

‘Dark Brandon’ returns with Biden’s latest State of the Union

In a remarkable moment during [Joe Biden’s State of the Union](#), the president shamed congressional Republicans for a plan to cut back on [Social Security](#) and Medicare – and made GOP lawmakers, publicly, on live television, agree to preserve them.

That moment and several others throughout [his address on 7 February](#) revived “Dark Brandon”, a meme that challenges right-wing caricatures of a tired 80-year-old man by turning him into a [laser-eyed demi-god-like figure](#), or depicting him [smoking a cigar](#) or as an eyepatch-wearing [Metal Gear Solid character](#).

The meme subverts the formerly fringe “dark MAGA” fascist aesthetic into a semi-ironic tribute to Mr Biden, as *The Independent* previously [reported on the meme phenomenon](#).

White House officials [began using](#) “Dark Brandon” memes last summer, and the images exploded on social media with the FBI’s search of Donald Trump’s Mar-a-Lago property in Palm Beach, Florida.

The meme became popular with his supporters on social media and a [dedicated Reddit page](#) following a string of recent victories for the administration among other Democratic “wins”, including Senate passage of a major climate, tax reform and healthcare bill, news of cooling inflation and declining gas prices, the US killing of Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri, and more recently, shooting down a Chinese surveillance balloon.

“Brandon” itself turns right-wing shorthand for “f*** Joe Biden” into a reappropriated nickname.

His remarks on Tuesday night took direct aim at Republican officials in front of him, as he condemned a plan from Republican Senator Rick Scott that would force Congress to reauthorize existing programmes like Social Security and Medicare every five years.

“Some Republicans want Medicare and Social Security to sunset,” Mr Biden said.

Republicans loudly objected, to which Mr Biden fired back, going off script: “Anybody who doubts it contact my office. I’ll give you a copy.”

After a brief and loud back and forth, the president ended the exchange: “So folks, as we all apparently agree, Social Security, Medicare, is off the books now, right? All right. We’ve got unanimity.”

In another moment, he told Republicans who did not support his infrastructure agenda “see you at the groundbreaking”.

“I’ve never seen anything like it in a State of the Union speech – they ran at him like a pack of lemmings and, with a wink and a grin, he politely directed them to the cliff,” Rex Huppke [writes in USA Today](#), hailing the arrival of “Dark Brandon” who “mops the floor with lost Republicans”.

The “dark MAGA” aesthetic, meanwhile, gained little traction with mainstream figures after brewing within far-right online spaces. The aesthetic embraces a dystopian, authoritarian and Terminator-like image of far-right figures, leading a final battle against their political enemies.

Orange to Red: An Assessment of the Dark MAGA Trend in Far-Right Online Spaces, published by the Global Network on Extremism & Technology, chronicles the evolution of dark MAGA from within the alt-right, emerging from GamerGate to the vengeful, emboldened and extremely online movement laundering fascism through meme warfare.

The aesthetic was adopted and remixed across some larger platforms among far-right influencers and officials, including some members of Congress.

One of the first to do so, [Marjorie Taylor Greene](#), shared a red-hued, laser-eyed “dark MAGA” image of herself on [Twitter in May of 2022](#). Her supporters continue to share similar images in replies to her posts or posts about her.