with the majestic Lincoln Memorial for a backdrop. To the unwavering supporters who were with him from the start, he promised: “You’re not forgotten any more. You’re not forgotten any more.”

“I’ll see you tomorrow,” he called out, and then fireworks exploded into the evening sky.

Trump began taking on more trappings of the presidency during the day, giving a salute to the Air Force officer who welcomed him as he stepped off a military jet with wife Melania at Joint Base Andrews just outside Washington. Later, he placed a ceremonial wreath at Arlington National Cemetery.

At a luncheon in a ballroom at his own hotel, he gave a shout-out to Republican congressional leaders, declaring: “I just want to let the world know we’re doing very well together.” House Speaker Paul Ryan, he said, will finally have someone to sign legislation into law. Then Trump veered into the territory of the unknowable to boast his Cabinet selections had “by far the highest IQ of any Cabinet ever.”

Just blocks away, the White House was quickly emptying out. President Barack Obama had his final weekly lunch with Vice President Joe Biden and got in a few final official acts, cutting the sentences of 330 inmates and placing a call to German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

Vice President-elect Mike Pence, in a tweet, called Inauguration Eve “a momentous



Fireworks light the sky at a pre-inaugural “Make America Great Again! Welcome Celebration” at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington on Thursday. AP Photo/David J. Phillip

day before a historic day,” as security barricades and blockades went up around Washington in preparation for Friday’s swearing-in at the Capitol.

“We are all ready to go to work,” Pence said. “In fact, we can’t wait to get to work for the American people to make it great again.”

Outgoing Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson said he’d be putting on his “favorite DHS jacket” and taking to the streets to inspect security preparations for the inaugural festivities.

He told MSNBC’s “Morning Joe” that areas where inaugural crowds will congregate will be “extra fortified this year with dump trucks, heavily armored vehicles to prevent anybody who’s not authorized from being in the area from driving something in there.” He said there was “no specific credible threat” related to the inauguration.

Trump’s public schedule for the inaugural celebration began at Arlington, where he and Pence stood at attention as a

bugler played taps at the Tomb of the Unknowns. Trump’s wife, children and grandchildren silently looked on.

From there, Trump shuttled to a celebratory welcome concert on the steps of Lincoln Memorial that ended with fireworks filling the sky.

The concert, open to the public, offered headliners including country star Toby Keith, soul’s Sam Moore and rockers 3 Doors Down. But not singer Jennifer Holliday: She backed out after an outcry from Trump critics.

“This is some day, dear friends,” actor Jon Voight told the crowd, casting Trump’s impending inauguration as evidence of divine intervention after “a parade of propaganda that left us all breathless with anticipation, not knowing if God could reverse all the negative lies against Mr. Trump.”

The crowd sent up a cheer when the giant screens flashed video of Trump singing along as Lee Greenwood delivered his signature “God Bless the U.S. A.” Trump declared such a

concert had a never been done before. In fact, a number of the past presidents have staged inaugural concerts among the monuments.

Tom Barrack, the chief architect of Trump’s inaugural festivities, said Trump would show the world that “we can argue, we can fight and we can debate,” but then the nation unites behind one president.

Trump, though, still had an urge to rehearse particulars of the long, 18-month campaign, from its early days when he claimed “a lot of people didn’t give us much of a chance” to the final weeks when his rallies took him to “state after state after state.”

Spokesman Sean Spicer said the president-elect was still making “edits and additions” to the inaugural address he’ll deliver at Friday’s swearing-in.

Never mind about Trump’s gilded private plane: He made his Washington entrance on a Boeing 757 that is part of the fleet of military planes that become

Air Force One whenever the president is aboard. The president-elect, who came to Washington without any press on his plane, was joined on the trip by a gaggle of children, grandchildren and other members of his extended family. Also spotted: bags of dresses and formalwear for the coming days’ festivities.

At the luncheon, Trump made sure to work in a plug for his hotel, saying, “This is a gorgeous room. A total genius must have built this place.” Reporters covering Trump’s remark were removed from the room before the president-elect finished speaking.

Ebullient Trump fans were ready for a three-day party.

“We’re hoping for good weather and hoping for some unity,” said Jon-Paul Oldham, a firefighter who came from Thomaston, Connecticut. He said everyone should want Trump to succeed.

“Wanting him to fail is like wanting the plane to crash but you’re on the plane,” Oldham said.

