



President Barack Obama

STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS

January 27, 2010

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THE STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS 2010

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

January 27, 2010

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT IN STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS

U.S. Capitol

9:11 P.M. EST

THE PRESIDENT: Madam Speaker, Vice President Biden, members of Congress, distinguished guests, and fellow Americans:

Our Constitution declares that from time to time, the President shall give to Congress information about the state of our union. For 220 years, our leaders have fulfilled this duty. They've done so during periods of prosperity and tranquility. And they've done so in the midst of war and depression; at moments of great strife and great struggle.

It's tempting to look back on these moments and assume that our progress was inevitable -- that America was always destined to succeed. But when the Union was turned back at Bull Run, and the Allies first landed at Omaha Beach, victory was very much in doubt. When the market crashed on Black Tuesday, and civil rights marchers were beaten on Bloody Sunday, the future was anything but certain. These were the times that tested the courage of our convictions, and the strength of our union. And despite all our divisions and disagreements, our hesitations and our fears, America prevailed because we chose to move forward as one nation, as one people.

Again, we are tested. And again, we must answer history's call.

One year ago, I took office amid two wars, an economy rocked by a severe recession, a financial system on the verge of collapse, and a government deeply in debt. Experts from across the political spectrum warned that if we did not act, we might face a second depression. So we acted -- immediately and aggressively. And one year later, the worst of the storm has passed.

But the devastation remains. One in 10 Americans still cannot find work. Many businesses have shuttered. Home values have declined. Small towns and rural

communities have been hit especially hard. And for those who'd already known poverty, life has become that much harder.

This recession has also compounded the burdens that America's families have been dealing with for decades -- the burden of working harder and longer for less; of being unable to save enough to retire or help kids with college.

So I know the anxieties that are out there right now. They're not new. These struggles are the reason I ran for President. These struggles are what I've witnessed for years in places like Elkhart, Indiana; Galesburg, Illinois. I hear about them in the letters that I read each night. The toughest to read are those written by children -- asking why they have to move from their home, asking when their mom or dad will be able to go back to work.

For these Americans and so many others, change has not come fast enough. Some are frustrated; some are angry. They don't understand why it seems like bad behavior on Wall Street is rewarded, but hard work on Main Street isn't; or why Washington has been unable or unwilling to solve any of our problems. They're tired of the partisanship and the shouting and the pettiness. They know we can't afford it. Not now.

So we face big and difficult challenges. And what the American people hope -- what they deserve -- is for all of us, Democrats and Republicans, to work through our differences; to overcome the numbing weight of our politics. For while the people who sent us here have different backgrounds, different stories, different beliefs, the anxieties they face are the same. The aspirations they hold are shared: a job that pays the bills; a chance to get ahead; most of all, the ability to give their children a better life.

You know what else they share? They share a stubborn resilience in the face of adversity. After one of the most difficult years in our history, they remain busy building cars and teaching kids, starting businesses and going back to school. They're coaching Little League and helping their neighbors. One woman wrote to me and said, "We are strained but hopeful, struggling but encouraged."

It's because of this spirit -- this great decency and great strength -- that I have never been more hopeful about America's future than I am tonight. (Applause.) Despite our hardships, our union is strong. We do not give up. We do not quit. We do not allow fear or division to break our spirit. In this new decade, it's time the American people get a government that matches their decency; that embodies their strength. (Applause.)

And tonight, tonight I'd like to talk about how together we can deliver on that promise.

It begins with our economy.

Our most urgent task upon taking office was to shore up the same banks that helped cause this crisis. It was not easy to do. And if there's one thing that has unified Democrats and Republicans, and everybody in between, it's that we all hated the bank bailout. I hated it -- (applause.) I hated it. You hated it. It was about as popular as a root canal. (Laughter.)

But when I ran for President, I promised I wouldn't just do what was popular -- I would do what was necessary. And if we had allowed the meltdown of the financial system, unemployment might be double what it is today. More businesses would certainly have closed. More homes would have surely been lost.

So I supported the last administration's efforts to create the financial rescue program. And when we took that program over, we made it more transparent and more accountable. And as a result, the markets are now stabilized, and we've recovered most of the money we spent on the banks. (Applause.) Most but not all.

To recover the rest, I've proposed a fee on the biggest banks. (Applause.) Now, I know Wall Street isn't keen on this idea. But if these firms can afford to hand out big bonuses again, they can afford a modest fee to pay back the taxpayers who rescued them in their time of need. (Applause.)

Now, as we stabilized the financial system, we also took steps to get our economy growing again, save as many jobs as possible, and help Americans who had become unemployed.

That's why we extended or increased unemployment benefits for more than 18 million Americans; made health insurance 65 percent cheaper for families who get their coverage through COBRA; and passed 25 different tax cuts.

Now, let me repeat: We cut taxes. We cut taxes for 95 percent of working families. (Applause.) We cut taxes for small businesses. We cut taxes for first-time homebuyers. We cut taxes for parents trying to care for their children. We cut taxes for 8 million Americans paying for college. (Applause.)

I thought I'd get some applause on that one. (Laughter and applause.)

As a result, millions of Americans had more to spend on gas and food and other necessities, all of which helped businesses keep more workers. And we haven't raised income taxes by a single dime on a single person. Not a single dime. (Applause.)

Because of the steps we took, there are about two million Americans working right now who would otherwise be unemployed. (Applause.) Two hundred thousand work in construction and clean energy; 300,000 are teachers and other education workers. Tens of thousands are cops, firefighters, correctional officers, first responders. (Applause.) And we're on track to add another one and a half million jobs to this total by the end of the year.

The plan that has made all of this possible, from the tax cuts to the jobs, is the Recovery Act. (Applause.) That's right -- the Recovery Act, also known as the stimulus bill. (Applause.) Economists on the left and the right say this bill has helped save jobs and avert disaster. But you don't have to take their word for it. Talk to the small business in Phoenix that will triple its workforce because of the Recovery Act. Talk to the window manufacturer in Philadelphia who said he used to be skeptical about the Recovery Act, until he had to add two more work shifts just because of the business it created. Talk to the single teacher raising two kids who was told by her principal in the last week of school that because of the Recovery Act, she wouldn't be laid off after all.

There are stories like this all across America. And after two years of recession, the economy is growing again. Retirement funds have started to gain back some of their value. Businesses are beginning to invest again, and slowly some are starting to hire again.

But I realize that for every success story, there are other stories, of men and women who wake up with the anguish of not knowing where their next paycheck will come from; who send out resumes week after week and hear nothing in response. That is why jobs must be our number-one focus in 2010, and that's why I'm calling for a new jobs bill tonight. (Applause.)

Now, the true engine of job creation in this country will always be America's businesses. (Applause.) But government can create the conditions necessary for businesses to expand and hire more workers.

We should start where most new jobs do -- in small businesses, companies that begin when -- (applause) -- companies that begin when an entrepreneur -- when an entrepreneur takes a chance on a dream, or a worker decides it's time she became her own boss. Through sheer grit and determination, these companies have weathered the recession and they're ready to grow. But when you talk to small businessowners in places like Allentown, Pennsylvania, or Elyria, Ohio, you find out that even though banks on Wall Street are lending again, they're mostly lending to bigger companies. Financing remains difficult for small businessowners across the country, even those that are making a profit.

