



Issue 1: Strategic Petroleum Reserve	2
Pro/Con Quotes	3
Ballot and Student Voting Results	4
Issue 2: D.C. Statehood	5
Global Corner: China	6

March Legislative Updates

President Biden Delivers State of the Union Address to 'Interactive' Audience

ON FEB. 7, President Joe Biden delivered his second **State of the Union (SOTU)** address since he's been in office. Speaking to a divided Congress for the first time, an optimistic Biden made the case that the nation was stronger and more stable than when he assumed office two years ago.

Throughout Biden's speech, tensions were on display in the chamber. On several occasions, Republicans interrupted the President by heckling, despite the attempts of **House Speaker Kevin McCarthy (R-CA)** to shush his congressional colleagues and control the emotion.

The most disruptive moments came when President Biden charged that Republicans wanted to "sunset" **Social Security** and **Medicare** as part of their efforts to reduce the deficit. Republicans erupted in almost theatrical outrage. "Liar," shouted **Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-GA)** while others booed and jeered.

Many Republican members of Congress, including **House Speaker Kevin McCarthy (R-CA)**, have stated that they are not in favor of cutting the Social Security and Medicare programs.

"So tonight, let's all agree—and we apparently are—let's stand up for seniors," Biden added.

Many Republicans, including Speaker McCarthy, joined Democrats in standing and applauding.

Arkansas Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders delivered the **Republican rebuttle** to Biden's speech, drawing a sharp contrast with Biden as she delivered criticisms of the president.



Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders (R-AR)

Sanders called Biden "unfit to serve as commander in chief," said his "weakness puts our nation and the world at risk," and described the political landscape in dire terms.

Lawmakers Introduce Airline Passengers' Bill of Rights Legislation

ON JAN. 31, following a holiday travel season with Southwest Airlines' meltdown and other airline disruptions affecting thousands of fliers, **Sens. Richard Blumenthal (D-CT)** and **Edward J. Markey (D-MA)** led the introduction of the **Airline Passengers' Bill of Rights** and the **Forbidding Airlines from Imposing Ridiculous or FAIR Fees Act**, bills to expand protections for air travelers.

The **Airline Passengers' Bill of Rights** would ensure that airlines provide passengers with fair compensation, refunds, and recourse in the event of airline-caused flight delays and cancellations, require airlines to pay at least \$1,350 to passengers denied boarding as a result of an oversold flight, and mandate airlines to immediately refund bag fees for damaged or lost bags. The **FAIR Fees Act** would prohibit airlines from charging unreasonably high fees for services like checked bags, seat selection, and ticket changes.

"This legislation will establish clear, enforceable rules for airlines to follow," said Sen. Blumenthal.

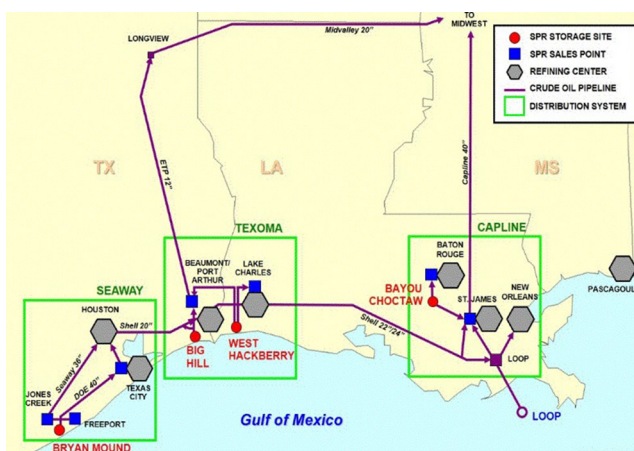
FEATURED PARTNER: Civic Learning Week

SGAP is excited to announce our participation in the first-ever national **Civic Learning Week**! Building on the successful localized efforts in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and New York City in 2022, this upcoming **Civic Learning Week** will bring together students, educators, policymakers, and leaders to energize the movement for civic education across the nation.

<https://civiclearningweek.org/>

THE ISSUE: On Jan. 27, the **Republican-led House of Representatives** passed a bill that aims to curb **President Joe Biden's** ability to tap the nation's petroleum reserves, a bid by the chamber's new majority to rebuke the White House for using massive oil releases last year to tamp down runaway gasoline prices.

