

**the Gov**

“Anticipating the State of the Union,  
January 2010”  
Social Studies Lesson Plan

**the Gov**  
is a feature of

**the News**

**A daily news broadcast for High School and Middle School students  
now under development by MacNeil/Lehrer Productions**



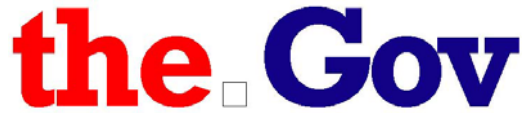
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# “Anticipating the State of the Union, January 2010” Social Studies Lesson Plan

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Winter, 2010

Dear Educator,

*the.News* online video reports for *the.Gov* provide middle and high school students with a valuable exercise in social studies and language arts with this 7:02 minute video report on “Anticipating the State of the Union, January 2010” at [www.pbs.org/newshour/thenews/thevote](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/thenews/thevote). Correspondent Eileen Wu reports about what to expect from President Obama’s address on January 27<sup>th</sup> and places the speech and issues in historical context. Lesson plans for social studies and language arts are available to support this video in the “For Educators” section of the website. All videos and curricula have been informed by *the.News* instructional design that can be found on the website [www.pbs.org/newshour/thenews](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/thenews). *the.Gov* is open-captioned. The curriculum includes content-based standards, discussion questions, student activities, vocabulary and primary reference sources. A complete transcript of each video report includes time codes to assist in isolating specific segments of the video and to augment the instruction of media literacy and multimedia production. All of this material is presented as options to fit teachers’ instructional needs.

References to Larry Bell’s “The 12 Powerful Words” are highlighted in **bold** in the lesson plans, in the “thought starter” questions on the home page and educator’s page, and in the transcript (to denote where they are used in the video segment).

**We have also added general topics to correlate to the lessons and video as well as concept based curriculum examples.**

We welcome our partners at the Omaha Public Schools who have joined *the.News* in a special pilot project during the 09-10 school year. We are also developing a new authoring tool for students called *YOU.edit*, to launch in early 2010. It will give students an online tool to remix the content of *the.News* reports, so they can create their own multimedia presentations. This editing tool will reside on our website so that it will be available to all students with an internet connection. It will be password protected so that it can serve as a viable educational asset that allows classroom teachers to assign multimedia projects within the security and content safety of *the.News* website.

Answers to student “thought starter” questions listed below the video.

**#1. Article II, Section III, Clause 1 of U.S. Constitution**

**#2. Healthcare, economy, war in Iraq & Afghanistan, education, financial reform, etc.**

**#3. (see LA lesson plan)**

For more information and questions about this material contact me at [kjaffe@newshour.org](mailto:kjaffe@newshour.org)

Sincerely,

Karen W. Jaffe  
Manager, Education Projects, *the.News*  
MacNeil/Lehrer Productions  
2700 S. Quincy St., Suite 250  
Arlington, VA 22206



## Anticipating the State of the Union, January 2010

This lesson was designed to support *the.News* video “Anticipating the State of the Union, January 2010” The video can be found online at [www.pbs.org/newshour/thenews/thevote](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/thenews/thevote)

### Standards

#### Omaha Public Schools

<http://www.ops.org/District/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=Hbqyrrg2ydM%3d&tabid=912&mid=2006>

#### Social Studies U.S. History Grade 8

Standard 04: Citizenship/Government: Describe the structure and function of government, the expanding role and responsibilities of the citizens in a representative democracy, and compare and contrast these elements with those of other societies.

#### Social Studies Government Grade 12

Standard 01 Identify and describe historical influences on American Government  
Standard 04 Describe the factors that influence government policy and decisions.

#### Conceptual Lenses

Origins, Power, System, Structure/Function

#### Enduring Understanding

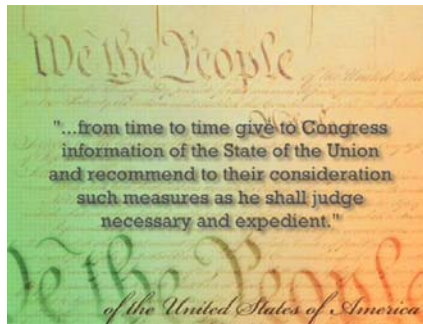
As society becomes more complex and international and domestic issues compete in the public agenda the role of government becomes more challenging.

