



Biden's State of the Union Highlights Absurd Reach of Federal Government

Plus: Facebook blocks and free speech, Elizabeth Warren is wrong about cryptocurrency (again), and more...

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President Joe Biden gave his second State of the Union Address last night. It was, above all, a testament to the ridiculous breadth of issues we expect our executive branch to be involved in and the absurd reach of the federal government into all aspects of American life.

Biden delved into everything from the price of insulin to protecting *Roe v. Wade*, safeguarding kids from social media ads, lowering consumer prices, getting more Americans mental health services, ensuring better patient treatment at nursing homes, raising the minimum wage, subsidizing childcare, stopping drug trafficking, helping young transgender people reach their potential, creating manufacturing jobs, combating cancer, and more. (You can [read the whole thing here](#).)

One of the most notable—and libertarian-friendly—sections of the speech related to COVID-19 and the pandemic, with Biden (in a test of new Democratic messaging on the issue?) promising a return to normalcy. "COVID-19 need no longer control our lives," he declared, while still touting the efficacy of vaccines, the importance of testing, and the need to stay vigilant about new variants.

"Most Americans in most of the country can now be mask free," said Biden, pointing to new Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines. He also commented: "Our schools are open. Let's keep it that way."

But Biden's State of the Union hit way too many notes that would've been right at home in an address from former President Donald Trump. He called for more police funding, talked about the need to strengthen our southern border, and went on at length about America-first trade policies and buying American.

"This is more a populist than a left-wing speech: trade protection, business subsidies, transfer payments, more money for police, secure the border," commented Cato Institute's Executive Vice President David Boaz.

FREE MINDS

Politician can block people on personal Facebook pages. A federal appeals court ruled that it doesn't violate the First Amendment for a New Mexico politician to block someone on his personal Facebook page. The case involves Otero County Commissioner (and Cowboys for Trump co-founder) Couy Griffin and whether his personal Facebook page counted as a public forum for free speech purposes.

"Three judges from the appeals court ruled unanimously that plaintiff Jeff Swanson, chairman of the Otero County Democratic Party, failed to show that the law has determined when a personal social media profile becomes a public forum, with 1st Amendment protections," reports the Associated Press. Swanson had argued that "elected leaders should not be able to shut out the electorate from political conversations on social media," after being blocked from Griffin's personal Facebook profile after criticizing the commissioner.

FREE MARKETS

Getting cryptocurrency wrong. In which Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D–Mass.) and *The New York Times* get everything about cryptocurrency and Ukraine/Russia exactly backward:

Cryptocurrencies are much more likely to help out ordinary Russians and Ukrainians than "Putin and his cronies."

"Crypto is a lifeline for ordinary people in countries like Venezuela and Russia, not a means to evade sanctions," comments the Niskanen Center's Samuel Hammond. "On the contrary. Russia is trying to minimize the cost of sanctions through draconian capital controls. Access to crypto markets *hurts* Russia more than it helps."

And—as Hammonds and many others have pointed out—cryptocurrency transactions come with a record. "An immutable ledger is simply not a smart way for nation states or large corporations to evade sanctions," comments Hammond. "There are two sides to every transaction. You really think Volkswagen could just illegally export vehicles to Russia and it not be noticed just because they paid in Bitcoin?"

QUICK HITS

- Russia's attacks on major Ukrainian cities "accelerated on Wednesday, with the Russian military claiming that its forces were fully in control of Kherson, a port near the Black Sea," *The New York Times* reports, adding that "Ukrainian officials disputed Russia's claim." Russian

forces also bombed a government building in Kharkiv yesterday, surrounded the port city of Mariupol, and continued advancing on Kyiv.

- "Don't pour your Russian vodka down the drain," writes Jack Shafer in *Politico*, and don't kick Russian students out of the U.S.
- Why a no-fly zone over Ukraine is a bad move.
- A new poll finds Democrats more supportive than Republicans of U.S. intervention in Ukraine:
- How Texas abortion restrictions are putting women's health at risk.
- The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) is suing over a Texas directive that sex reassignment surgery, puberty blockers, or hormone treatments for minors should be considered child abuse.
- *The Washington Post* looks at different visions for the American right, as embodied by three conservative conferences that took place last weekend.
- "Is libertarianism a specifically political philosophy whose only legitimate concern is the role of the state and its use of force vis a vis the people it rules? Or does libertarianism, properly understood, also entail a variety of cultural commitments that range far beyond arguments over the size, scope, and spending of government?" *Reason's* Nick Gillespie and Stephanie Slade discuss.
- Professor and writer Paul Cantor—author of *The Invisible Hand in Popular Culture: Liberty vs. Authority in American Film and TV* and an occasional contributor to Reason—has died.