So tonight, I'm proposing that we take \$30 billion of the money Wall Street banks have repaid and use it to help community banks give small businesses the credit

they need to stay afloat. (Applause.) I'm also proposing a new small business tax credit

-- one that will go to over one million small businesses who hire new workers or raise wages. (Applause.) While we're at it, let's also eliminate all capital gains taxes on small business investment, and provide a tax incentive for all large businesses and all small businesses to invest in new plants and equipment. (Applause.)

Next, we can put Americans to work today building the infrastructure of tomorrow. (Applause.) From the first railroads to the Interstate Highway System, our nation has always been built to compete. There's no reason Europe or China should have the fastest trains, or the new factories that manufacture clean energy products.

Tomorrow, I'll visit Tampa, Florida, where workers will soon break ground on a new high-speed railroad funded by the Recovery Act. (Applause.) There are projects like that all across this country that will create jobs and help move our nation's goods, services, and information. (Applause.)

We should put more Americans to work building clean energy facilities -- (applause) -- and give rebates to Americans who make their homes more energy-efficient, which supports clean energy jobs. (Applause.) And to encourage these and other businesses to stay within our borders, it is time to finally slash the tax breaks for companies that ship our jobs overseas, and give those tax breaks to companies that create jobs right here in the United States of America. (Applause.)

Now, the House has passed a jobs bill that includes some of these steps. (Applause.) As the first order of business this year, I urge the Senate to do the same, and I know they will. (Applause.) They will. (Applause.) People are out of work. They're hurting. They need our help. And I want a jobs bill on my desk without delay. (Applause.)

But the truth is, these steps won't make up for the seven million jobs that we've lost over the last two years. The only way to move to full employment is to lay a new foundation for long-term economic growth, and finally address the problems that America's families have confronted for years.

We can't afford another so-called economic "expansion" like the one from the last decade -- what some call the "lost decade" -- where jobs grew more slowly than during any prior expansion; where the income of the average American household declined while the cost of health care and tuition reached record highs; where prosperity was built on a housing bubble and financial speculation.

From the day I took office, I've been told that addressing our larger challenges is too ambitious; such an effort would be too contentious. I've been told that our political system is too gridlocked, and that we should just put things on hold for a while.

For those who make these claims, I have one simple question: How long should we wait? How long should America put its future on hold? (Applause.)

You see, Washington has been telling us to wait for decades, even as the problems have grown worse. Meanwhile, China is not waiting to revamp its economy. Germany is not waiting. India is not waiting. These nations -- they're not standing still. These nations aren't playing for second place. They're putting more emphasis on math and science. They're rebuilding their infrastructure. They're making serious investments in clean energy because they want those jobs. Well, I do not accept second place for the United States of America. (Applause.)

As hard as it may be, as uncomfortable and contentious as the debates may become, it's time to get serious about fixing the problems that are hampering our growth.

Now, one place to start is serious financial reform. Look, I am not interested in punishing banks. I'm interested in protecting our economy. A strong, healthy financial market makes it possible for businesses to access credit and create new jobs. It channels the savings of families into investments that raise incomes. But that can only happen if we guard against the same recklessness that nearly brought down our entire economy.

We need to make sure consumers and middle-class families have the information they need to make financial decisions. (Applause.) We can't allow financial institutions, including those that take your deposits, to take risks that threaten the whole economy.

Now, the House has already passed financial reform with many of these changes. (Applause.) And the lobbyists are trying to kill it. But we cannot let them win this fight. (Applause.) And if the bill that ends up on my desk does not meet the test of real reform, I will send it back until we get it right. We've got to get it right. (Applause.)

Next, we need to encourage American innovation. Last year, we made the largest investment in basic research funding in history -- (applause) -- an investment that could lead to the world's cheapest solar cells or treatment that kills cancer cells but leaves healthy ones untouched. And no area is more ripe for such innovation than energy. You can see the results of last year's investments in clean energy -- in the North Carolina company that will create 1,200 jobs

nationwide helping to make advanced batteries; or in the California business that will put a thousand people to work making solar panels.

But to create more of these clean energy jobs, we need more production, more efficiency, more incentives. And that means building a new generation of safe, clean nuclear power plants in this country. (Applause.) It means making tough decisions about opening new offshore areas for oil and gas development. (Applause.) It means continued investment in advanced biofuels and clean coal technologies. (Applause.) And, yes, it means passing a comprehensive energy and climate bill with incentives that will finally make clean energy the profitable kind of energy in America. (Applause.)

I am grateful to the House for passing such a bill last year. (Applause.) And this year I'm eager to help advance the bipartisan effort in the Senate. (Applause.)

I know there have been questions about whether we can afford such changes in a tough economy. I know that there are those who disagree with the overwhelming scientific evidence on climate change. But here's the thing -- even if you doubt the evidence, providing incentives for energy-efficiency and clean energy are the right thing to do for our future -- because the nation that leads the clean energy economy will be the nation that leads the global economy. And America must be that nation. (Applause.)

Third, we need to export more of our goods. (Applause.) Because the more products we make and sell to other countries, the more jobs we support right here in America. (Applause.) So tonight, we set a new goal: We will double our exports over the next five years, an increase that will support two million jobs in America. (Applause.) To help meet this goal, we're launching a National Export Initiative that will help farmers and small businesses increase their exports, and reform export controls consistent with national security. (Applause.)

We have to seek new markets aggressively, just as our competitors are. If America sits on the sidelines while other nations sign trade deals, we will lose the chance to create jobs on our shores. (Applause.) But realizing those benefits also means enforcing those agreements so our trading partners play by the rules. (Applause.) And that's why we'll continue to shape a Doha trade agreement that opens global markets, and why we will strengthen our trade relations in Asia and with key partners like South Korea and Panama and Colombia. (Applause.)

Fourth, we need to invest in the skills and education of our people. (Applause.)

Now, this year, we've broken through the stalemate between left and right by launching a national competition to improve our schools. And the idea here is simple: Instead of rewarding failure, we only reward success. Instead of funding the status quo, we only invest in reform -- reform that raises student

achievement; inspires students to excel in math and science; and turns around failing schools that steal the future of too many young Americans, from rural communities to the inner city. In the 21st century, the best anti-poverty program around is a world-class education. (Applause.) And in this country, the success of our children cannot depend more on where they live than on their potential.

When we renew the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, we will work with Congress to expand these reforms to all 50 states. Still, in this economy, a high school diploma no longer guarantees a good job. That's why I urge the Senate to follow the House and pass a bill that will revitalize our community colleges, which are a career pathway to the children of so many working families. (Applause.)

To make college more affordable, this bill will finally end the unwarranted taxpayer subsidies that go to banks for student loans. (Applause.) Instead, let's take that money and give families a \$10,000 tax credit for four years of college and increase Pell Grants. (Applause.) And let's tell another one million students that when they graduate, they will be required to pay only 10 percent of their income on student loans, and all of their debt will be forgiven after 20 years -- and forgiven after 10 years if they choose a career in public service, because in the United States of America, no one should go broke because they chose to go to college. (Applause.)

And by the way, it's time for colleges and universities to get serious about cutting their own costs -- (applause) -- because they, too, have a responsibility to help solve this problem.

Now, the price of college tuition is just one of the burdens facing the middle class. That's why last year I asked Vice President Biden to chair a task force on middle-class families. That's why we're nearly doubling the child care tax credit, and making it easier to save for retirement by giving access to every worker a retirement account and expanding the tax credit for those who start a nest egg. That's why we're working to lift the value of a family's single largest investment -- their home. The steps we took last year to shore up the housing market have allowed millions of Americans to take out new loans and save an average of \$1,500 on mortgage payments.