Grade Level: 7-12

Concept Areas: Social Studies, Language Arts, Government/Civics

#### Key Concept(s):

Students will understand the Constitutional requirements behind the State of the Union Address and the ways different presidents have given the address. They will also identify topics likely to be presented in the upcoming address and **evaluate** the president in his delivery. Finally, students will **analyze** how their assessment of the president’s State of the Union **compares** with that of media political pundits and commentators.



### Key Objectives:

The student will:

- understand the president’s Constitutional requirement for giving the State of the Union Address
- **compare and contrast** how other presidents have given their state of the union addresses
- **predict** the topics to be included in the president’s State of the Union Address
- **evaluate** the president’s effectiveness in giving the address
- **compare and contrast** other media political pundits/commentators analysis of the president’s address with their own



## Key Vocabulary:

**Joint session:** a joint meeting, as of both houses of a bicameral legislature

**Resolution:** a formal expression of opinion or intention made, usually after voting, by a formal organization, a legislature, a club, or other group.

**Monarchical:** of, like, or pertaining to a monarch or monarchy

**Bully pulpit:** a position of authority or public visibility, esp. a political office, from which one may express one's views

**Pundit:** a person who makes comments or judgments, esp. in an authoritative manner; critic or commentator

Source: Dictionary.com



## McRel

([www.mcrel.org](http://www.mcrel.org))

## Civics

### Standard 1: Understands ideas about civic life, politics, and government.

#### Level III (Grades 6-8)

- Understands how politics enables people with differing ideas to reach binding agreements (e.g., presenting information and evidence, stating arguments, negotiating, compromising, voting)
- Understands competing ideas about the purposes government should serve (e.g., whether government should protect individual rights, promote the common good, provide economic security, mold the character of citizens, promote a particular religion)

#### Level IV (Grades 9-12)

- Understands how politics enables a group of people with varying opinions and/or interests to reach collective decisions, influence decisions, and accomplish goals that they could not reach as individuals (e.g., managing the distribution of resources, allocating benefits and burdens, managing conflicts)
- Knows formal institutions that have the authority to make and implement binding decisions (e.g., tribal councils, courts, monarchies, democratic legislatures)

## Lesson Topics:

- Constitution
- Influence of English Rule
- The Presidency
- Speeches/Public Speaking
- History of Media Coverage of Politics
- Three Branches of Government

**Materials:**

the.News video “Anticipating the State of the Union, January 2010”

[www.pbs.org/newshour/thenews/thevote](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/thenews/thevote)

**Student Handouts**

- Activity Sheets 1, 2, 3, and 4
- Internet Access

**Time Frame**

These activities are designed to be presented consecutively but can also be used as standalone activities. Review the individual activities prior to presenting them to your class to see how they will fit into your schedule and students’ abilities.

- Activity 1: Less than one class period (if reading is assigned ahead of time)
- Activity 2: One to two class periods and a homework assignment to watch the State of the Union Address
- Activity 3: One class period plus essay homework assignment
- Activity 4: One to two class periods





**Standard 19: Understands what is meant by "the public agenda," how it is set, and how it is influenced by public opinion and the media**

Level III (Grades 6-8)

- Knows how the public agenda is shaped by political leaders, interest groups, and state and federal courts; and understands how individual citizens can help shape the public agenda (e.g., by joining interest groups or political parties, making presentations at public meetings, writing letters to government officials and to newspapers)
- Knows how Congress, the president, the Supreme Court, and state and local public officials use the media to communicate with the citizenry
- Understands how citizens can evaluate information and arguments received from various sources so that they can make reasonable choices on public issues and among candidates for political office
- Understands the opportunities that the media provides for individuals to monitor the actions of their government (e.g., televised broadcasts of proceedings of governmental agencies such as Congress and the courts, public officials' press conferences) and communicate their concerns and positions on current issues (e.g., letters to the editor, talk shows, "op-ed pages," public opinion polls)

Level IV (Grades 9-12)