Sponsored by **Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R-WA)** and 40 fellow House Republicans, **H.R.21** or the **"Strategic Production Response Act"** would prohibit non-emergency releases from the **Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR)** unless the government approves an increase in domestic oil and gas production on federal lands.



THE STRATEGIC PETROLEUM RESERVE (SPR) is the world's largest supply of emergency crude oil. Administered by the **U.S. Department of Energy**, these federally owned oil stocks are stored in massive underground **salt domes (or caverns)** along the Texas and Louisiana coastlines of the **Gulf of Mexico**. Each dome is roughly cylindrical in shape with an average diameter of about 200 feet and a height of 2,550 feet. Decisions to withdraw crude oil in the event of an energy emergency are made by the **President**. With a storage capacity of up to 713.5 million barrels, as of **Dec. 30, 2022**, the SPR currently holds in approximately **372.4 million barrels** of crude oil.

THE HISTORY: In 1973, the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC) imposed an oil embargo against the United States, triggering an energy crisis that caused a U.S. economic recession. To mitigate damage from future oil shortages, **President Gerald Ford** signed the **Energy Policy and Conservation Act of 1975**, which established the Strategic Petroleum Reserve. The SPR offers the nation an insurance policy against potential supply interruptions; provides a deterrent to hostile threats to cut off oil supplies; and protects the U.S. economy.

THE CONTROVERSY: Republicans cast the new bill in national security terms, accusing

Biden of recklessly making politically timed releases ahead of the midterm election. They contend he has depleted the emergency reserve, which was created in 1975 in response to the Arab oil embargo.

"If there's a hurricane that hits the Gulf [and] disrupts the oil markets, you've got oil there to make sure you can continue to flow oil to your refineries to keep the supply going," said **Majority Leader Steve Scalise (R-LA)**. "It's not there to mask bad policies."

President Biden has proposed a plan for replenishing the

stockpile after ordering the biggest crude oil releases by far in the history of the reserve. Its current level of **372.4 million barrels** is its **lowest level since 1983**. But Biden is not the first president to draw down supply from the SPR—**Presidents George H.W. Bush, George W. Bush** and **Barack Obama** all released barrels from the reserve. And Congress in recent years turned to the reserve as a way to pay for unrelated priorities, with lawmakers of both parties approving sales to pay for federal funding needs.

THOSE FOR Congress passing H.R.21 say Biden drew down oil from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve to help reduce gas prices before the **2022 mid-term elections**. To lower prices it is necessary to expand oil and gas production on federal lands. Biden has been hostile to fossil fuels, suspending new sales of oil and gas leases, and creating regulatory hurdles to drilling. Tying future drawdowns from the SPR to expanded oil and gas production on federal lands would ensure U.S. energy independence.

THOSE AGAINST Congress passing H.R.21 say President Biden's drawdown of SPR oil was warranted given the disruptions to global energy markets caused by **Russia's** invasion of **Ukraine**, and that Republicans beholden to the fossil fuel industry are looking for excuses to expand oil and gas drilling on federal lands. The U.S. needs to accelerate the transition towards clean energy, and that requiring additional oil and gas leasing could preclude any leasing for renewable energy projects.

“It is a national scandal that the people who live in the capital of the oldest democracy in the world have fewer political rights than those who live outside it.”

SEN. CHRIS VAN HOLLEN (D-MD)



WASHINGTON, D.C., formally the District of Columbia and also known as D.C. or just Washington, is the capital city of the United States of America. The city is divided into quadrants, which are centered around the Capitol and include 131 neighborhoods. As of the 2020 census, the city had a population of 689,545, making it the third-most populous city in the Mid-Atlantic after New York City and Philadelphia. But without statehood, residents of D.C. have no voting member in Congress.

THE ISSUE: On Jan. 24, **Sen. Tom Carper (D-DE)** introduced **S.51** or the **“Washington, D.C. Admission Act,”** a bill to provide for the admission of the state of Washington, D.C. into the Union. Were the bill made law, the District of Columbia would become the 51st state of the United States of America.

According to a press release from Sen. Carper’s office, the bill would “ensure that the citizens and elected leaders of the District of Columbia have full authority over local affairs, including the selection of judges to fill vacancies on state courts.” The legislation would designate the areas surrounding the White House, the Capitol, the Supreme Court, and the National Mall as the seat of the federal government. That area would inherit the name the “Capital” and remain under the control of Congress, as mandated by the Constitution.