This year, we will step up refinancing so that homeowners can move into more affordable mortgages. (Applause.) And it is precisely to relieve the burden on middle-class families that we still need health insurance reform. (Applause.) Yes, we do. (Applause.)

Now, let's clear a few things up. (Laughter.) I didn't choose to tackle this issue to get some legislative victory under my belt. And by now it should be fairly obvious that I didn't take on health care because it was good politics. (Laughter.)

I took on health care because of the stories I've heard from Americans with preexisting conditions whose lives depend on getting coverage; patients who've been denied coverage; families -- even those with insurance -- who are just one illness away from financial ruin.

After nearly a century of trying -- Democratic administrations, Republican administrations -- we are closer than ever to bringing more security to the lives of so many Americans. The approach we've taken would protect every American from the worst practices of the insurance industry. It would give small businesses and uninsured Americans a chance to choose an affordable health care plan in a competitive market. It would require every insurance plan to cover preventive care.

And by the way, I want to acknowledge our First Lady, Michelle Obama, who this year is creating a national movement to tackle the epidemic of childhood obesity and make kids healthier. (Applause.) Thank you. She gets embarrassed. (Laughter.)

Our approach would preserve the right of Americans who have insurance to keep their doctor and their plan. It would reduce costs and premiums for millions of families and businesses. And according to the Congressional Budget Office -- the independent organization that both parties have cited as the official scorekeeper for Congress -- our approach would bring down the deficit by as much as \$1 trillion over the next two decades. (Applause.)

Still, this is a complex issue, and the longer it was debated, the more skeptical people became. I take my share of the blame for not explaining it more clearly to the American people. And I know that with all the lobbying and horse-trading, the process left most Americans wondering, "What's in it for me?"

But I also know this problem is not going away. By the time I'm finished speaking tonight, more Americans will have lost their health insurance. Millions will lose it this year. Our deficit will grow. Premiums will go up. Patients will be denied the care they need. Small business owners will continue to drop coverage altogether. I will not walk away from these Americans, and neither should the people in this chamber. (Applause.)

So, as temperatures cool, I want everyone to take another look at the plan we've proposed. There's a reason why many doctors, nurses, and health care experts who know our system best consider this approach a vast improvement over the status quo. But if anyone from either party has a better approach that will bring down premiums, bring down the deficit, cover the uninsured, strengthen Medicare for seniors, and stop insurance company abuses, let me know. (Applause.) Let me know. Let me know. (Applause.) I'm eager to see it.

Here's what I ask Congress, though: Don't walk away from reform. Not now. Not when we are so close. Let us find a way to come together and finish the job for the American people. (Applause.) Let's get it done. Let's get it done. (Applause.)

Now, even as health care reform would reduce our deficit, it's not enough to dig us out of a massive fiscal hole in which we find ourselves. It's a challenge that makes all others that much harder to solve, and one that's been subject to a lot of political posturing. So let me start the discussion of government spending by setting the record straight.

At the beginning of the last decade, the year 2000, America had a budget surplus of over \$200 billion. (Applause.) By the time I took office, we had a one-year deficit of over \$1 trillion and projected deficits of \$8 trillion over the next decade. Most of this was the result of not paying for two wars, two tax cuts, and an expensive prescription drug program. On top of that, the effects of the recession put a \$3 trillion hole in our budget. All this was before I walked in the door. (Laughter and applause.)

Now -- just stating the facts. Now, if we had taken office in ordinary times, I would have liked nothing more than to start bringing down the deficit. But we took office amid a crisis. And our efforts to prevent a second depression have added another \$1 trillion to our national debt. That, too, is a fact.

I'm absolutely convinced that was the right thing to do. But families across the country are tightening their belts and making tough decisions. The federal government should do the same. (Applause.) So tonight, I'm proposing specific steps to pay for the trillion dollars that it took to rescue the economy last year.

Starting in 2011, we are prepared to freeze government spending for three years. (Applause.) Spending related to our national security, Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security will not be affected. But all other discretionary government programs will. Like any cash-strapped family, we will work within a budget to invest in what we need and sacrifice what we don't. And if I have to enforce this discipline by veto, I will. (Applause.)

We will continue to go through the budget, line by line, page by page, to eliminate programs that we can't afford and don't work. We've already identified \$20 billion in savings for next year. To help working families, we'll extend our middle-class tax cuts. But at a time of record deficits, we will not continue tax cuts for oil companies, for investment fund managers, and for those making over \$250,000 a year. We just can't afford it. (Applause.)

Now, even after paying for what we spent on my watch, we'll still face the massive deficit we had when I took office. More importantly, the cost of

Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security will continue to skyrocket. That's why I've called for a bipartisan fiscal commission, modeled on a proposal by Republican Judd Gregg and Democrat Kent Conrad. (Applause.) This can't be one of those Washington gimmicks that lets us pretend we solved a problem. The commission will have to provide a specific set of solutions by a certain deadline.

Now, yesterday, the Senate blocked a bill that would have created this commission. So I'll issue an executive order that will allow us to go forward, because I refuse to pass this problem on to another generation of Americans. (Applause.) And when the vote comes tomorrow, the Senate should restore the pay-as-you-go law that was a big reason for why we had record surpluses in the 1990s. (Applause.)

Now, I know that some in my own party will argue that we can't address the deficit or freeze government spending when so many are still hurting. And I agree -- which is why this freeze won't take effect until next year -- (laughter) -- when the economy is stronger. That's how budgeting works. (Laughter and applause.) But understand -- understand if we don't take meaningful steps to rein in our debt, it could damage our markets, increase the cost of borrowing, and jeopardize our recovery -- all of which would have an even worse effect on our job growth and family incomes.

From some on the right, I expect we'll hear a different argument -- that if we just make fewer investments in our people, extend tax cuts including those for the wealthier Americans, eliminate more regulations, maintain the status quo on health care, our deficits will go away. The problem is that's what we did for eight years. (Applause.) That's what helped us into this crisis. It's what helped lead to these deficits. We can't do it again.

Rather than fight the same tired battles that have dominated Washington for decades, it's time to try something new. Let's invest in our people without leaving them a mountain of debt. Let's meet our responsibility to the citizens who sent us here. Let's try common sense. (Laughter.) A novel concept.

To do that, we have to recognize that we face more than a deficit of dollars right now. We face a deficit of trust -- deep and corrosive doubts about how Washington works that have been growing for years. To close that credibility gap we have to take action on both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue -- to end the outsized influence of lobbyists; to do our work openly; to give our people the government they deserve. (Applause.)

That's what I came to Washington to do. That's why -- for the first time in history -- my administration posts on our White House visitors online. That's

why we've excluded lobbyists from policymaking jobs, or seats on federal boards and commissions.

But we can't stop there. It's time to require lobbyists to disclose each contact they make on behalf of a client with my administration or with Congress. It's time to put strict limits on the contributions that lobbyists give to candidates for federal office.

With all due deference to separation of powers, last week the Supreme Court reversed a century of law that I believe will open the floodgates for special interests -- including foreign corporations -- to spend without limit in our elections. (Applause.) I don't think American elections should be bankrolled by America's most powerful interests, or worse, by foreign entities. (Applause.) They should be decided by the American people. And I'd urge Democrats and Republicans to pass a bill that helps to correct some of these problems.