Inauguration timeline

BEFORE THE CEREMONY

5:30 a.m. (PST) : Donald and Melania Trump attend service at St. John’s Church

6:40 a.m.: President Barack Obama and first lady Michelle Obama welcome the Trumps to the White House

6:45 a.m.: Obamas host a coffee and tea reception for the Trumps.

7:30 a.m.: Trumps, Obamas leave White House for U.S. Capitol

AT THE CAPITOL

8:16 a.m.: Sen. Roy Blunt, Inaugural Committee Chairman, delivers opening remarks

8:21 a.m.: Timothy Michael Cardinal Dolan, Rev. Dr. Samuel Rodriguez and Pastor Paula White-Cain deliver invocations

8:30 a.m.: Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer delivers remarks

8:35 a.m.: Vice Presidential oath is administered by Associate Justice Clarence Thomas

8:47 a.m.: Presidential oath is administered by Chief Justice John Roberts

8:51 a.m.: President Donald Trump delivers inaugural address

9:12 a.m.: Rabbi Marvin Hier, Rev. Franklin Graham and Bishop Wayne T. Jackson deliver benedictions

9:18 a.m.: Jackie Evancho performs the National Anthem

AFTER THE CEREMONY

9:30 a.m.: Obama departs by helicopter from East Front

9:54 a.m.: President’s Room signing ceremony

10:08 a.m.: Luncheon

11:35 a.m.: Review of the troops

Noon: Parade from the Capitol to the White House

4 p.m.: Inaugural balls get underway

Will Trump call on our better angels?

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Tradition suggests it’s time for Donald Trump to set aside the say-anything speaking style and rise to the inaugural moment.

But bucking tradition or ignoring it altogether, is what got Donald Trump to his inaugural moment.

When Trump stands on the west front of the Capitol on Friday and delivers his inaugural address, all sides will be waiting to see whether he comes bearing a unifying message for a divided nation or decides to play up his persona as a disrupter of the established order.

How Trump tends to that balancing act, in both style and content, will be a telling launch for his presidency.

“The inaugural is an address that is meant for the ages,” said Kathleen Hall Jamieson, a communications professor and director of the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania. “In particular, it’s important when you’ve had a divisive election. You need to become president of all of the people, including those who vehemently opposed your election.”

Trump seems to get that. He’s spoken admirably in recent weeks about the speeches of past presidents Ronald Reagan and John F. Kennedy, and is said to be deeply involved in preparing his address.

“This is something very personal to him,” spokesman Sean Spicer said Wednesday, estimating the speech will run about 20 minutes. “He wants to talk about his vision, where he sees this country and where we are right now.”

Trump told Fox on Tuesday that he’ll start his address with words of thanks to “everybody,” including President Barack Obama and his wife, Michelle, for being “so gracious.”



President-elect Donald Trump, left, and his wife Melania Trump arrive to the “Make America Great Again Welcome Concert” at the Lincoln Memorial on Thursday in Washington. AP Photo/Evan Vuoci

The president-elect showed he can deliver a straight-forward, prepared address at the Republican convention, where he largely stuck to a script and shut down anti-Hillary Clinton chants of “lock her up” from the crowd of GOP loyalists.

But that address was strikingly dark in tone, sketching a portrait of an America in crisis, and he later embraced that chant from supporters at his freewheeling campaign rallies.

The inaugural address, by contrast, needs to be “an inherently aspirational speech,” said Michael Gerson, who wrote speeches for President George W. Bush and is a frequent Trump critic. “It has to be about the future and about your vision.”

Abraham Lincoln ended his first inaugural address with a call for unity after some Southern states had formed the Confederacy, saying “every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.”

Veteran speechwriters have plenty of other advice for Trump and his chief wordsmith, Stephen Miller.

Keep it short. Don’t overdo the gravitas. Don’t gloat, the victory tour is over. No deviations from script.

Oh, and don’t undo a successful inaugural address with an intemperate tweet — or two or three — a few hours later.

While Trump used his victory speech on election night to sound a call to “come together as one united people,” his tweets since then have featured name calling, score settling and petulance.

Wayne Fields, a Washington University expert on presidential rhetoric, said Trump is in an awkward situation, going into his inaugural address as a man who seems to regard precise language with contempt “rather than respect.”