- Understands how political institutions and political parties shape the public agenda
- Understands the concept of public opinion, and knows alternative views of the proper role of public opinion in a democracy
- Understands the ways in which television, radio, the press, newsletters, and emerging means of communication influence American politics; and understands the extent to which various traditional forms of political persuasion have been replaced by electronic media
- Knows how to use criteria such as logical validity, factual accuracy, emotional appeal, distorted evidence, and appeals to bias or prejudice in order to evaluate various forms of historical and contemporary political communication (e.g., Lincoln's "House Divided," Sojourner Truth's "Ain't I a Woman?," Chief Joseph's "I Shall Fight No More Forever," Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream," campaign advertisements, political cartoons)

**Background**

The annual State of the Union Address is a vital forum to promote presidential priorities for the coming year. The message serves several purposes: as a report to Congress and the nation on national conditions; as a platform to announce and rally support for the president's legislative agenda for the coming year; and as a unique opportunity for the Chief Executive to personally convey his vision for the nation to Congress and the American people. The State of the Union Address gives the president an opportunity to exercise legislative leadership by assessing current national conditions and making recommendations for future policy.

The State of the Union Address is usually delivered by the president at an evening joint session of Congress during the second, third, or fourth week of January. When a president indicates that he is coming to deliver a State of the Union Address, Congress responds by passing a resolution calling "a joint session of Congress to receive a message from the president on the State of the Union." President Obama will deliver his State of the Union Address on January 27, 2010 9 PM EST.



## History of the Address

### A Constitutional Requirement



Article II, Section III, Clause 1 of the U.S. Constitution states 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." It is this constitutional requirement that forms the basis of the State of the Union Address.

The idea of a State of the Union Address traces back to the British practice of opening Parliament with the speech from the Throne. It was originally titled the

"president's Annual Address to Congress."

#### **Standard 21: Understands the formation and implementation of public policy**

##### Level III (Grades 6-8)

- Understands what public policy is and knows examples at local, state, and national levels.
- Understands why conflicts about values, principles, and interests may make agreement difficult or impossible on certain issues of public policy (e.g., affirmative action, gun control, environmental protection, capital punishment, equal rights)

##### Level IV (Grades 9-12)

- Understands the processes by which public policy concerning a local, state, or national issue is formed and carried out
- Understands why agreement may be difficult or impossible on issues such as abortion because of conflicts about values, principles, and interests

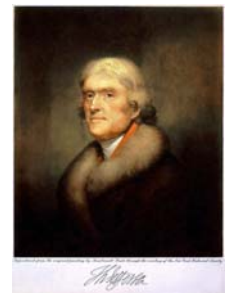
Congressional cooperation.

### Breaking with Tradition

The tradition established by George Washington and John Adams of delivering the State of the Union Address in person was broken with Thomas Jefferson's presidency. Jefferson felt that the act of the president speaking in person before Congress was time consuming and monarchical, resembling too closely the nation's royal past. In his pledge to "return to simple, republican forms of Government," Jefferson broke with tradition and delivered his annual messages in writing by messenger, with no invitation to Congress to respond:

### The First Address

George Washington gave the first State of the Union Address on January 8, 1790, before a joint session of the House and Senate in New York, then the nation's capital. In his speech, Washington urged the legislators to consider how best to advance science and learning in the new country and talked about the need for improved roads and a postal system. Congress responded to Washington's speech just as the British parliament had traditionally responded to a speech by the king: they drafted and delivered a response that closely mirrored Washington's speech, pledging





*"By sending a message, instead of making a speech at the opening of the session, I have prevented the bloody conflict [to] which the making an answer would have committed them. They consequently were able to be sent into real business at once."*



Jefferson avoided discussing specific measures in his messages, fearing they might appear as regal edicts, instead broadly stating his recommendations. Not until Andrew Jackson did a president champion specific issues in the annual address. After a long string of post-Civil war presidents who viewed the State of the Union address as a means to placate Congress, Theodore Roosevelt saw the occasion as a "bully pulpit" to mold the nation toward action.

Jefferson's precedent of submitting the annual message in writing lasted through the next 24 presidents until 1913, when Woodrow Wilson personally delivered his address to Congress. President Franklin Roosevelt adopted Wilson's practice of personal delivery, and it has since become a tradition.

