

Using NewsHour Extra Feature Stories

STORY

Obama Outlines Economic Plan in Address to Congress, 2/25/2009

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/features/us/jan-june09/obama_02-25.html

Estimated Time: One 45-minute class period with possible extension

[Student Worksheet](#) (reading comprehension and discussion questions without answers)

PROCEDURE

1. WARM UP

Use initiating questions to introduce the topic and find out how much your students know.

2. MAIN ACTIVITY

Have students read NewsHour Extra's feature story and answer the reading comprehension and discussion questions on the student handout.

3. DISCUSSION

Use discussion questions to encourage students to think about how the issues outlined in the story affect their lives and express and debate different opinions.

INITIATING QUESTIONS

1. What are President Obama's biggest priorities?

2. Who disagrees with President Obama's priorities? Why?

READING COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS – [Student Worksheet](#)

1. What priorities did President Obama lay out in his address to Congress?

ANSWER

The president called for prioritizing renewable energy, fixing the healthcare 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.

2. What percentage of overall energy consumption in the United States comes from renewable sources?

ANSWER

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% to a total of 14%.

3. How many Americans are currently without health insurance?

ANSWER

Currently, 46 million Americans are without healthcare insurance. The president noted that healthcare costs cause a bankruptcy every 30 seconds in the United States and weigh down thousands of small businesses.

4. Why does President Obama want to move towards electronic health records?

ANSWER

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

5. What percentage of the U.S. population currently graduates from high school?

ANSWER

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.

6. What was President Obama's message to parents in the speech?

ANSWER

He 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.

7. Who delivered the Republican response? What did he say?

ANSWER

Governor Bobby Jindal from Louisiana, a likely candidate for the Republican 2012 presidential bid, delivered the rebuttal.

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 healthcare 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."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (more research might be needed)

1. Do you think President Obama was right to lay out energy, health care and education as his priorities? What was missing? In what order would you put those three issues?

2. Do you think the president should focus on one issue at a time? Why or why not?

3. What is challenging the president's ability to implement his agenda?

4. Watch the speech here:

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/video/blog/2009/02/obama_gives_first_address_to_c.html

What struck you about the speech? Do you think President Obama will be able to achieve the goals he describes?

Extension Activity

Have students write a 300-500 word essay on this topic providing clear examples. Send your completed editorial to NewsHour Extra (extra@newshour.org). Exceptional essays might be published on our Web site.