I'm also calling on Congress to continue down the path of earmark reform. Applause.) Democrats and Republicans. (Applause.) Democrats and Republicans. You've trimmed some of this spending, you've embraced some meaningful change. But restoring the public trust demands more. For example, some members of Congress post some earmark requests online. (Applause.) Tonight, I'm calling on Congress to publish all earmark requests on a single Web site before there's a vote, so that the American people can see how their money is being spent. (Applause.)

Of course, none of these reforms will even happen if we don't also reform how we work with one another. Now, I'm not naïve. I never thought that the mere fact of my election would usher in peace and harmony -- (laughter) -- and some post-partisan era. I knew that both parties have fed divisions that are deeply entrenched. And on some issues, there are simply philosophical differences that will always cause us to part ways. These disagreements, about the role of government in our lives, about our national priorities and our national security, they've been taking place for over 200 years. They're the very essence of our democracy.

But what frustrates the American people is a Washington where every day is Election Day. We can't wage a perpetual campaign where the only goal is to see who can get the most embarrassing headlines about the other side -- a belief that if you lose, I win. Neither party should delay or obstruct every single bill just because they can. The confirmation of -- (applause) -- I'm speaking to both parties now. The confirmation of well-qualified public servants shouldn't be held hostage to the pet projects or grudges of a few individual senators. (Applause.)

Washington may think that saying anything about the other side, no matter how false, no matter how malicious, is just part of the game. But it's precisely such politics that has stopped either party from helping the American people. Worse yet, it's sowing further division among our citizens, further distrust in our government.

So, no, I will not give up on trying to change the tone of our politics. I know it's an election year. And after last week, it's clear that campaign fever has come even earlier than usual. But we still need to govern.

To Democrats, I would remind you that we still have the largest majority in decades, and the people expect us to solve problems, not run for the hills. (Applause.) And if the Republican leadership is going to insist that 60 votes in the Senate are required to do any business at all in this town -- a supermajority -- then the responsibility to govern is now yours as well. (Applause.) Just saying no to everything may be good short-term politics, but it's not leadership. We were sent here to serve our citizens, not our ambitions. (Applause.) So let's show the American people that we can do it together. (Applause.)

This week, I'll be addressing a meeting of the House Republicans. I'd like to begin monthly meetings with both Democratic and Republican leadership. I know you can't wait. (Laughter.)

Throughout our history, no issue has united this country more than our security. Sadly, some of the unity we felt after 9/11 has dissipated. We can argue all we want about who's to blame for this, but I'm not interested in re-litigating the past. I know that all of us love this country. All of us are committed to its defense. So let's put aside the schoolyard taunts about who's tough. Let's reject the false choice between protecting our people and upholding our values. Let's leave behind the fear and division, and do what it takes to defend our nation and forge a more hopeful future -- for America and for the world. (Applause.)

That's the work we began last year. Since the day I took office, we've renewed our focus on the terrorists who threaten our nation. We've made substantial investments in our homeland security and disrupted plots that threatened to take American lives. We are filling unacceptable gaps revealed by the failed Christmas attack, with better airline security and swifter action on our intelligence. We've prohibited torture and strengthened partnerships from the Pacific to South Asia to the Arabian Peninsula. And in the last year, hundreds of al Qaeda's fighters and affiliates, including many senior leaders, have been captured or killed -- far more than in 2008.

And in Afghanistan, we're increasing our troops and training Afghan security forces so they can begin to take the lead in July of 2011, and our troops can begin to come home. (Applause.) We will reward good governance, work to reduce

corruption, and support the rights of all Afghans -- men and women alike. (Applause.) We're joined by allies and partners who have increased their own commitments, and who will come together tomorrow in London to reaffirm our common purpose. There will be difficult days ahead. But I am absolutely confident we will succeed.

As we take the fight to al Qaeda, we are responsibly leaving Iraq to its people. As a candidate, I promised that I would end this war, and that is what I am doing as President. We will have all of our combat troops out of Iraq by the end of this August. (Applause.) We will support the Iraqi government -- we will support the Iraqi government as they hold elections, and we will continue to partner with the Iraqi people to promote regional peace and prosperity. But make no mistake: This war is ending, and all of our troops are coming home. (Applause.)

Tonight, all of our men and women in uniform -- in Iraq, in Afghanistan, and around the world -- they have to know that we -- that they have our respect, our gratitude, our full support. And just as they must have the resources they need in war, we all have a responsibility to support them when they come home. (Applause.) That's why we made the largest increase in investments for veterans in decades -- last year. (Applause.) That's why we're building a 21st century VA. And that's why Michelle has joined with Jill Biden to forge a national commitment to support military families. (Applause.)

Now, even as we prosecute two wars, we're also confronting perhaps the greatest danger to the American people -- the threat of nuclear weapons. I've embraced the vision of John F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan through a strategy that reverses the spread of these weapons and seeks a world without them. To reduce our stockpiles and launchers, while ensuring our deterrent, the United States and Russia are completing negotiations on the farthest-reaching arms control treaty in nearly two decades. (Applause.) And at April's Nuclear Security Summit, we will bring 44 nations together here in Washington, D.C. behind a clear goal: securing all vulnerable nuclear materials around the world in four years, so that they never fall into the hands of terrorists. (Applause.)

Now, these diplomatic efforts have also strengthened our hand in dealing with those nations that insist on violating international agreements in pursuit of nuclear weapons. That's why North Korea now faces increased isolation, and stronger sanctions -- sanctions that are being vigorously enforced. That's why the international community is more united, and the Islamic Republic of Iran is more isolated. And as Iran's leaders continue to ignore their obligations, there should be no doubt: They, too, will face growing consequences. That is a promise. (Applause.)

That's the leadership that we are providing -- engagement that advances the common security and prosperity of all people. We're working through the G20 to sustain a lasting global recovery. We're working with Muslim communities around the world to promote science and education and innovation. We have gone from a bystander to a leader in the fight against climate change. We're helping developing countries to feed themselves, and continuing the fight against HIV/AIDS. And we are launching a new initiative that will give us the capacity to respond faster and more effectively to bioterrorism or an infectious disease -- a plan that will counter threats at home and strengthen public health abroad.

As we have for over 60 years, America takes these actions because our destiny is connected to those beyond our shores. But we also do it because it is right. That's why, as we meet here tonight, over 10,000 Americans are working with many nations to help the people of Haiti recover and rebuild. (Applause.) That's why we stand with the girl who yearns to go to school in Afghanistan; why we support the human rights of the women marching through the streets of Iran; why we advocate for the young man denied a job by corruption in Guinea. For America must always stand on the side of freedom and human dignity. (Applause.) Always. (Applause.)

Abroad, America's greatest source of strength has always been our ideals. The same is true at home. We find unity in our incredible diversity, drawing on the promise enshrined in our Constitution: the notion that we're all created equal; that no matter who you are or what you look like, if you abide by the law you should be protected by it; if you adhere to our common values you should be treated no different than anyone else.

We must continually renew this promise. My administration has a Civil Rights Division that is once again prosecuting civil rights violations and employment discrimination. (Applause.) We finally strengthened our laws to protect against crimes driven by hate. (Applause.) This year, I will work with Congress and our military to finally repeal the law that denies gay Americans the right to serve the country they love because of who they are. (Applause.) It's the right thing to do. (Applause.)