## **Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills**

[\(http://www.21stcenturyskills.org/\)](http://www.21stcenturyskills.org/)

### **Civic Literacy**

- Participating effectively in civic life through knowing how to stay informed and understanding governmental processes

### **Creativity and Innovation**

- Use a wide range of idea creation techniques (such as brainstorming)
- Elaborate, refine, analyze and evaluate their own ideas in order to improve and maximize creative efforts

### **Critical Thinking and Problem Solving**

Reason Effectively:

- Use various types of reasoning (inductive, deductive, etc.) as appropriate to the situation

Make Judgments and Decisions:

- Effectively analyze and evaluate evidence, arguments, claims and beliefs
- Analyze and evaluate major alternative points of view
- Interpret information and draw conclusions based on the best analysis

### **Communication and Collaboration**

- Articulating thoughts and ideas clearly and effectively through speaking and writing
- Listen effectively to decipher meaning, including knowledge, values, attitudes and intentions
- Utilize multiple media and technologies, and know how to judge their effectiveness a priori as well as assess their impact



Media Coverage of the Address

Before the advent of radio, the State of the Union Address was transmitted to the public by the print media. Historian Charles Beard observed that the annual message was:

*"...the one great public document of the United States which is widely read and discussed. Congressional debates receive scant notice, but the president's message is ordinarily printed in full in nearly every metropolitan daily, and is the subject of general editorial comment throughout the length and breadth of the land. It stirs the country: it often affects Congressional elections; and it may establish grand policy."*



Calvin Coolidge was the first president to use radio for a State of the Union address, in 1923. Franklin Roosevelt used both the radio and personal appearances before Congress. President Harry Truman's 1947 State of the Union Address was the first to be broadcast by television. With the advent of all forms of mass media (radio, television, and the Internet), the State of the Union Address has gained great importance by providing a nationwide platform for the president.



Excerpted from the State of the Union Address, the National Archives  
<http://clinton4.nara.gov/WH/SOTU00/history/address.html>

**Photos:**

Third page of the United States Constitution, Constitutional Convention  
Thomas Jefferson, Rembrandt Peale, New York Historical Society  
Woodrow Wilson, Pach Brothers, New York, Library of Congress



## Lesson Plan

### Activity 1: Pre-Viewing Activity

To better facilitate this lesson, distribute the handout “Facts on the State of the Union Address” the day before you start this unit. That way, students will have read the content and be prepared for the discussion.

On the day you begin this unit, write on the front board or overhead the following: He [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...”

1. Help students with any unfamiliar words as necessary. Tell them that this statement comes from Article II of the U.S. Constitution and describes one of the duties of the president of the United States.
2. Then ask students the following questions:
  - What does “from time to time” mean regarding the president informing Congress?
  - What kind of information might the president give congress on the state of the union?
  - What kind of measures is the Congress supposed to consider?
  - Why do students think this provision is in the U.S. Constitution?
3. Then explain to students that the president uses the State of the Union Address to lay out his agenda for the year or coming years to encourage Congress to pass bills to fulfill the agenda. Also, mention that since early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Address’s audience is not just the members of Congress but all Americans too. Since the 1920’s presidents have used radio and later television to convey their agendas directly to the American people in hopes that the people will encourage members of Congress – their representatives – to pass laws that support his or her programs.
4. Next, arrange students in small groups of 3-4. Have students take out the handout, “Facts on the State of the Union Address.”
5. Have students answer the discussion questions in their small groups.
6. Then hold a general discussion over all the questions and compare different groups’ responses to the same questions.

### Activity 2: Preparing to Watch the State of the Union

Conduct this activity the day or a few days before the State of the Union address.

1. Ask students to brainstorm topics the president is likely to speak about during the upcoming State of the Union Address. (General topics like the economy, health care, wars in Iran and Afghanistan, terrorism and security, etc.) List these on the front board or overhead.
2. Arrange students in small groups of 3 and ask them to quickly prioritize their top 4 choices according to importance.
3. Ask the groups for their top 4 responses and record these on the front board or overhead to develop a class consensus of 4 topics.