Carper and the bill’s 43 cosponsors contend that Washington, D.C.’s 700,000 citizens suffer a “no taxation without representation” reality since they do not have a voting representative in either chamber of Congress.

“D.C. residents pay the highest federal taxes per capita and more federal taxes than 23 states, and the District has a bond rating higher than 35 states,” said **Rep. Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC)** who has served as a nonvoting delegate to the House of Representatives, representing the District of Columbia since 1991.

THE CONTROVERSY:

Republicans say the real issue here is that the Democrats want to make Washington, D.C. a state of its own so that the people who live there will have representation in the federal government—and the population of D.C. tends to lean left. In other words, the Democrats want D.C. to have voting members of Congress. Gaining two seats in the Senate would add seats in the House and Senate in favor of the Democrats.

THOSE FOR D.C. statehood argue the city’s residents pay the highest federal taxes per capita and yet don’t have voting representatives in Congress. Leading Democrats have said making the District of Columbia a state is a civil rights issue since approximately 46 percent of the District’s residents are people of color. Supporters feel that keeping D.C. from becoming a state is undemocratic and unacceptable. They say it is time for the residents of D.C. to finally have their representation with their taxation.

THOSE AGAINST D.C. statehood say the bill is nothing more than an attempt by Democrats to gain two Senate seats and one House seat. Those against argue that the Constitution mandates a district to house the federal government and so the territory was designed to be neutral so no state could claim they housed the head of the government and potentially influence it. If the territory were to be reduced, it would include just a few buildings near the National Mall.



Tensions Increase Between China and U.S. After Balloon and Other Unidentified Object Incidents

ON FEB. 9, the **House of Representatives** passed a resolution in a 419-0 vote condemning China for the **Chinese surveillance balloon** that traveled across U.S. airspace in early February.



A Chinese surveillance balloon floats over Billings, Montana, on Feb. 1, 2023.
Author: Chase Doak.

A **State Department** official said the Chinese balloon that flew above the U.S. included “multiple antennas” capable of collecting signals intelligence, and the balloon maker has proven ties to the Chinese military.

Tensions appear to be ratcheting up between the two nations. China lodged a “stern protest” to the U.S. over shooting down the “unmanned airship.”

“The Chinese side has repeatedly shared information on the unintended entry of the unmanned Chinese civilian airship into U.S. airspace,” said **Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokeswoman Mao Ning**.

On Feb. 12, the U.S. shot down a fourth flying object at 20,000 feet above Lake Huron, the Pentagon said, underscoring heightened concerns over North American airspace after a suspected Chinese spy balloon was found traversing the U.S.

Pentagon officials said none of the objects shot down appeared to pose a military threat, but they couldn’t rule out additional takedowns of unidentified objects in U.S. airspace. Asked by a reporter if extraterrestrials might be involved, **Air Force Gen. Glen VanHerck** responded, “I haven’t ruled anything out.”



THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA (PRC) is the world's most populous country, with a population exceeding 1.4 billion, slightly ahead of India. China spans the equivalent of five time zones, borders fourteen countries by land, and covers approximately 3.7 million square miles of land area.

QUICK FACTS ABOUT CHINA

Population: 1,410,539,758 (2022 est.)
Population growth rate: 0.19% (2022 est.)

Ethnic groups: Han Chinese 91.1%, ethnic minorities 8.9% (includes Zhang, Hui, Manchu, Uighur, Miao, Yi, Tujia, Tibetan, Mongol, Dong, Buyei, Yao, Bai, Korean, Hani, Li, Kazakh, Dai, and other nationalities) (2021 est.)

Religions: Folk religion 21.9%, Buddhist 18.2%, Christian 5.1%, Muslim 1.8%, Hindu < 0.1%, Jewish < 0.1%, other 0.7% (includes Daoist (Taoist)), unaffiliated 52.1%

Government type: Communist party state

Capital: Beijing

Chief of State: President XI Jinping (since March 14, 2013)

Source: <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/china/summaries>



This newsletter is a publication of the **Student Governmental Affairs Program (SGAP)**, a nonprofit organization founded by **National Write Your Congressman**.