We're going to crack down on violations of equal pay laws -- so that women get equal pay for an equal day's work. (Applause.) And we should continue the work of fixing our broken immigration system -- to secure our borders and enforce our laws, and ensure that everyone who plays by the rules can contribute to our economy and enrich our nation. (Applause.)

In the end, it's our ideals, our values that built America -- values that allowed us to forge a nation made up of immigrants from every corner of the globe; values that drive our citizens still. Every day, Americans meet their responsibilities to

their families and their employers. Time and again, they lend a hand to their neighbors and give back to their country. They take pride in their labor, and are generous in spirit. These aren't Republican values or Democratic values that they're living by; business values or labor values. They're American values.

Unfortunately, too many of our citizens have lost faith that our biggest institutions -- our corporations, our media, and, yes, our government -- still reflect these same values. Each of these institutions are full of honorable men and women doing important work that helps our country prosper. But each time a CEO rewards himself for failure, or a banker puts the rest of us at risk for his own selfish gain, people's doubts grow. Each time lobbyists game the system or politicians tear each other down instead of lifting this country up, we lose faith. The more that TV pundits reduce serious debates to silly arguments, big issues into sound bites, our citizens turn away.

No wonder there's so much cynicism out there. No wonder there's so much disappointment.

I campaigned on the promise of change -- change we can believe in, the slogan went. And right now, I know there are many Americans who aren't sure if they still believe we can change -- or that I can deliver it.

But remember this -- I never suggested that change would be easy, or that I could do it alone. Democracy in a nation of 300 million people can be noisy and messy and complicated. And when you try to do big things and make big changes, it stirs passions and controversy. That's just how it is.

Those of us in public office can respond to this reality by playing it safe and avoid telling hard truths and pointing fingers. We can do what's necessary to keep our poll numbers high, and get through the next election instead of doing what's best for the next generation.

But I also know this: If people had made that decision 50 years ago, or 100 years ago, or 200 years ago, we wouldn't be here tonight. The only reason we are here is because generations of Americans were unafraid to do what was hard; to do what was needed even when success was uncertain; to do what it took to keep the dream of this nation alive for their children and their grandchildren.

Our administration has had some political setbacks this year, and some of them were deserved. But I wake up every day knowing that they are nothing compared to the setbacks that families all across this country have faced this year. And what keeps me going -- what keeps me fighting -- is that despite all these setbacks, that spirit of determination and optimism, that fundamental decency that has always been at the core of the American people, that lives on.

It lives on in the struggling small business owner who wrote to me of his company, "None of us," he said, "...are willing to consider, even slightly, that we might fail."

It lives on in the woman who said that even though she and her neighbors have felt the pain of recession, "We are strong. We are resilient. We are American."

It lives on in the 8-year-old boy in Louisiana, who just sent me his allowance and asked if I would give it to the people of Haiti.

And it lives on in all the Americans who've dropped everything to go someplace they've never been and pull people they've never known from the rubble, prompting chants of "U.S.A.! U.S.A.! U.S.A.!" when another life was saved.

The spirit that has sustained this nation for more than two centuries lives on in you, its people. We have finished a difficult year. We have come through a difficult decade. But a new year has come. A new decade stretches before us. We don't quit. I don't quit. (Applause.) Let's seize this moment -- to start anew, to carry the dream forward, and to strengthen our union once more. (Applause.)

Thank you. God bless you. And God bless the United States of America. (Applause.)

10:20 P.M. EST

HISTORY OF THE STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS

FROM TIME TO TIME: THE STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS

By Robert Longley, About.com Guide

Article II, Sec. 3, of the U.S. Constitution requires that, "*The President shall from time to time give to Congress information of the State of the Union and recommend to their Consideration such measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient.*"

Since January 8, 1790, when George Washington personally delivered the first annual message to Congress, presidents have "from time to time," been doing just that in what has become known as the State of the Union Address.

The speech was shared with the public only through newspapers until 1923, when President Calvin Coolidge's annual message was broadcast on radio. Franklin D. Roosevelt first used the phrase "State of the Union" in 1935, and in 1947, Roosevelt's successor Harry S. Truman became the first president to deliver a televised address.

Washington hits the essentials

Rather than outlining his administration's agenda for the nation, as has become the modern practice, Washington used that first State of the Union Address to focus on the very concept of the "union of states" that had so recently been created. Indeed, establishing and maintaining the union was the primary goal of Washington's first administration.

While the Constitution specifies no time, date, place, or frequency for the address, president's have typically delivered the State of the Union Address in late January, soon after Congress has re-convened. Since Washington's first address to Congress, the date, frequency, method of delivery and content have varied greatly from president to president.

Jefferson puts it in writing

Finding the whole process of a speech to a joint session of Congress a little too "kingly," Thomas Jefferson chose to carry out his constitutional duty in 1801 by sending details of his national priorities in separate, written notes to the House and Senate. Finding the written report a great idea, Jefferson's successors in the White House followed suit and it would be 112 years before a president again spoke the State of the Union Address.

Wilson sets the modern tradition

In a controversial move at the time, President Woodrow Wilson revived the practice of spoken delivery of the State of the Union Address to a joint session of Congress in 1913.

Content of the State of the Union Address

In modern times, the State of the Union Address serves as both a conversation between the president and Congress and, thanks to television, an opportunity for the president to promote his party's political agenda for the future. From time to time, the address has actually contained historically important information.

In 1823, James Monroe explained what became known as the Monroe Doctrine, calling on powerful European nations to end their practice of western colonization.

Abraham Lincoln told the nation he wanted to end slavery in 1862.

In 1941, Franklin D. Roosevelt spoke of the "four freedoms."

Just four months after the 9-11 terrorist attacks, President George W. Bush shared his plans for a war on terror in 2002.

Whatever its content, presidents traditionally hope their State of the Union Addresses will heal past political wounds, promote bipartisan unity in Congress and win support for his legislative agenda from both parties and the American people. From time to time... that actually happens.

WASHINGTON'S FIRST STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS

On January 8, 1790, President George Washington complied with Article II, Section 3. (Spellings appear as in the original draft.)

State of the Union
George Washington
January 8, 1790
Federal Hall, New York City

Fellow Citizens of the Senate and House of Representatives:

I embrace with great satisfaction the opportunity which now presents itself of congratulating you on the present favorable prospects of our public affairs. The recent accession of the important state of north Carolina to the Constitution of the United States (of which official information has been received), the rising credit and respectability of our country, the general and increasing good will toward the government of the Union, and the concord, peace, and plenty with which we are blessed are circumstances auspicious in an eminent degree to our national prosperity.

In resuming your consultations for the general good you can not but derive encouragement from the reflection that the measures of the last session have been as satisfactory to your constituents as the novelty and difficulty of the work allowed you to hope. Still further to realize their expectations and to secure the blessings which a gracious Providence has placed within our reach will in the course of the present important session call for the cool and deliberate exertion of your patriotism, firmness, and wisdom.

Among the many interesting objects which will engage your attention that of providing for the common defense will merit particular regard. To be prepared for war is on e of the most effectual means of preserving peace.

A free people ought not only to be armed, but disciplined; to which end a uniform and well-digested plan is requisite; and their safety and interest require that they should promote such manufactories as tend to render them independent of others for essential, particularly military, supplies.

