



U.S. President Joe Biden delivers the State of the Union address at the U.S. Capitol in Washington March 7, 2024. In the background are Vice President Kamala Harris and House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La. (OSV News/Shawn, Thew Reuters)

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The state of the union "is strong and getting stronger," President Joe Biden said in his March 7 address.

In his third State of the Union address to a joint session of Congress at the Capitol, Biden said "this is no ordinary moment" in U.S. history.

"Not since President Lincoln and the Civil War have freedom and democracy been under assault here at home as they are today," Biden said. "What makes our moment rare is that freedom and democracy are under attack, both at home and overseas, at the very same time."

Biden appeared energetic and passionate in his delivery, stumbling over some of his words on several occasions, while vigorously jousting with lawmakers on the floor. The chamber was boisterous over the nearly 70-minute address with a smattering of lawmakers heckling the president and his supporters calling for "four more years." House Speaker Mike Johnson, a Republican sitting behind Biden for the address, shook his head at several portions of Biden's address while Vice President Kamala Harris repeatedly stood to applaud the president.

Biden opened his remarks with a pitch for providing military and humanitarian aid for Ukraine, calling on Congress to rise to the occasion as Congress did in 1941, supplying European allies in the fight against Nazi Germany during World War II. Biden also sought to highlight his remaining policy priorities on issues like abortion, the economy, and immigration.

He also sought to convince voters that he should be elected to another term in what may be his largest television audience before November, as polls show increasing concerns about the president's age. Biden is the nation's second Catholic president and is seeking to become the first Catholic elected to two full terms.

Calling on Congress to approve additional aid to Ukraine, Biden said, "If anybody in this room thinks (Russian President Vladimir) Putin will stop at Ukraine, I assure you, he will not."

"But Ukraine can stop Putin if we stand with Ukraine and provide the weapons it needs to defend itself," he said. "That is all Ukraine is asking. They are not asking for American soldiers."

Biden reiterated his position that access to abortion should be expanded by congressional legislation, as well as access to fertility treatments like in vitro fertilization, following a controversial ruling by the Alabama Supreme Court that frozen embryos should be considered unborn children under the state's wrongful death law.

Biden at one point addressed justices of the Supreme Court who were in attendance directly, citing the majority opinion in the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* case that overturned *Roe v. Wade*, where the justices wrote: "Women are not without electoral or political power."

"You're about to realize just how much you're right about that," Biden said.

In response to heckling from the controversial Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, R-Ga., during his comments on immigration, Biden noted the death of Laken Riley and held up a pin with her name that Greene had given him upon entering the House Chamber. Biden said Riley was "an innocent young woman who was killed by an illegal" and expressed his condolences to her parents.

"My heart goes out to you having lost children myself, I understand," Biden said.

The slain Georgia student who police say was killed by a man who illegally crossed the border has become a rallying cry for Republicans opposed to what they call Biden's lax immigration policy.

But Biden criticized Republicans for rejecting a bipartisan deal that would have implemented new border security measures and increased the government's capacity to adjudicate immigration cases. That legislation was criticized by Catholic migration advocates who expressed concern about the implications of the proposed legislation, particularly for those seeking asylum.

Biden said there was "a simple choice" before lawmakers.

"We can fight about fixing the border or we can fix it," he said.

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Biden also called for the construction of a temporary pier to deliver humanitarian aid in Gaza amid the ongoing war between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip following Hamas' Oct. 7 surprise attack on Israel.

Israel, Biden said, has a right to defend itself. He condemned the violence perpetrated against Israel that day but stressed Israel must allow more civilian aid into Gaza.

Biden also argued Hamas could end the conflict by releasing remaining hostages, halting its attacks, and surrendering those responsible for the Oct. 7 atrocities. Biden also stressed that Israel's only path to lasting peace, including with its neighbors in the region, depended on a two-state solution with a viable Palestinian state.

Biden also addressed economic concerns, praising the role of unions in creating the American middle class, while also calling for the restoration of the now-lapsed extended child tax credit that was effective in reducing the number of families in poverty and child hunger, and a tax credit to help new homebuyers pay their mortgages until rates went down. He said these measures should be coupled with increasing tax revenue from billionaires and corporations.

Addressing concerns about his age head-on, Biden said that with age, "certain things become clearer than ever."

"My lifetime has taught me to embrace freedom and democracy, a future based on core values that defined America: honesty, decency, dignity, equality," he said.

Biden said, "the issue facing our nation isn't how old we are -- it's how old our ideas are."

"Hate, anger, revenge, retribution are among the oldest of ideas," he said. "But you can't lead America with ancient ideas that only take us back. To lead America, the land of possibilities, you need a vision for the future of what America can and should be."

The line was an apparent reference to his likely general election rival, former President Donald Trump, who has said in comments to his supporters, "I am your retribution."

During the address, Trump posted on his social media platform Truth Social, "He is so angry and crazy!"

Alabama's Sen. Katie Britt, who delivered the GOP rebuttal to the speech, said Biden's speech was "the performance of a permanent politician who has actually been in office for longer than I've been alive."

Britt argued, "Our country can do better." She singled out what she called a "crisis at our Southern border" and said "Bidenomics" has failed.

"Goodness, y'all," she said. "Bless his heart, we know better."

As Republicans have sought to distance themselves from the IVF ruling, Britt also said "we strongly support continued nationwide access to in vitro fertilization."

IVF is a form of fertility treatment opposed by the Catholic Church on the grounds that it often involves the destruction of human embryos, among other concerns. Some pro-life groups have called Alabama's subsequent enactment of IVF protections "ill-considered legislation" that fails to resist "an ideology that treats human beings as expendable commodities."

The U.S. Constitution requires the president to "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."

First dubbed the "Annual Message," the practice has taken various forms throughout U.S. history, per the House Historian's office, at times taking the form of a written message to Congress, while at others delivered in person by the president, and broadcast on radio or television.