4. Next, have students do a little research on these topics to refresh their memories and prepare them for the State of the Union address. Distribute student handout “The Issues” to all students. Have them meet in their small groups and record in the first column the 4 top issues they identified that might be presented during the State of the Union Address. Then have them **describe** key points for each topic. These points can identify problems, areas of disagreement, or concerns that surround each of the topics. Students can also go to the NewsHour’s webpage: [www.pbs.org/newshour/thenews/thegov](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/thenews/thegov) on the upcoming issues to be discussed State of the Union Address.
5. After the student groups have identified the details of the issues, review these with the entire class.
6. Then ask students what speech techniques they feel the president must use to be effective in this address? Have them meet in their small groups again and **describe** the aspects that make up a well-presented speech: important content, rhetoric, tone of voice, humor, persuasive messaging, etc.
7. When students have come up with several techniques, have several groups share their ideas.
8. Distribute the student handout, “Evaluating the State of the Union Address.”
9. Review the directions with students and the list of descriptive terms.
10. Have students watch the State of the Union Address on January 27, 2010 9 PM EST and complete the chart making comments on the president’s delivery and persuasiveness in columns 2 and 3. Tell students that the speech will go quickly and it won’t always be clear when the subject has changed, so they will need to listen carefully. Remind them to listen to the opposition party’s response usually given at the end of the president’s address. Have them bring their chart to school the next day.

### **Activity 3: Post-viewing Activity Evaluating the President’s State of the Union Address**

1. Have students bring in their evaluation charts on the State of the Union Address. Provide them with copies of the speech transcript from the NewsHour’s website or other news organization or have them look for this online.
2. Have students work in their same groups from yesterday. Have each group choose or assign each group one of the topics covered during the State of the Union Address. Make sure all the topics are covered. Most likely, some topics will be covered by more than one group.
3. With a copy of the speech transcript, have students complete the chart detailing the specifics of the president’s comments on their assigned topic and commenting on how effective they think the president’s proposals are.
4. Have the student groups review the discussion questions that follow the chart
5. Then have them individually write their evaluation essays following the outline on their handout. This might take them a few days, so set a deadline appropriate for your students.



## Activity 4: Post-viewing Activity Analyzing Reaction to the President’s State of the Union Address

In this activity, students will **compare** and **contrast** their assessment of the president’s State of the Union Address with pundits and commentators from the cable and broadcast news organizations. This activity can be started before students have finished their essays from Activity 3.

1. Have meet in their same topic groups from the previous activity. Distribute Activity 4 Packet to all students.
2. Have students **analyze** the transcript and video stream of the Republican Party’s response to the State of the Union Address. Also, provide time for them to **analyze** different perspectives from pundits and commentators from the Newshour, CNN, Fox News, NPR, the Weekly Standard, NY Times, Wall Street Journal, as well as the Republican and Democratic National Committee websites. Have students use the guide on their handout to conduct their research.
3. Then provide time for students to assess the pundit/commentators’ views with their own from the essay they wrote in Activity 3.

## Assessment

Assess student performance on their working cooperatively with others and class participation during discussions, on the completeness of their charts, and their essay.

## Resources

- PBS NewsHour <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/topic/politics/>
- GPO Access on the State of the Union <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/sou/index.html>
- CNN <http://www.cnn.com/allpolitics>
- New York Times <http://www.nytimes.com>
- Washington Post <http://www.washingtonpost.com>
- Wall Street Journal <http://online.wsj.com/home-page?mg=com-ruby-wsj>
- Weekly Standard: <http://www.weeklystandard.com>
- Democratic Party <http://www.democrats.org/>
- Republican Party <http://www.rnc.org/>

## Activity Designer:

*Greg Timmons is a former social studies teacher now freelance writer and educational consultant.*



## Activity 1: Facts on the State of the Union Address

The annual State of the Union Address is a vital forum to promote presidential priorities for the coming year. The message serves several purposes: as a report to Congress and the nation on national conditions; as a platform to announce and rally support for the president's legislative agenda for the coming year; and as a unique opportunity for the Chief Executive to personally convey his vision for the nation to Congress and the American people. The State of the Union Address gives the president an opportunity to exercise legislative leadership by assessing current national conditions and making recommendations for future policy.

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#### The First Address

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#### Breaking with Tradition

The tradition established by George Washington and John Adams of delivering the State of the Union Address in person was broken with Thomas Jefferson's presidency. Jefferson felt that the act of the president speaking in person before Congress was time consuming and monarchical, resembling too closely the nation's royal past. In his pledge to "return to simple, republican forms of Government," Jefferson broke with tradition and delivered his annual messages in writing by messenger, with no invitation to Congress to respond:

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## Activity 2 Packet

- The Issues
- Evaluating the State of the Union Address

**Directions:** Meet in your small groups and record in the first column the 4 top issues that might be presented during the State of the Union Address. Then **describe** key points for each topic in the second column. These points can identify problems, areas of disagreement, or concerns that surround each of the topics. You can also go to the NewsHour's webpage <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/> on the upcoming issues to be discussed State of the Union Address.

