



Foreign Leaders Addressing Congress

Foreign leaders are periodically invited to address Congress. The first address by a foreign dignitary occurred on December 10, 1824, when Revolutionary War hero the Marquis de Lafayette addressed the House. The most recent address took place on April 3, 2019, when His Excellency Jens Stoltenberg, Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), addressed a joint meeting of Congress.

Invitation Process

When a foreign leader formally visits the United States he or she is sometimes invited to address Congress. The decision to invite a foreign leader to address Congress has historically been made by the congressional leadership, often in consultation and conjunction with the executive branch. No formal procedure, however, on when or how to issue invitations is codified in law or in House or Senate rules. Additionally, not all foreign leaders who visit the United States are invited to address Congress.

When a foreign leader is invited to address Congress, the invitation is formally extended by the Speaker of the House on behalf of the House and Senate leadership.

“It is my honor as Speaker, and on behalf of the bipartisan leadership of the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate, to extend to you as head of state of the Holy See an open invitation to appear before and address a Joint Meeting of the two houses of Congress assembled in the Chamber of the U.S. House of Representatives.”
- Invitation to His Holiness, Pope Francis

Types of Meetings

A foreign leader (or other non-Member of Congress) has historically addressed either the House, the Senate (a House or Senate reception), or a joint meeting, where the House and Senate are both present.

House and Senate Receptions

On several occasions, a foreign leader has been invited to address the House or Senate individually. These meetings are formally called House or Senate receptions. The first House reception was held on December 10, 1824, when the Marquis de Lafayette addressed the chamber. The most recent House reception for a foreign leader was held on February 17, 1977, for the President of Mexico, José Lopez Portillo.

The first Senate reception was held on January 5, 1852, when Louis Kossuth, the exiled Governor of Hungary, addressed the Senate. The most recent Senate reception for

a foreign leader was held on August 16, 1967, with Kurt George Kiesinger, Chancellor of West Germany.

Joint Meeting of Congress

A joint meeting of Congress is generally held when a prominent individual, often a foreign leader, is invited to address the House and Senate simultaneously. Because addressing a joint meeting of Congress is available by invitation only, agreement on whom to invite, and when they will speak, is generally reached between the House and the Senate. **Table 1** lists the number of foreign leaders who have addressed a joint meeting of Congress since the 94th Congress (1975-1976).

Table 1. Number of Foreign Leaders Addressing a Joint Meeting of Congress, 1975-2019

Congress	Number	Congress	Number
94	7	106	1
95	1	107	2
96	0	108	4
97	1	109	7
98	4	110	3
99	7	111	3
100	3	112	3
101	7	113	2
102	5	114	5
103	3	115	1
104	5	116	1
105	3	Total	78

Source: Historian of the House of Representatives, “Joint Meeting & Joint Session Addresses Before Congress by Foreign Leaders & Dignitaries,” at <http://history.house.gov/Institution/Foreign-Leaders/Joint-Sessions/>.

The first time a foreign leader addressed a joint meeting of Congress occurred in 1874, when King Kalakaua of Hawaii (then a kingdom) visited Washington. Since then, there have been 120 instances where foreign leaders have addressed a joint meeting of Congress.

Table 2 lists the foreign leaders to address a joint meeting of Congress during the last six Congresses (110th Congress [2007-2008] to the 116th Congress [2019-2020]). In the 117th Congress (2021-2022), no foreign leaders have addressed a joint meeting of Congress.

Table 2. Addresses by Foreign Leaders to a Joint Meeting of Congress110th to 116th Congresses

Date	Foreign Leader
3/7/2007	King Abdullah II Bin Al Hussein Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan
11/7/2007	President Nicolas Sarkozy French Republic
4/30/2008	Prime Minister Bertie Ahern Ireland
3/4/2009	Prime Minister Gordon Brown United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
11/3/2009	Chancellor Dr. Angela Merkel Federal Republic of Germany
5/20/2010	President Felipe Calderón Hinojosa Mexico
3/9/2011	Prime Minister Julia Gillard Australia
3/24/2011	Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu Israel
10/13/2011	President Lee Myung-bak Republic of Korea
5/8/2013	President Park Geun Hye Republic of Korea
9/18/2014	President Petro Poroshenko, Ukraine
3/3/2015	Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, Israel
3/25/2015	President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
4/29/2015	Prime Minister Shinzō Abe, Japan
9/24/2015	His Holiness Pope Francis Holy See of Rome
6/8/2016	Prime Minister Narendra Modi Republic of India
4/25/2018	President Emmanuel Macron France

Date	Foreign Leader
4/3/2019	Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Source: Historian of the House of Representatives, “Joint Meeting & Joint Session Addresses Before Congress by Foreign Leaders & Dignitaries,” at <http://history.house.gov/Institution/Foreign-Leaders/Joint-Sessions/>.

Since 1809, most joint meetings of Congress to hear addresses by foreign leaders have been held in the Hall of the House. For example, **Figure 1** shows Islamic Republic of Afghanistan President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani addressing a joint meeting of Congress on March 25, 2015.

Figure 1. President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Addressing a Joint Meeting of Congress

March 25, 2015



Source: C-SPAN, “Afghan President Ashraf Ghani Address to Joint Meeting of Congress,” March 25, 2015, at <http://www.c-span.org/video/?324977-2/afghan-president-ashraf-ghani-address-joint-meeting-congress>.

Video Address to an Informal Meeting of Congress

On at least one occasion, a foreign leader has addressed an informal meeting of Members of the House and Senate by video, without a formal joint meeting of Congress. On March 16, 2022, Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelenskyy addressed Members of the House and Senate by a video broadcast to the Congressional Auditorium in the Capitol Visitor Center.

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