

# *U.S. lawmaker takes Gabriel Shipton, brother of Julian Assange, as invited guest for State of the Union address*

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Washington, March 6 (RHC)-- U.S. Rep. Thomas Massie has invited Gabriel Shipton, the brother of imprisoned Wikileaks founder Julian Assange, as his guest for this week's State of the Union address.

The Kentucky Republican decided to bring Shipton as part of his message that the U.S. should drop Assange's criminal charges and stop seeking his extradition. "The U.S. government's ongoing effort to

prosecute Julian Assange threatens the First Amendment rights of Americans and should be opposed," Massie said in a statement to the newspaper The Louisville Courier Journal.

"During his term in office, I asked President Trump to pardon Mr. Assange, and I was disappointed by his failure to do so. President Biden should stop seeking Assange's extradition and should instead drop the criminal charges currently being pursued by the Department of Justice."

Biden's State of the Union Address will be delivered to a joint session of Congress on Thursday evening at the U.S. Capitol in Washington. Each representative and senator is allowed to bring one guest to the event.

Assange, who is originally from Australia, started Wikileaks in 2006. The website published classified documents in 2010 from U.S. Army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning, including documents about Iran's backing of militants in Iraq and video footage of a U.S. helicopter attack that killed civilians.

In May 2019, the U.S. Justice Department announced a federal grand jury indicted Assange on 17 charges of espionage and one charge of computer misuse. Assange has been held in London's Belmarsh Prison for five years, after he was arrested for skipping bail. Previously, Assange spent seven years inside the Ecuadorian Embassy in London to avoid extradition to Sweden, where he faced allegations of rape and sexual assault.

The U.S. wants Assange sent to the U.S. to face his charges, but Assange's lawyers are trying to stop him from being extradited. This month would be the earliest when Assange could find out whether he can challenge extradition.

Shipton has advocated for his brother's release, including visiting Washington, D.C., to lobby on Assange's behalf. He is the chair of the Assange Campaign, which was organized to support and protect Assange and has previously said that Assange's charges have driven a wedge between the U.S. and Australia.

"I am honored to be Rep. Massie's guest at the State of the Union address," Shipton said in a statement released by Massie's office. "The prosecution of Julian Assange is a direct attack on the 1st amendment and the freedom of the press to publish information in the public interest.

"Rep. Massie is a fierce defender of these rights having introduced legislation that would protect my brother Julian and put an end to the espionage act being weaponized against publishers. I hope President Biden can take a new look at the indictment and see it for the threat to democracy that it is."

Last year, Massie sent a bipartisan letter to Biden, urging him to drop the prosecution of Assange. Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky., also signed the letter.

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