The proper establishment of the troops which may be deemed indispensable will be entitled to mature consideration. In the arrangements which may be made respecting it it will be of importance to conciliate the comfortable support of the officers and soldiers with a due regard to economy.

There was reason to hope that the pacific measures adopted with regard to certain hostile tribes of Indians would have relieved the inhabitants of our southern and western frontiers from their depredations, but you will perceive from the information contained in the papers which I shall direct to be laid before you (comprehending a communication from the Commonwealth of Virginia) that we ought to be prepared to afford protection to those parts of the Union, and, if necessary, to punish aggressors.

The interests of the United States require that our intercourse with other nations should be facilitated by such provisions as will enable me to fulfill my duty in that respect in the manner which circumstances may render most conducive to the public good, and to this end that the compensation to be made to the persons who may be employed should, according to the nature of their appointments, be defined by law, and a competent fund designated for defraying the expenses incident to the conduct of foreign affairs.

Various considerations also render it expedient that the terms on which foreigners may be admitted to the rights of citizens should be speedily ascertained by a uniform rule of naturalization.

Uniformity in the currency, weights, and measures of the United States is an object of great importance, and will, I am persuaded, be duly attended to.

The advancement of agriculture, commerce, and manufactures by all proper means will not, I trust, need recommendation; but I can not forbear intimating to you the expediency of giving effectual encouragement as well to the introduction of new and useful inventions from abroad as to the exertions of skill and genius in producing them at home, and of facilitating the intercourse between the distant parts of our country by a due attention to the post-office and post-roads.

Nor am I less persuaded that you will agree with me in opinion that there is nothing which can better deserve your patronage than the promotion of science and literature. Knowledge is in every country the surest basis of public happiness. In one in which the measures of government receive their impressions so immediately from the sense of the community as in ours it is proportionably essential.

To the security of a free constitution it contributes in various ways - by convincing those who are intrusted with the public administration that every valuable end of government is best answered by the enlightened confidence of the people, and by teaching the people themselves to know and to value their own rights; to discern and provide against invasions of them; to distinguish between oppression and the necessary exercise of lawful authority; between burthens proceeding from a disregard to their convenience and those resulting from the inevitable exigencies of society; to discriminate the spirit of liberty from

that of licentiousness - cherishing the first, avoiding the last - and uniting a speedy but temperate vigilance against encroachments, with an inviolable respect to the laws.

Whether this desirable object will be best promoted by affording aids to seminaries of learning already established, by the institution of a national university, or by any other expedients will be well worthy of a place in the deliberations of the legislature.

Gentlemen of the House of Representatives:

I saw with peculiar pleasure at the close of the last session the resolution entered into by you expressive of your opinion that an adequate provision for the support of the public credit is a matter of high importance to the national honor and prosperity. In this sentiment I entirely concur; and to a perfect confidence in your best endeavors to devise such a provision as will be truly with the end I add an equal reliance on the cheerful cooperation of the other branch of the legislature.

It would be superfluous to specify inducements to a measure in which the character and interests of the United States are so obviously so deeply concerned, and which has received so explicit a sanction from your declaration.

Gentlemen of the Senate and House of Representatives:

I have directed the proper officers to lay before you, respectively, such papers and estimates as regard the affairs particularly recommended to your consideration, and necessary to convey to you that information of the state of the Union which it is my duty to afford.

The welfare of our country is the great object to which our cares and efforts ought to be directed, and I shall derive great satisfaction from a cooperation with you in the pleasing though arduous task of insuring to our fellow citizens the blessings which they have a right to expect from a free, efficient, and equal government.

January 27, 2010

THE PRESIDENT'S STATE OF THE UNION MESSAGE: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Congressional Research Service (CRS) Report, March 7, 2006

What is the State of the Union Message?

The State of the Union Message is a communication from the President of the United States to Congress and the nation in which the chief executive reports on conditions in the United States and, sometimes, around the world, recommends a legislative program for the coming session of Congress, and frequently presents his views about and vision for the present and future.

What Section of the Constitution Authorizes the Message?

Article II, Section 3, clause 1 of the United States Constitution authorizes the State of the Union Message, stating: "He [the President] shall from time to time give to the Congress Information on the State of the Union, and recommend to their Consideration such measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient."

When Was the First State of the Union Message Delivered, and by Which President? What Was the Early Practice?

President George Washington delivered the first regular annual message before a joint session of Congress, in New York, on January 8, 1790. During the administrations of Presidents Washington and John Adams, the President customarily appeared before a joint session of Congress to deliver the address personally. Each house subsequently debated and approved official replies to the President's message, which were then delivered personally to the President by delegations of Senators and Representatives.

When Did the President Stop Delivering the Message Personally, and Why? How Long Did this Practice Persist?

President Thomas Jefferson changed the procedure followed by his predecessors with his first annual message (December 8, 1801). His private secretary delivered copies of the message to both houses of Congress, to be read by clerks in the House and Senate. Jefferson's change was intended to simplify a ceremony that he believed to be an aristocratic imitation of the British monarch's Speech from the Throne, and thus unsuitable to a republic. Further, preparing a response in Congress consumed valuable time during short legislative sessions.

Who Revived the Tradition of Personal Presidential Appearances?

Jefferson's precedent was followed until April 8, 1913, when President Woodrow Wilson appeared before Congress to deliver personally a special message on tariff and bank reform. President Wilson is also widely credited with expanding the scope of the annual message, transforming it from a report on the activities of the executive departments into a blueprint for the President's legislative program

for the coming congressional session and year. Wilson subsequently delivered six of his annual messages in person (1913-1918); President Warren Harding, two (1921 and 1922); and President Calvin Coolidge, one (1923). President Herbert Hoover made no personal appearances before Congress. President Franklin Roosevelt established the personal appearance as a permanent tradition with his 1934 State of the Union Message, but he and several later chief executives also chose to deliver a written message in preference to a personal appearance on at least one occasion.

How Many Annual or State of the Union Messages Have Been Delivered? When and Where Does the Ceremony Take Place? Has the Message Always Been Known by this Name?

As of January 31, 2006, 217 annual messages and State of the Union Messages had been delivered by Presidents; of these, 73 were delivered in person by the chief executive. Until the 20th amendment changed the opening time for congressional sessions, the annual message was delivered in December. Since 1934, messages have been delivered on a range of dates, between January 3 and February 2 of each year. The State of the Union Message is now customarily delivered at the Capitol, in the chamber of the House of Representatives, before a joint session of both houses of Congress. The message was generally known as "the President's Annual Message to Congress" until well into the 20th century. Although some historians suggest that the phrase "State of the Union" emerged only after World War II, President Franklin Roosevelt's 1934 message is identified in his papers as his "Annual Message to Congress on the State of the Union." According to the Office of the Clerk of the House of Representatives, it was known informally as the State of the Union Address from 1942 to 1946, and has been known "generally" by the same name since 1947.

Which Was the Shortest Message? The Longest? What Is the Average Length of Messages in Modern Times?

Most evidence on the length of State of the Union Messages is anecdotal, as comprehensive information has not been collected; for the record, however, President Washington's first annual message was surely one of the shortest, comprising only 833 words. If contemporary speech delivery guidelines (which range from 115 to 175 words per minute) are used to calculate the length of time he spoke, Washington would have taken between four and seven minutes to deliver his first message. This estimate does not account for interruptions for any applause he may have received, although this was perhaps unlikely, given the solemnity attached to the proceedings at that time. President Harry Truman's 1946 message was the longest to date, at over 25,000 words. This was a unique effort, however, as it combined both the State of the Union and Annual Budget Messages, and was not delivered personally by the President. Following Jefferson's abandonment of personal delivery, annual messages tended to grow in length throughout the 19th century, often reaching more than 10,000 words, and became, in effect, an annual report from the executive branch to Congress.

