



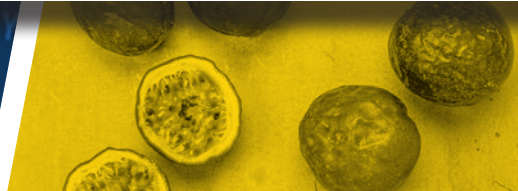
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Saul Loeb / Pool via Reuters

U.S. President Joe Biden delivers the State of the Union address at the U.S. Capitol on Tuesday in Washington.

‘Democracies are rising to the moment’ Biden blasts Putin for Ukraine invasion as he pledges to fight inflation

By Jennifer Haberkorn
Los Angeles Times

Washington
President Biden on Tuesday evening used his first State of the Union address to praise the West’s response to Russian leader Vladimir Putin’s “premeditated and unprovoked” war with Ukraine while seeking to convince Americans that he has a plan to combat spiking inflation at home. The speech comes amid geopolitical and domestic crises: a stalled legislative agenda, rising inflation, declining public support and Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. In an escalation of the U.S. response to Putin’s actions, Biden set out a series of actions to put pressure on Russia: He will ban Russian aircraft from American airspace, joining other European nations that have already taken that step. In addition, the Justice Department will pursue Russian oligarchs in Putin’s inner circle, Biden said. “Tonight, I say to the Russian oligarchs and corrupt leaders who have bilked billions of dollars off this violent regime: No more,” Biden said to bipartisan, rapturous applause in the House chamber of the U.S. Capitol. “We are joining with our European allies to find and seize their yachts, their luxury apartments, their private jets. We are coming for your ill-begotten gains. He has no idea what’s coming.” Biden also sought to underscore the role the United States played in establishing a united Western front to Russia, spelling out his decision to share Putin’s plans to the world. “We countered Russia’s lies with truth. And now that he has acted, the free world is holding him accountable,” Biden said. “In the battle between democracy and autocracy, democracies are



Evelyn Hockstein / Reuters

U.S. first lady Jill Biden applauds her guest Ukrainian Ambassador to the U.S. Oksana Markarova in the first lady’s box as President Joe Biden welcomes Markarova during his State of the Union address to a joint session of the U.S. Congress in the House of Representatives Chamber at the Capitol on Tuesday in Washington.

rising to the moment, and the world is clearly choosing the side of peace and security.” In the House chamber, hundreds of lawmakers, freshly relieved of COVID-19 face mask mandates and armed with signs of support for Ukraine, cheered when Biden pointed to Ukrainian ambassador Oksana Markarova in the gallery where she was sitting with First Lady Jill Biden. “Let each of us here tonight in this Chamber send an unmistakable signal to Ukraine and to the world,” Biden said, drawing a standing ovation from members of both parties. Biden touted efforts by U.S. and Western allies to sanction Russia over its invasion in the hopes of pressuring Putin to stop the war. “A Russian dictator, invading a foreign country, has costs around the world,” Biden said. “And I’m taking robust action to make sure the pain of our sanctions

is targeted at Russia’s economy.” Acknowledging the COVID-19 pandemic has taken a toll on Americans, Biden said the country “has lived through two of the hardest years this nation has ever faced. The pandemic has been punishing.” The president took pains to tell Americans that he understood they were struggling to afford groceries and gasoline. Biden outlined what the White House identifies as its recent accomplishments in job creation and recovery, as well as a plan to fight inflation in a way that he says will also slash the deficit. “Lower your costs, not your wages,” Biden said. “Make more cars and semiconductors in America. More infrastructure and innovation in America. More goods moving faster and cheaper in America. More jobs where you can earn a good living in America. And,

instead of relying on foreign supply chains — let’s make it in America.” “I call it building a better America,” he said. The speech comes as Biden is hoping for a reset, particularly when it concerns the economy. An NPR/PBS “NewsHour” poll released Friday found that only 36% of respondents agreed with how Biden is handling the economy and 39% approved of his overall job performance. Inflation was the top concern cited. To that end, Biden highlighted the passage of his American Rescue Plan, a COVID-19 stimulus measure, and the bipartisan infrastructure legislation, which funded road, bridge and transit repairs. “People were hurting,” he said of the months when the stimulus bill was enacted last year. “We needed to act, and we did. Few pieces of legislation have done more in a critical

moment in our history to lift us out of crisis.” To that end, the president announced a new effort that officials say will help boost the economy by seeking to promote more competition in the ocean shipping market, one dominated by just three global alliances. He also reiterated support for pieces of a massive spending bill, which was known as “Build Back Better,” that was killed in December because of opposition by every Republican and Sen. Joe Manchin III (D-W.Va.), a moderate who expressed concern over the measure’s proposed cost. Biden asked Congress to send him legislation that includes the effort’s proposals to reduce prescription drug costs, expand child care, tackle climate change and reduce the deficit. It is not clear how Biden will persuade Manchin to get on board with such proposals. Biden did not refer to the plan — which he once said would define his presidency — by its old moniker. Biden’s address before a joint session of Congress at the Capitol comes amid tighter physical security but fewer COVID-19 precautions. U.S. Capitol Police Chief J. Thomas Manger said a fence, similar to the one installed after last year’s insurrection, was going back up out of an abundance of caution. On Monday, Congress’ attending physician lifted a mask requirement on Capitol Hill, a move that many Republicans have been seeking for months, even during surges in cases and deaths. While the vast majority of House Democrats have been wearing masks around the Capitol in recent weeks, most Republicans wear them only when they enter the House chamber. ©2022 Los Angeles Times. Distributed by Tribune Content Agency, LLC.