

Extra Feature Story

Obama Outlines Economic Plan in Address to Congress

February 25, 2009

While not technically a State of the Union address, President Barack Obama went before the joint houses of Congress and the American public Tuesday to lay out his plans for the nation, saying that the United States is “a nation that has seen promise amid peril and claimed opportunity from ordeal.”

The president called for prioritizing renewable energy, fixing the health care system and improving education quality. Obama’s message of hope and perseverance had to balance with the sober mood of the country, as major banks crumble, consumer confidence and retail sales drop, and families continue to lose their homes.

This speech comes after the Democratic majority in Congress passed and the president signed into law the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, a \$787 billion stimulus package.

It begins with energy

One cornerstone of Obama’s speech was renewable and affordable domestic energy. He promised to try to double America’s renewable energy supply in the next three years, from 7 percent to a total of 14 percent.

Some states are further along than others; Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger has called for California to raise its renewable energy supply to 33 percent by 2020.

The president also asked Congress to send him a bill placing market-based caps on carbon pollution, so that companies would have to buy credits to pollute more. The New York Times reports that such cap and trade policies could produce \$100 billion in revenue for the government.

Crushing cost of health care

Within a theme of governmental responsibility and accountability, President Obama said he wants affordable health care for every American. Currently, 46 million Americans are without health insurance. The president noted that health care costs cause a bankruptcy every 30 seconds in the United States and weigh down thousands of small businesses.

The new president noted that the recovery plan includes money for electronic health records and new technology that could reduce medical errors and costs.

President Obama called for bi-partisan support for comprehensive reform of the industry, saying it could not wait another year.

The promise of education

Tying education directly to the ever-globalizing job market, the president said three quarters of the fastest-growing fields require more than a high school degree while only about half of the U.S. population graduates from high school.

He encouraged individuals to commit to at least one year of advanced education or career training, saying that dropping out of high school was "not just quitting on yourself, it's quitting on your country."

He also asked parents to attend parent/teacher conferences, help with homework after dinner, and turn off the TV and video games.

"I speak to you not just as a president, but as a father when I say that responsibility for our children's education must begin at home," he said.

He proposed that by 2020 the United States will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world. Without stating specifics, he added that while those who volunteered in the community or served their country will receive governmental aid to abate the rising price of admission to college.

Republican response

According to recent tradition, after the president delivered his speech, a representative of the opposing party delivered a rebuttal, this time Governor Bobby Jindal from Louisiana, a likely candidate for the Republican 2012 presidential bid.

After congratulating Obama and the process that elected the first black president, Jindal outlined the Republican Party's fundamental disagreements with the president. He criticized the new stimulus package, saying that it will only grow government and increase taxes.

Jindal did list universal health care coverage and improved education for young people as main priorities for the GOP, but noted he does not agree with Obama: "it comes down to an honest and fundamental disagreement about the proper role of government."

-- Compiled by Lizzy Berryman for NewsHour Extra

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