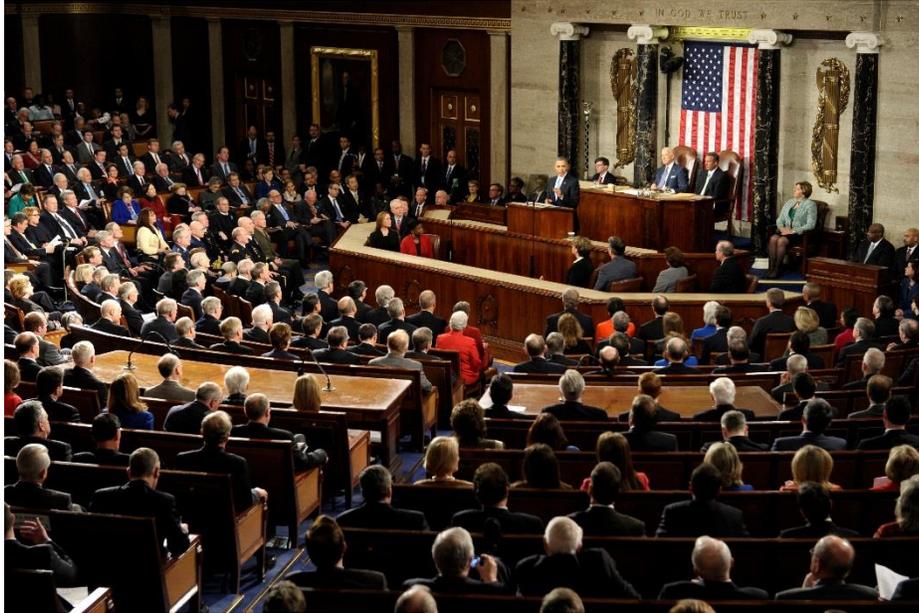




The State of the Union Address

A Constitutional Requirement

Student Exercise & Handout



Background:

The State of the Union address gives the President of the United States an opportunity to speak to the nation, highlight the achievements of the previous year, and layout plans for the year to come. Article. II. Section. 3. of the Constitution, requires the President of the United States to inform Congress of the state of our nation. The President fulfills this constitutional obligation in his State of the Union Address in which he discusses the issues our country is facing and provides proposals for the coming year.

The formal basis for the State of the Union Address is from the U.S. Constitution:

The President "shall from time to time give to the Congress Information of the State of the Union, and recommend to their Consideration such measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient." Article II, Section 3, Clause 1.

The constitutionally mandated presidential address has gone through a few name changes:

It was formally known as the Annual Message from 1790 to 1946.

It began to be informally called the "state of the Union" message/address from 1942 to 1946.

Since 1947 it has officially been known as the State of the Union Address.

Technological Change to the State of the Union Address:

- First radio broadcast of Message: President Calvin Coolidge, 1923.
- First television broadcast of Message: President Harry Truman, 1947.
- First televised evening delivery of Message: President Lyndon Johnson, 1965.
- First live webcast on Internet: President George W. Bush, 2002.
- First high definition television broadcast of Message, President George W. Bush, 2004.

(over)

Record Holders of State of Union Addresses:

- The longest: President James Earl (Jimmy) Carter 33,667 words in 1981 (written). President William J. (Bill) Clinton 9,190 words in 1995 (spoken).
- The shortest: President George Washington, 1790, 1,089 words.
- Average length: 19th century was about 10,000 words; late 20th century, about 5,000 words.
- Most Messages/Addresses given: President Franklin Roosevelt, 12 (10 were personal appearances before Congress).
- Fewest Messages/Addresses given: President Zachary Taylor, 1; President William Henry Harrison, 0; President James A. Garfield, 0.

Student Exercise:

1. Ask students to share what they know about the State of the Union Address. Why does the President give this speech every year? Who attends the address? What topics are typically covered in the speech?
2. View a past or present State of the Union Address (from You Tube or whitehouse.gov). Which issues did the President discuss during his or her speech? What actions did they propose to take? Identify three topics and fill out the chart below and be prepared to discuss with the class.
 - a. If reviewing an older speech, discuss the outcomes of his proposals over the past year as a class.
 - b. Have students share their individual responses to the President's speech. This can be done through an entire classroom discussion or divide the class into small groups.

Topic or Issue Presented by the President	Action Proposed	Your Analysis or Opinion on the Action Proposed

Extra Credit – What do you think is the most important issue facing our country in the upcoming year? Choose a topic from the State of the Union address above and explain how you might solve it.