Issues	Identify Key Points of Topic (problems, areas of disagreement, or concerns)



## Evaluating the State of the Union Address

**Directions:** Watch the State of the Union Address and complete the chart. **Formulate** your comments in column 2 from the list of descriptive terms to the right in columns 2 and 3. Be sure to support your analysis. Then rate the president’s effectiveness speaking about the topic in column 3.

1. Topic	2. Adjective descriptor for this part of the speech. Support your rating with an explanation.	3. On a scale of 1-5 rate the effectiveness of the speech on this topic. 1= highly effective 5= not effective	List of descriptive terms.
The Economy			<b>Passionate</b>
Health Care			<b>Well-stated</b>
Terrorism and National Security			<b>Sophisticated</b>
Iraq/Afghanistan			<b>Repetitive</b>
Education			<b>Interesting</b>
Environment			<b>Energetic</b>
Other Topics			<b>Boring</b>
			<b>Patriotic</b>
			<b>Inspirational</b>
			<b>Annoying</b>
			<b>Other description of your choice</b>



### Activity 3 Packet

- Analyzing What the President Said
- Essay Outline

**Directions:** Work in your same groups. You may choose or your teacher may assign you one of the topics covered during the State of the Union Address. With a copy of the speech transcript, complete the chart detailing the specifics of the president’s comments on your topic and comment on how effective you think the president’s proposals are. Then review the discussion questions that follow the chart. After you’ve completed your discussion, individually write your evaluation essay following the outline on their handout.

1. Topic	Actions proposed by the President	How effective do you think these actions are? Explain your answers.
The Economy		
Health Care		
Terrorism and National Security		
Iraq/Afghanistan		
Education		
Environment		
Other Topics		



### Discussion Questions:

1. What topics did the president present during his State of the Union Address?
2. Were any of the topics on your chart not mentioned?
3. Which topic(s) do you think the president was most effective in presenting? **Support** your answer.
4. Which topic(s) do you think he was least effective in presenting? **Support** your answer.
5. In reviewing the strongest and weakest topic presentations, how effective do you think the president's plan is in each of these? **Support** your answer.
6. Overall, how would you **evaluate** the president's speech?

### Essay Outline

- I. Introduction
  - A. Brief description of history and purpose of the state of the union
  - B. In a single statement provide an analysis of the effectiveness of the president's State of the Union Address (you might do this after the rough draft of the paper is written.)
- II. Review the president's speech on the topic
  - A. Summarize your assigned issue and the problems it presents.
  - B. Describe the actions proposed by the president in the State of the Union speech to address this issue.
  - C. How effectively did the president described his plan in the State of the Union Address (be sure to explain why you feel this way).
  - D. How effective do you think the president's plan is? **Support** your position.
- III. Conclusion
  - A. Review the importance of the topic you are featuring in your essay.
  - B. Summarize the strengths and weaknesses of the president's State of the Union Address on this topic.
  - C. Provide any suggestions on what should be done next



### Activity 4: Analyzing Reaction to the President’s State of the Union Address

**Directions:** Review what the political commentators say about the president’s speech. Spend time reviewing different perspectives from different sources, such as the Newshour, CNN, Fox News, NPR, the Weekly Standard, NY Times, Wall Street Journal, as well as the Republican and Democratic National Committee websites. Pick one source that is favorable and one source opposed to the president’s address. Use the guide below to gather your information. Then in a short essay **compare** and **contrast** the pundit/commentators’ views with your own from the essay they wrote in Activity 3.

	<b>Favorable Pundit/Political Commentator</b>	<b>Opposed Pundit/Political Commentator</b>
Summarize their assessment of the president’s address on your topic.		
Identify evidence they present to support their view.		
Explain the action they feel the president should take		
Which pundit/commentator agrees with your assessment of the president’s address		
Identify the changes you would make to your assessment of the president’s address (if any)		