

THE STATE OF OUR UNION

Our Country And Our Classroom

Please read everything below and leave tracks of your thinking as you read.

Tonight, our President will give the 2013 State of the Union speech. This month we are also looking at the state of our union in 5SH. We are looking at small steps we can do each day to make for a positive change in how we come together as a class regardless of our differences.

The State of the Union is an **annual** speech (given every year) by the President of the United States to the U.S. Congress. The President reports on how the U.S. is doing and shares his future plans and priorities. George Washington gave the first State of the Union address on January 8, 1790 ... how many years ago was that? _____

DID YOU KNOW?

There is a proper protocol to the State of the Union Address... It goes something like this:

A formal invitation is made to the President from the Congress. He can't give the speech without the invitation. At approximately 8:30 p.m., on the evening of the address, Congress gathers in their seats for a **joint session**. A joint is when both the House of Representatives *and* the Senate get together. Notice the word join is in the word joint. Joint sessions only happen on special occasions like the presidential inauguration or the State of the Union. The House Majority Leader loudly announces the Vice President and members of the Senate. They enter and take assigned seats. More formal announcements are made and then just after 9 p.m., as the President reaches the door to the chamber, it is announced, "Mister [or Madam] Speaker... The President of the United States!

As applause and cheering begin, the President walks toward the podium. It takes him a while because he has to pause to shake hands, hug, kiss and autograph copies of his speech. Finally, the Speaker of the House states, "Members of Congress, I have the high privilege and distinct honor of presenting to you the President of the United States." This leads to a further round of applause and, after much clapping, the beginning of the President's address. Two years ago, at President Obama's first state of the union address, he began his speech with the following words:

Madam Speaker, Vice President Biden, members of Congress, distinguished guests, and fellow Americans: Our Constitution declares that from time to time, the President shall give to Congress information about the state of our union. For 220 years, our leaders have fulfilled this duty. They've done so during periods of prosperity and tranquility. And they've done so in the midst of war and depression; at moments of great strife and great struggle. ..

State of the Union speeches usually last a little over an hour. There is a lot of applause so it takes a long time for the President to get through it. Traditionally democrats and republicans sit separately and clap at different times during the speech based on their politics. The Supreme Court rarely applauds in order to look non-biased. The year before last, after U.S. Representative Gabrielle Giffords was shot, Senator Mark Udall of Colorado proposed having all members of Congress sit together regardless of their political party. We'll see what happens this year.

The State of Our Union... In 5SH

In 5SH we have our own three branches of government. I, (Ms. Stark) am the President and Ms. Homer is the Vice President. We are the executive branch; we enforce the laws. You are the legislative branch. The founding fifth graders created the laws and it is up to you to create new ones or amend the ones we have. Ms. Cook and Mr. Youkilis are our Supreme Court, except while Ms. Cook is on maternity leave, Mr. Ritchie is on the Supreme Court. They are our judicial branch. They judge if a law has been broken and what the consequence should be. As your President, I decided that on the occasion of the State of the Union speech, it would be good if I wrote one for you too.

Vice President Homer, members of 5SH Congress, families and fellow citizens of room 302: The seven articles of our class constitution declare that in room 302, ***differences will be valued, attention*** will be given to whomever is talking, ***full effort*** will be given to each task, ***consideration*** must be paid to the feelings of others, everyone in our class will be **safe from harmful words and actions**, **cooperation** between people in our class is required and **the property** of our citizens and of the classroom will be used only with permission and with care.

My fellow citizens, as I look around each day and listen to the tone and words I hear, for the most part, I do not see our laws being broken. In fact I observe the opposite. I see teams working together, ideas being shared without fear of insults, property being handled with care, and a respect given to people in our class who have unique traits and ideas. I see you working hard. I see you making progress. There is a great deal of laughter and enthusiasm for what we do. So, I say to you on this 12th day of February, 2013, that the state of our union in 5SH is remarkable for the many acts of kindness, cooperation and care that occur each day.

Now, 5SH, I ask you this: Do we have work to do? Are there moments in our class where the laws of our land are being broken? Each one of us knows the answer is yes. Yes, there are moments when people do not pitch in when it's time to clean or line up. Yes, there are moments when people do not invite others to work or play with them and forget what it feels like to be excluded. And yes, there are moments when people forget how their side conversations stop the progress of those around them. So yes, we have work to do. But 5SH, is it too much work? Do you feel we are capable of doing better? Again, my citizens, the answer is yes. We know there is great power in you to reach farther. And we know it is those little, but not insignificant, gestures that will lift the spirits of your peers today and ripple out to future moments - making them better too. I know it can be hard to imagine how far a good deed can go, but I say to you today and every day, now is the perfect time to try. Thank you for being the outstanding citizens that you are.