

## **The President's State of the Union Address: Tradition, Function, and Policy Implications**

The State of the Union address is a communication between the President and Congress in which the chief executive reports on the current conditions of the United States and provides policy proposals for the upcoming legislative year. Formerly known as the “Annual Message,” the State of the Union address originates in the Constitution. As part of the system of checks and balances, Article II, Section 3, clause 1 mandates that 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.” In recent decades, the President has expanded his State of the Union audience, addressing the speech to both the nation and Members of Congress.

Over time, the State of the Union address has evolved considerably. The format and delivery of the speech have changed, and its length has fluctuated widely. Technology has also influenced the delivery of the address, with the advent of radio, television, and the Internet playing significant roles in the transformation.

Although each President uses the State of the Union address to outline his Administration's policy agenda, most incorporate similar rhetorical sequences and ceremonial traditions. Bipartisanship, attention to both the past and the future, and optimism are recurring themes in State of the Union addresses.

The legislative success rate of policy proposals mentioned in State of the Union addresses varies widely. Addresses given after a President's election or reelection tend to produce higher rates of legislative success. Presidents can also use the State of the Union address to increase media attention for a particular issue.

Immediately following the State of the Union address, the political party not occupying the White House provides an opposition response. The response, usually much shorter than the State of the Union, outlines the opposition party's policy agenda and serves as an official rejoinder to the proposals outlined by the President.