

State of the Union Address – Timeline

1790: President George Washington delivers the first "annual message of the president."

1801: Thomas Jefferson, believing the tradition of speaking to Congress is too "royal," sends his annual message in a letter. The written tradition continues for over a century.

1823: President James Monroe sends a letter to Congress which outlines the Monroe Doctrine opposing European intervention in the Americas.

1862: As Civil War battles rage, Abraham Lincoln sends his famous "last best hope" annual message to Congress.

1913: Woodrow Wilson revives the tradition of delivering the annual message in a speech to Congress.

1945: Franklin Roosevelt's speech formally becomes known as "The State of the Union."

1965: As the power of television becomes increasingly clear, Lyndon Johnson shifts the State of the Union address from midday to evening to attract a larger audience.

1986: The State of the Union is postponed for the first time after the space shuttle Challenger explodes the morning of the scheduled address.

1999: President Clinton delivers a State of the Union to a House of Representatives that has impeached him and a Senate considering his removal.

2002: In a post-September 11th world, President George W. Bush's second State of the Union address focuses on domestic security and the "war on terror." He signals out Iraq, Iran and North Korea for pursuing weapons of mass destruction, calling them "an axis of evil."

2011: President Barack Obama delivered his second address amid a long-struggling economy and partisan arguments over the budget. Obama called for Americans to look forward with hope and invest in innovation and international competitiveness.