This trend was reversed by Wilson and Franklin Roosevelt's return to the practice of personal delivery. Today, the message tends to be measured in delivery time, rather than in the number of words it contains. For instance, President George W. Bush's 2006 message took 51 minutes to deliver, and was interrupted by applause more than 60 times.

Which President Delivered the Most Messages? Which the Fewest? Has Any President Not Delivered a Message?

The longest serving President, Franklin Roosevelt, holds the record for the most State of the Union Messages delivered – 12 – of which 10 were personal appearances before Congress. President Zachary Taylor submitted only one written annual message, in 1849. Two Presidents did not serve long enough to submit an annual message: William Henry Harrison, who died in 1841, 32 days after his inauguration, and James A. Garfield, who was assassinated in 1881 and served only 199 days.

How Have Advances in Communications Technology Affected the Message?

President Coolidge delivered the first annual message to be broadcast by radio, in 1923. President Truman's 1947 State of the Union Message was the first to be broadcast by television. Free air time for the President's message and the opposition response is currently provided as a public service by commercial, public broadcast, and cable networks. President George W. Bush's 2002 address was the first to be made available as a live web cast on the Web from the White House website, and the 2004 address was the first to be broadcast in high definition television. The advent of mass electronic communications dramatically affected the format, audience, and impact of the message. Commanding a steadily-growing audience of listeners and viewers, successive Presidents learned to use the occasion as an appeal to the nation: the message evolved from being a report to Congress to a direct address to the American people, a platform from which the President announced, explained, and promoted his legislative agenda for the coming year. President Lyndon Johnson recognized the importance of the national audience in 1965, when he changed the time for his State of the Union Message from the traditional mid-afternoon to 9:00 P.M., the better to attract the largest number of television viewers, a practice all his successors have continued. The message traditionally draws a large audience: President George W. Bush's 2006 address was viewed by an estimated 41.7 million people (according to Nielsen Media Research), an increase of about 3 million from 2005.⁶ The largest audience recorded in recent years was 66.9 million, for President William Clinton's 1993 speech on Administration goals (not a State of the Union Address), while President Clinton's 2000 address attracted the fewest viewers in recent times, 31.5 million.

What Procedures Are Currently Followed When the President Delivers the Message?

A concurrent resolution, agreed to by both chambers, sets aside a certain date and time for a joint session of the House of Representatives and the Senate “for the purpose of receiving such communication as the President of the United States shall be pleased to make to them.” At the appointed time, the Senators cross the Capitol to the House chamber, where seats are reserved for them at the front of the chamber. The Speaker and the Vice President (in his capacity as President of the Senate) occupy seats at the dais, and the Speaker presides. Aside from reserved places for leadership, seats in the chamber are not assigned to particular Members. The President is then escorted to the chamber by a specially-appointed committee of Members from both houses; upon entering the chamber, he is announced by the House of Representatives' Sergeant-at-Arms. The Speaker then introduces the President, who then delivers his address.

One late 20th century innovation was the opposition response to the State of the Union Message. In 1966, Senator Everett Dirksen and Representative Gerald Ford made a televised joint Republican response to President Johnson's message, a practice that has since become a regular feature, and is usually broadcast shortly after the President has completed his remarks. The format for the opposition response varies, but it usually includes remarks by one or more party leaders (almost always Senators, Representatives, or state governors), who are nationally known, or are considered to be promising emerging political figures.

In a more recent innovation, initiated by President Ronald Reagan, the chief executive will frequently invite citizens who have distinguished themselves in some field of service or endeavor to be his personal guests in the gallery. Usually, the achievements or programs for which the President publicly salutes them also serve to underscore some major element of his message.

What Precautions Are Taken at the Address to Assure Continuity of Government?

Customarily, one member of the President's Cabinet does not attend. This precaution is taken in order to provide continuity in the presidency in the event a catastrophe were to result in the death or disablement of the President, the Vice President, and other officials in the line of presidential succession gathered in the House chamber. Veterans Affairs Secretary Jim Nicholson stayed away from the Capitol during the 2006 address. Then-Secretary of Commerce Donald L. Evans was the cabinet member who did not attend the State of the Union address in both 2004 and 2005. In a post-September 11, 2001, development that began with the 2003 address, congressional leadership responded to increased concern over security by designating two Members of each house of Congress, representing both parties, to be absent from the Capitol during the President's speech. Members absent from the 2006 address were Senators Byron Dorgan and Ted Stevens and Representatives Eric Cantor and George Miller.

In Contemporary Practice, Is There a State of the Union Message Every Year?

There have been occasional variations in presidential practices concerning the State of the Union Message since World War II. For instance, the past four Presidents (Ronald Reagan in 1981, George H. W. Bush in 1989, William Clinton in 1993, and George W. Bush in 2001) have chosen not to give an official State of the Union Message the year they were first inaugurated, having just previously delivered a keynote inaugural address. In each instance their first speech to a joint session of Congress closely followed their inauguration, but was not officially categorized as a "State of the Union Message." One observer noted in 1993 that by not calling such an address "State of the Union," the President could present a more focused message, while still deriving "the benefits of a joint session; nothing competes with the pomp and circumstances of the evening" Some recent Presidents have also preferred not to deliver a State of the Union Message immediately prior to their departure from office, although several have given farewell addresses in the last days of their presidencies. President Eisenhower's farewell message, broadcast to the nation on January 17, 1961, became famous for its warnings against the "military-industrial complex." President Reagan delivered a televised farewell address to the nation from the Oval Office on January 11, 1989, a practice followed by President Clinton on January 18, 2001. Conversely, outgoing and incoming Presidents have occasionally given successive State of the Union Messages within weeks of each other. President Truman's final message, delivered in printed form to Congress on January 7, 1953, was closely followed by President Eisenhower's first message, delivered in person at the Capitol on February 2. President Eisenhower's last message was delivered in printed form to Congress on January 12, 1961, and was similarly closely followed by President John Kennedy's first State of the Union address, which he delivered personally before Congress on January 30.

Does the President Always Deliver the State of the Union Message Personally?

Since World War II, Presidents have occasionally chosen not to deliver a State of the Union Message in person. As noted previously, President Truman sent his last message only in print, a practice subsequently followed by Presidents Eisenhower (1961) and Carter (1981). In 1956, President Eisenhower was recuperating from a heart attack, and was unable to deliver his message personally. From his Key West, Florida, retreat, he prepared a seven-minute filmed summary of the message that was subsequently broadcast nationwide.¹⁸ When President Richard Nixon sent a multi-part printed message to Congress in 1973, his staff explained that "no oral message was planned because it would follow closely on the heels of Nixon's second inaugural address."

STATE OF THE UNION, IN DUTCH

The New York Times, January 27, 2010

Americans tend to think of the State of the Union as our singular event. But while it is a special night, it's not unique. In fact, leaders around the world deliver a yearly address in which they step onto the podium to score points, lay out agendas and offer up a flourish or two. So how does American rhetoric measure up? Read the following excerpts (taken from official transcripts and translations of speeches given in the last few months), listen to the president tonight and then decide.

