

NBC's *Today*

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7:00:44 a.m. [TEASE]

22 seconds

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Making His Case]

CRAIG MELVIN: Making his case, President Trump to deliver the first State of the Union of his second term.

PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP: It's going to be a long speech because we have so much to talk about.

MELVIN: The high stakes address coming at a critical time for his administration and the nation set to focus on the economy, new tariff turmoil, and immigration. We're live at the White House with what you can expect.

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7:10:20 a.m.

5 minutes and 27 seconds

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Trump Set to Deliver State of the Union]

HODA KOTB: Now to an event in Washington that will — will be watched very closely later tonight. President Trump set to deliver the State of the Union address at a key time in his second term, expected to touch on a wide range of issues from the economy to immigration and Iran. We have two reports for you. We're going to start with NBC's Garrett Hake, who's at the White House for us. Hey, Garrett. Morning.

GARRETT HAAKE: Hey, Hoda. Good morning. A lot of issues to be discussed tonight, but the President is expected to focus heavily on the economy. It's the issue most important to voters as we begin this year's midterm election year. Now, the President's speech to Congress last year was the longest such speech in history, clocking in at an hour and 40 minutes. Tonight's could approach that length, too, with the President telling reporters yesterday he's got a lot he wants to say. President Trump preparing to address the nation tonight.

TRUMP: It's going to be a long speech because we have so much to talk about.

HAAKE: On Monday, speaking to a gathering of families of Americans killed by undocumented immigrants, the President previewing possible applause lines.

TRUMP: We have a country that's now doing well. We have the greatest economy we've ever had. [SCREEN WIPE] We restored our border, and that's now totally secure. And our country is at the safest level it's been in many, many years.

HAAKE: But recent polls show Americans don't share the President's positivity, with his approval rating hovering just below 40 percent. The public souring on his handling of the economy and even immigration, long his signature issue, though the President has shrugged off negative polls. The President is expected to unveil new domestic policies aimed at tackling affordability, among them a new commitment from tech companies to pay increased electricity costs in communities where new AI data centers are being built. President Trump also expected to devote a portion of his speech to foreign policy, against the backdrop of a U.S. military buildup in the Middle East as the President weighs a strike on Iran. Dozens of Democrats plan to skip the speech tonight in protest.

CONGRESSMAN ROBERT GARCIA (D-CA): It's important to show the American public that someone that has led the single most corrupt government in U.S. history. There has to be action against that.

HAAKE: Others will use their guests to send a message, including several lawmakers inviting survivors of abuse by Jeffrey Epstein and newly elected Virginia Governor Abigail Spanberger, delivering the Democrats' response. The President has spent the last several days slamming Supreme Court justices for overturning much of his tariff program, saying he was ashamed of them and that they perhaps shouldn't even be invited to the speech tonight. Well, tonight, any justices that choose to attend will be seated just feet away from the President, which could create some awkward moments if he decides he has more to say about their work, Craig.

CRAIG MELVIN: Garrett Hake from the White House. Garrett, thank you. For more on what we can expect to hear tonight. We're joined by Kristen Welker, moderator of *Meet the Press*. Kristen, good morning to you. The President says he's got a lot to talk about tonight. Give us a preview. What can we expect to hear from him and what will you be looking for specifically?

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: What to Expect From State of the Union]

KRISTEN WELKER: Well, Craig, this is a critical speech for the President. It comes as Republicans are fighting to hold on to Congress in the midterms. One of the biggest questions tonight, how exactly will he address the economy? Republicans I've been talking to want him to stay on message, express that he understands that people are struggling and to lay out a clear path forward for why the economy will improve. But look, he's facing headwinds. You just heard Garrett talk about this. In addition to that overall approval rating, a recent poll shows he's underwater with his handling of the economy, 41 percent approve, 57 percent disapprove. Now, yes, foreign policy will loom large, too. Will President Trump give any insight into his thinking on Iran and whether he plans to attack that country? And today marks the four year anniversary, Craig, of Russia's invasion into Ukraine, a grim milestone. The war has dragged on despite the President's vow to end it. Look, I'm also told he will focus on the fact that this year marks America's 250th birthday. So, expect a hopeful tone as well. One senior administration official telling me overnight the President is still putting the final touches on the speech in these final hours before he delivers it, Craig and Hoda.

KOTB: Well, Kristen, what do we expect to get from the Democrats?

WELKER: Yeah, Hoda, great question. All eyes are going to be on the Democrats as well. Some members are planning to bring guests to highlight their key issues. Garrett just talked about that from Epstein to survivors. Also, people who have been impacted by the President's immigration policies. Some Democrats are planning to boycott the speech altogether, so expect to see some empty seats in the chamber tonight. It is notable that Democratic leadership has urged members to maintain decorum in the chamber, and Democrats are facing their own headwinds head into the midterms. Heading into tonight, a recent poll showing more Americans trust President Trump to handle key issues than Democrats in Congress by a narrow margin, 33 to 31 percent. And you might recall, last year, Democrats got criticized for appearing like their protests were in disarray. Will they look more unified tonight? I think that's a key question, and it's worth noting that this is the first time a president will deliver a State of the Union during a partial government shutdown, in this case, over Democrats' demands that ICE change its tactics. It is all setting the stage for a pivotal night, Hoda and Craig.

MELVIN: All right, Kristen Welker. Kristen, thank you. We will see you again during tonight's special coverage of the State of the Union, 9:00 eastern, six Pacific here on NBC and NBC News NOW as well. Meantime,