After all, this is a candidate who reveled in taking juvenile potshots during the campaign, labeling his rivals “stupid,” “dumb” and “bad.”

“I know words,” he declared at one rally. “I have the best words. But there’s no better word than stupid, right?”

Even if Trump delivers a statesmanlike speech that hits all the right notes, Fields said, “nobody would know how to receive it or who it was coming from or how seriously to take it. It’s a huge

challenge.”

Any reframing of Trump’s tone for the presidency — if he wanted to do that — would require a consistent, longer-term shift, Fields said.

Trump does go into the speech with the benefit of low expectations: His off-the-cuff and often inflammatory style has long been a big part of his appeal. The soaring rhetoric of Obama, for example, simply wouldn’t ring true.

“Because of the high level of attention and the low expectations, he’s far more likely to exceed expectations,” Jamieson said.

At the same time, Gerson cautions, Trump faces an extra hurdle in his inaugural address because he won the election by dividing the country.

“The method that he won creates the initial challenge of his presidency, which is to rally people broadly around his agenda and vision,” he said.

Trump also knows his audience will include plenty of supporters who elected him to challenge the status quo. An address that doesn’t offer any flavor of Trump-the-disruptor could disappoint those eager for a sea change in the ways of Washington.

Beyond Friday, there is the larger question of how Trump will adjust his speaking style over the next four years. His past pledges to “act more presidential” when the time is right are coming due.

“Any president is going to have to learn how to make use of good speeches,” said Gerson, noting that presidents may have to speak at three public events in a given day. “That may be different from anything he’s ever experienced before, because the campaign rewarded spontaneity and being extemporaneous. There are huge portions of the presidency where that can’t be the case.”

As Trump takes oath, many voters still can’t believe it

WASHINGTON (AP)

— On the morning 19 months ago when Donald Trump descended the escalator in his glitzy Manhattan tower, waving to onlookers who lined the rails, many Americans knew little about him beyond that he was very rich and had a thing for firing people on a reality television show.

No one can plausibly say they knew that the man who launched his candidacy that day would be elected the nation’s 45th president. As Trump prepares to take the oath of office Friday, many Americans still can’t quite believe that a presidency that still seems almost bizarrely improbable becomes a reality on Friday.

“I thought it was a joke. He’d run, he’d lose early and he’d be out,” said Christopher Thoms-Bauer, 20, a bookkeeper and college student from Bayonne, New Jersey, who originally backed Florida Sen. Marco Rubio’s Republican candidacy.

Then, Thoms-Bauer recalled, came the night in November when he joined friends in a diner after a New Jersey Devils hockey game and watched, stunned, as Trump eked out wins in key states.

“Having this realization that he was really going to become president was really just a surreal moment,” said Thoms-Bauer, who gave his write-in vote to Evan McMullin, a former CIA agent who ran as a conservative alternative to Trump. “It still doesn’t make sense.”

For all the country’s political divisions, plenty of people on both sides of the aisle share that disbelief.

“I thought there was no way he could win,” said Crissy Bayless, a Rhode Island photographer who on Thursday tweeted a picture of the Statue of Liberty holding her face in her hands, despairing over

Trump’s imminent inauguration.

“How am I feeling? Wow... disgusted, nauseous and honestly like I’m in a nightmare,” Bayless, 38, wrote in a conversation via email.

When Barack Obama won the White House in 2008, the election of the nation’s first black president felt to many like one of the most improbable moments in the nation’s political history. The idea of the election of a white billionaire born of privilege feels implausible to many in very different ways — and that may say as much about the country as it does about Trump.

When Trump announced his candidacy, Kayla Coursey recognized him as the developer who had tried and failed to build a golf course she’d opposed in her hometown of Charlottesville, Virginia.

She recalled him as stubborn and resistant to pressure from local residents and officials. That, she said, made his candidacy for president feel like a joke. Trump’s election felt downright surreal, she said.

In the weeks since, “there was always the hope that things will somehow magically become better. However, now we know (Friday) at noon we’re going to be welcoming President Trump, which is surreal in and of itself,” said Coursey, a college student in Roanoke, Virginia.

Tyler Wilcox, a 23-year-old musician in Riverton, Utah, has been dreading inauguration day. He lists his location on Twitter as “Not My President” and is planning to avoid all coverage of the ceremonies.

“I just feel like it’s, I guess you can say, the beginning of the end,” he said.