

What is the State of the Union (SOTU) Address in the US?

February 8, 2023

In news— The US President Joe Biden has delivered his second State of the Union (SOTU) Address to a Joint Session of Congress at the United States Capitol in Washington DC.

About the SOTU address-

- **The formal basis of the Address lies in the US Constitution itself.**
- Article II, Section 3, Clause 1 of the Constitution says 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”
- **The first of these annual addresses was given by the first President George Washington in 1790.**
- **However, it was not called SOTU then** – for more than a century and a half up to 1946, the Address was **formally known as the “Annual Message”**.
- Already from 1942 though, the message had started to be informally referred to as the “State of the Union” message or address.
- And **beginning with President Harry S Truman’s message to Congress on January 6, 1947, the address came to be officially known as the State of the Union Address.**
- **SOTU Addresses in the modern era have been delivered in the chamber of the House of Representatives.**
- **A House** concurrent resolution decides on the day and time for the Joint Session of Congress to listen to the President.
- **Up until 1934, the President’s Annual Message was**

delivered in December; since then, the Annual Message/SOTU has been delivered in January or February.

- Biden's second SOTU Address on February 7 will be the 99th in-person Address/Annual Message in US history.
- President Franklin D Roosevelt's 1945 Address was read to a Joint Session of Congress – since the President did not himself deliver it, it is not counted as an in-person address.
- **Annual Messages by earlier Presidents were more in the nature of Budget speeches** – they included agency budget requests and general reports on the health of the US economy.
- Subsequently, as Congress required more in-depth reports on these aspects, the Budget Message was instituted by law in 1921 law, and the Economic Report in 1946. These messages were separate from the President's Annual Message.
- The practice of speaking directly to Congress had ceased after a few years into the Annual Message; this was revived after a gap of 113 years by President Woodrow Wilson in 1913.
- Ever since, the SOTU Address has served as a platform for the President to rally support for his agenda.