Russia

President Dmitri Medvedev
Address to the Federal Assembly
Nov. 12, 2009 (11,944 words)

Citizens of Russia... the foundation of my vision for the future is the firm conviction that Russia can and must become a global power on a completely new basis. Our country's prestige and national prosperity cannot rest forever on past achievements. After all, the oil and gas production facilities that generate most of our budget revenue, the nuclear weapons that guarantee our security, and our industrial and utilities infrastructure – most of this was built by Soviet specialists. In other words, it was not we who built it. It is still keeping our country afloat today, but it is rapidly depreciating both morally and physically. The time has come for today's generation of Russians to make their mark

Today we are talking about modernization – this is the essential aspect of my address today – about our desire to be modern. We must remember of course that modernity is a fluid notion. It is not a final stage of progress at which point you can rest and relax, as we say – quite the contrary. A truly modern society is the one that seeks constant renewal, continuous evolutionary transformation of social practices, democratic institutions, visions of the future....

I note that in August this year, Russia registered its natural population increase for the first time in the last 15 years. This growth is still only small – just 1,000 people – but still, it is an increase nonetheless. This result was achieved above all thanks to the National Project on Health and the new demographic policy we have been implementing....

Go, Russia!

Norway

Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg

New Year's Address

Jan. 1, 2010 (2,045 words)

Among the first public buildings we know of from the earliest civilizations are granaries. They were used to provide emergency relief in years when crops failed. We remember the story of Joseph advising Pharaoh to build up a store of grain because the seven good years would be followed by seven years of famine. This is ancient wisdom: we should save when times are good so as to be prepared for hard times.

Over the last year, the world has experienced the most severe economic crisis since the 1930s.

This international crisis has also affected Norway. We have a small, open economy, and half of what we produce is sold abroad. When export markets disappear, people at home are hit. Some of those who used to manufacture car components, smelt aluminum or build ships lost their jobs because people abroad stopped buying these goods.

Losing a job is first and foremost a blow for the person concerned. But unemployment also harms the community. With fewer people producing goods, there is less to go round. During this crisis, we have injected a great deal of extra funds to keep the wheels in motion. We have been able to spend more during these difficult times because we were careful when times were good. In this respect, you could say that we have followed the advice Joseph gave to Pharaoh, albeit in a rather different way. The Egyptians built granaries. We built the Government Pension Fund Global.

Britain

Queen Elizabeth II

Speech From the Throne

Nov. 18, 2009 (735 words)

My lords and members of the House of Commons, my government's overriding priority is to ensure sustained growth to deliver a fair and prosperous economy for families and businesses as the British economy recovers from the global economic downturn....

The Duke of Edinburgh and I look forward to our visit to Bermuda and our state visit to Trinidad and Tobago and to the Commonwealth heads of government meeting in this, the Commonwealth's 60th anniversary year. We also look forward to receiving the president of South Africa next year. ...

My government will continue to work closely with the devolved administrations in the interests of all the people of the United Kingdom. My government is committed to the Northern Ireland political process and will continue to work with Northern Ireland's leaders to complete the devolution of policing and justice and to ensure its success.

In Scotland, my government will take forward proposals in the final report from the Commission on Scottish Devolution. My government will continue to devolve more powers to Wales....

My government will work for security, stability and prosperity in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and for peace in the Middle East. Legislation will be brought forward to ban cluster munitions....

My lords and members of the House of Commons, I pray that the blessing of Almighty God may rest upon your counsels.

The Netherlands

Queen Beatrix

Speech From the Throne

Sept. 15, 2009 (1,574 words)

Members of the States-General ... the economic recession has exposed ethical shortcomings in the way market and society operate. The government has identified flaws in the financial sector both inside and outside the Netherlands, and drawn up proposals for stricter standards and better supervision. Binding agreements will be made on limiting excessive salaries and bonuses.

In these difficult times, the government believes it is important to continue working toward a society in which people feel a sense of togetherness, respect one another and share responsibility. A good upbringing and good education are the foundation of responsible citizenship.

Over the past two years, the government has taken measures to promote social cohesion, safety and security, stability and mutual respect. A persistent, multiyear approach is required to achieve results. The government will therefore continue to devote special attention to youth and young people, civic integration and vulnerable neighborhoods in the big cities.

The lack of integration of certain groups in society, widespread disrespectful and offensive behavior in public places and criminal behavior by groups of young people are stubborn problems that cause a great deal of annoyance. The government is therefore not only taking consistent action against offenders but also tackling the causes of unacceptable behavior.

Philippines

President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo

State of the Nation Address

July 27, 2009 (4,373 words)

A few days ago Moody's upgraded our credit rating, citing the resilience of our economy. The state of our nation is a strong economy. Good news for our people, bad news for our critics.

I did not become president to be popular. To work, to lead, to protect and preserve our country, our people – that is why I became president. When my father left the presidency, we were second to Japan. I want our republic to be ready for the first world in 20 years.... To those who want to be president, this advice: If you really want something done, just do it. Do it hard, do it well. Don't pussyfoot. Don't pander. And don't say bad words in public. ...

We inherited the longest-running communist insurgency in the world. Leah de la Cruz is one of 12,000 rebel returnees. She was only 16 when she joined the New People's Army.... She was captured in 2006. She is now involved in an L.G.U.-supported handicraft livelihood training of former rebels. We love you, Leah!...

We inherited an age-old conflict in Mindanao, exacerbated by a politically popular but near-sighted policy of massive retaliation.... There is nothing more that I would wish for than peace in Mindanao. It will be a blessing for all its people, Muslim, Christian and indigenous peoples. It will show other religiously divided communities that there can be common ground on which to live together in peace, harmony and cooperation.

South Africa

President Jacob Zuma

State of the Nation Address

June 3, 2009 (4,545 words)

Fellow South Africans ...since 1994 we have sought to create a united cohesive society out of our fragmented past. We are called upon to continue this mission of promoting unity in diversity. ... We must develop a common attachment to our country, our Constitution and the national symbols. In this spirit, we will promote the national anthem and our country's flag and all other national symbols.

Our children, from an early age, must be taught to pay allegiance to the Constitution and the national symbols, and know what it means to be South African citizens. ...

Sport is a powerful nation-building tool. Working together we must support all our national teams from Bafana Bafana to the Proteas and the Springboks; from Banyana Banyana to Paralympians.

Our teams can only do well with our support. Allow me to use this opportunity to congratulate our national teams for their performances in the past week, indeed in pulling off a hat trick. The country's women's netball team has done us proud by winning the Tri-Nations Netball Challenge. Congratulations to the Sevens Springboks who have become the I.R.B. Sevens World Series champions – and not forgetting the Blue Bulls who have won the Super 14 finals in a convincing fashion!

We take this opportunity to wish the Springboks well in the upcoming series against the British and Irish Lions.

READ: Fact-checking the 2015 State of the Union address. America, for all that weâ€™ve endured, for all the grit and hard work required to come back, for all the tasks that lie ahead, know this: The shadow of crisis has passed, and the State of the Union is strong. (APPLAUSE).Â You are the reason that I ran for this office. You are the people I was thinking of six years ago today in the darkest months of the crisis when I stood on the steps of this Capitol and promised we would rebuild our economy on a new foundation. And it has been your resilience, your effort that has made it possible for our country to emerge stronger.