2435 N. Central Expressway | Suite 300
Richardson, TX 75080
<https://www.sgap.org>

Issue

1

Petroleum Reserve

Should Congress pass H.R.21 to curb the ability to tap the nation's petroleum reserve?



YES: REP. CATHY MCMORRIS RODGERS (R-WA)



"Biden has turned a longtime bipartisan strategic asset, the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, into a political tool to cover up the consequences of his expensive rush-to-green agenda. H.R. 21

provides a path towards making energy more affordable and reliable for Americans by preserving the SPR's vital and central purpose—to provide the oil supplies Americans need during true emergencies, not drain them away for non-emergency, political purposes. I am honored to join my Republican colleagues in passing this important bill to strengthen American energy security and leadership. President Biden and the Democrats' radical 'rush to green' agenda has made life unaffordable for people across the country. It is time to flip the switch. It's time to end the politically motivated abuse of the SPR and focus on American energy and American security."



NO: PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN (STATEMENT FROM ADMINISTRATION)



"H.R. 21 would significantly weaken a critical energy security tool, resulting in more oil supply shortages and higher gas prices. This Administration's use of the Strategic Petroleum Reserve has

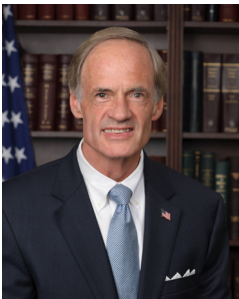
been essential to protecting our energy security. By arbitrarily requiring completion of a report related to energy production on Federal lands, H.R.21 makes it harder to provide relief to Americans during energy disruptions globally and at home. Moreover, there is nothing currently standing in the way of domestic oil production. Production is up by more than 1 million barrels per day and is on track to reach a new record this year. Oil and gas companies are currently sitting on thousands of unused but approved permits that they can use to further increase production right now."

Issue

2

D.C. Statehood

Should Congress make Washington, D.C. the 51st state?



YES: SEN. TOM CARPER (D-DE)



"We have been taught that when our founders built a new nation they cried 'no taxation without representation'—a slogan that has stood the test of time. Unfortunately, 'taxation without representation' is

the current reality for nearly 700,000 citizens living in the District of Columbia. These citizens do not have a voting representative in either chamber of Congress. They pay more federal taxes per capita than citizens of any of the 50 states but have no say in how those taxes are actually spent. This is wrong and not consistent with the values that we hold dear as Americans."



NO: SEN. JOE MANCHIN (D-WV)



"If Congress wants to make D.C. a state, it should propose a constitutional amendment. It should propose a constitutional amendment and let the people of America

vote. To those who want to change the District's status, let the people of America vote. I caution all of my friends that if they go down the path of seeking statehood by simple legislation, you know it's going to go to the Supreme Court. Every single legal scholar has told us that. So why not do it the right way and let the people vote, to see if they want to change?"



Dear Member of Congress:

I am a student receiving information from the Student Governmental Affairs Program. Here are my opinions on these issues. I would greatly appreciate any response you might like to share.

1) Should Congress pass H.R.21 to curb the ability to tap the nation's petroleum reserve?

Comments: _____

_____ Yes _____ No _____ Undecided

2) Should Congress make Washington, D.C. the 51st state?

Comments: _____

_____ Yes _____ No _____ Undecided

Student Name

School Name

School Address

Nationwide Student Voting Results from the Last SGAP Newsletter

	Yes	No	Undecided
1) Should Congress pass legislation to ban TikTok in the U.S.? Yes: "TikTok contributes to the mental health issues that teenagers face." "It shapes younger generations to 'adapt' to trends." "It has the power to shape society on how TikTok wants it to be." "TikTok has too much false and harmful information, and has contributed to serious injuries for some." No: "What prevents a similar app from coming back in the future?" "No, because there are informative videos on TikTok." "It's a platform for some people to make money and banning it could do more harm than good."	25%	59%	16%
2) Should the federal government regulate cryptocurrency? Yes: "Lightly regulated since regular money is regulated." No: "Most feel this is a fly-by-night monetary movement."	42%	39%	19%

This ballot was prepared by the Student Governmental Affairs Program (SGAP), a nonprofit, nonpartisan student civics program, located at: 2435 N. Central Expressway, Suite 300, Richardson, TX 75080 | Phone: 1-800-806-7427 | Email: civics@sgap.org | Website: <https://www.sgap.org>