

Veterans For Peace Toolkit

Hosting a State of the Union Watch Party

The State of the Union is delivered annually by the President of the United States to a joint session of the United States Congress. While this speech is often used as a marketing tool by the President filled with optimistic predictions and open-ended promises, it also provides a window of opportunity for us to come together with our community. By hosting a watch party, you can lead a valuable discussion about the issues facing our nation, including those that the President may leave out in his speech. In this toolkit, you will find steps for planning your party, a timetable, suggested discussion questions, and an attendance sheet.

SUGGESTED STEPS

The following section gives you a concise step-by-step plan for hosting a successful State of the Union watch party. Please e-mail casey@veteransforpeace.org if you have any questions.

Step 1. Deciding whom to invite

Make a list of all your fellow VFP members, family relatives, friends, colleagues, social acquaintances, neighbors, church activists, community activists, co-workers, people from your union or social clubs and anyone else you can think of who share your political interests, that you wouldn't mind inviting to your home.

Step 2. Sending invitations

Using all available means, invite the folks on your list and encourage them to bring along friends. Use all available sources to reach out to your potential guests, including: email, phone, snail mail, social media, or a personal visit. Please see the suggested timetable, provided in this toolkit.

(Conventional wisdom suggests that about 1/3 of those you invite will tell you they can't attend and 1/2 of those who tell you they can attend, will change their plans at the last second, so expect a turnout of 1/3 of the people you invite. There is nothing wrong with hosting a small group of people, just be sure to make the most of the opportunity by being prepared with discussion starters, VFP handouts, and a plan for the evening.)

Step 3. Printed materials

VFP has provided links to position statements that you and your guests can easily refer to. In addition to educational materials, national office has created sign-up sheets so you can encourage your guests to become active with us. Also, be sure to have a copy of the Statement of Purpose to read after the President's speech.

Step 4. Conducting your event

As your guests arrive, have them fill in the sign-in sheet so you can keep track and follow up with everyone who attends. When everyone has arrived, introduce yourself by talking about why you care about this State of the Union address, what made you get involved with VFP, etc. Try to keep your introduction to just a few minutes. Ask all participants to introduce themselves and state briefly why this is important to them and why they decided to participate.

(If you have a large group of attendees, consider limiting introductions to keep things moving along. Consider breaking into smaller groups after the speech for discussion/questions and answer, then come back together as a large group. Keep in mind: we want guests to feel engaged in the discussion. Don't allow one person to dominate the conversation.)

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After the speech is over, encourage discussion about the State of the Union with your group. Start by reading the VFP Statement of Purpose. This toolkit contains some suggested questions for the watch parties, or you can ask your own. This is also a good time to take the conversation online and encourage attendees to share their thoughts on Facebook and Twitter.

Step 5. Get commitments

While you have their attention, don't forget to ask folks to sign up to get involved! What type of action can you all take in response to the State of the Union? Will someone write a Letter to the Editor or an Op Ed? Who will call the Whitehouse Switchboard (202-456-1414)?

ONE MORE THING:

Take pictures! Everyone likes to see themselves in print. We will have a place on our Facebook page for the Watch Parties across the country. Please send any pictures to casey@veteransforpeace.org

THIS IS A PARTY, SO REMEMBER TO HAVE FUN!

TIMETABLE & CHECKLIST

Today!

_____ Start compiling a list of people you want to invite to the Watch Party

January 15

_____ Invite your friends and family to join you at the Watch Party on January 20th

January 18

_____ Follow up with each invitee

_____ Make sure to sign up to follow Veterans For Peace on Twitter and Facebook

Day before Event

_____ Print off attendance sheets, discussion questions, and VFP Statement of Purpose

_____ Pick up the snacks and beverages for your party

_____ Make sure you have pens or pencils and paper on hand for your party participants

_____ Check your viewing equipment and room set up. Do you have enough chairs?

Day of Event

_____ Have each guest fill out an attendance sheet as they arrive at the party

_____ Have a discussion after the speech about issues raised by the President

_____ Request your guests to post their opinions on our Twitter and Facebook pages

Day after Event

_____ Follow up with everyone who attended your event, thanking them for coming out

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QUESTIONS FOR THE WATCH PARTY

Before jumping into the discussion questions, please read the VFP Statement of Purpose. Feel free to ask your participants some or all of these questions once the President's speech is finished. Share questions and answers on social media or to e-mail any responses to casey@veteransforpeace.org to be posted online.

- 1) How does the speech relate to VFP's mission and Statement of Purpose?
- 2) What wasn't mentioned by the President that should have been brought up? How can we lift up those issues?
- 3) Were there any points throughout the speech in which you feel the President misled the audience? How can we shed light on the truth of those issues?
- 4) How can we move our foreign policies away from endless military spending and war-making?