



Obama's Final State of the Union Address Big on Sweet-Talking Rhetoric

President Barack Obama delivered his final State of the Union address before a joint session of Congress on the evening of January 12, and — as journalists who had been given advance press releases about the speech predicted — he avoided legislative proposals for the present Congress and focused on four “big questions” about the future.



While the president touted “bipartisan priorities” near the beginning of his address, there was little in the talk that inspired Republicans to applaud, except for a single statement (“Our troops are the finest fighting force in the history of the world.”) that drew a rousing ovation from those on both sides of the aisle.

Using his “four big questions” to frame his address, Obama stated:

First, how do we give everyone a fair shot at opportunity and security in this new economy?

Second, how do we make technology work for us, and not against us — especially when it comes to solving urgent challenges like climate change?

Third, how do we keep America safe and lead the world without becoming its policeman?

And finally, how can we make our politics reflect what's best in us, and not what's worst?

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Starting with the first question, Obama asserted that the United States “has the strongest, most durable economy in the world.”

To bolster that claim, he continued:

We're in the middle of the longest streak of private-sector job creation in history. More than 14 million new jobs; the strongest two years of job growth since the '90s; an unemployment rate cut in half. Our auto industry just had its best year ever. Manufacturing has created nearly 900,000 new jobs in the past six years. And we've done all this while cutting our deficits by almost three-quarters.

Obama did not mention which statistics he used to substantiate his claim that “We're in the middle of the longest streak of private-sector job creation in history,” or if such streaks must measure only individual presidential administrations or can span presidencies. However, Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) data from 1941 until the present contradicts Obama's statement. The BLS figures show 7,405,00 jobs created from January 2013-January 2015, a 1.99 percent increase. During the previous four Obama



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years (2009-2013) BLS indicated 1,316,00 job creations, for a .25 percent increase. (This was only slightly higher than George W. Bush's second term, for which the figures were 1,225,000 and 1.99 percent, respectively.)

For historic comparison, during Lyndon Johnson's only full term (1965-1969) there were 9,855,00 jobs created for a 3.9 percent increase. Under Jimmy Carter (1977-1981) 10,330,00 jobs were created for a 3.06 percent increase and during Ronald Reagan's second term (1985-1989) 10,780,00 jobs were created for a 2.69 percent increase.

Obama also claimed that "we've done all this while cutting our deficits by almost three-quarters." But have we?

An article in Investopedia (an investment website owned by *Forbes*) states concerning the relatives deficits of recent presidents:

Barack Obama's budget is projected to run a deficit of \$6.8 trillion over his eight years, making him the president with the largest budget deficit. George W. Bush is second, with a deficit of \$3.29 trillion over his eight years. Ronald Reagan is third at \$1.412 trillion deficit in eight years and George H.W. Bush comes in fourth with a \$1.03 trillion deficit in his single term.

Speaking about his second "big questions" — technology — Obama harkened back to the space race of the late 1950s and 1960s, when, in response to the Soviet launching of the first Sputnik satellite, the United States launched a program that put a man on the moon in 12 years. He then cited Vice President Biden's statement that "with a new moonshot, America can cure cancer." He continued:

Tonight, I'm announcing a new national effort to get it done. And because he's gone to the mat for all of us, on so many issues over the past forty years, I'm putting Joe in charge of Mission Control.

While the goal of curing cancer is a praiseworthy one, the idea that putting a politician in charge of such an objective defies logic. (Of course, if a politician should be tasked to do this, then why not pick one who is at least a medical doctor such presidential candidate Ben Carson or Rand Paul? In truth though, the best hope for curing cancer would be to end the federal government's harmful practice of medicine, allowing competition and excellence in medical research and therapy on the part of the private sector to flourish.)

Obama then segued from cancer to global warming, stating: "Medical research is critical. We need the same level of commitment when it comes to developing clean energy sources." He did not miss an opportunity to jab at those (including many respectable climate scientists) who dispute that global warming, if it exists at all, is caused by human activity:

Look, if anybody still wants to dispute the science around climate change, have at it. You'll be pretty lonely, because you'll be debating our military, most of America's business leaders, the majority of the American people, almost the entire scientific community, and 200 nations around the world who agree it's a problem and intend to solve it.

The New American's writers have offered countless material to the contrary. One such article, "[Meet the Climate Realists](#)," was posted on January 9. In that article, Rebecca Terrell noted: "*The New American* has compiled a short sampling of the tens of thousands of rational and reputable scientists who maintain an unbiased skepticism toward AGW [anthropogenic global warming], even at the risk of acquiring the career-jeopardizing slur of 'denier,'" and presented short biographies of several climate realists, including Judith Curry, Ph.D., E. Calvin Beisner, Ph.D., Anthony Watts, Richard S. Lindzen,



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Ph.D., Patrick Moore, Ph.D., and Art Robinson, Ph.D.

On the topic of keeping America safe in the world, Obama focused on American efforts to defeat ISIS (using his preferred term, ISIL). However, lost in his rhetoric was the realization that it was the Obama administration's support of the so-called moderate rebels fighting against the government of strongman Bashar al-Assad in Syria (some of whom were allied with ISIS) that strengthened ISIS, provided it with much weaponry, and allowed it to become the major threat that is today.

Obama then moved on to his view on how we can make our politics reflect "what's best in us, and not what's worst." Like many recent political leaders, he referred to our American political system as a "democracy," when our Founding Fathers warned against democracy (rule by majority) and established instead a Republic (rule by law). He stated:

But democracy does require basic bonds of trust between its citizens. It doesn't work if we think the people who disagree with us are all motivated by malice, or that our political opponents are unpatriotic. Democracy grinds to a halt without a willingness to compromise; or when even basic facts are contested, and we listen only to those who agree with us.

Unfortunately, many of Obama's supposed political opponents on the other side of the aisle have been all too willing to compromise, including Speaker of the House Paul Ryan, who occupied a place of prominence on the dais behind the president as he delivered his address.

At the beginning of his address, Obama addressed Ryan:

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the constructive approach you and the other leaders took at the end of last year to pass a budget and make tax cuts permanent for working families.

In December, Ryan led a Republican majority in the House to pass a massive \$1.1-trillion spending package that Senator Jeff Sessions (R-Ala.) strongly criticized because it fully funded President Obama's resettlement of both refugees and illegal aliens, fully funded sanctuary cities, and quadrupled the number of H-2B foreign worker visas. Despite the strong opposition from Sessions and Sen Rand Paul (R-Ky.), the budget bill was passed by the Republican-controlled Senate on a 65-33 vote and subsequently signed by President Obama.

The budget also continued full funding for Planned Parenthood, the nation's largest abortion provider. Perhaps this is an example of what Obama has praised as Ryan's and other congressional leaders' "constructive approach."

South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley, in the "Republican response" to Obama's address, made only mild criticism of the president. After stating that Obama's election as president "broke historic barriers and inspired millions of Americans," Haley said that "tonight President Obama spoke eloquently about grand things. He is at his best when he does that."

Her main criticism of Obama was not that his goals themselves were off base, but that "Unfortunately, the President's record has often fallen far short of his soaring words."

Haley devoted much of her space to criticizing the strong anti-immigration rhetoric of presidential candidate Donald Trump, though she did not mention him by name. She also used terminology often favored by Obama: "We must fix our broken immigration system." (Obama, in fact, used the same terminology in his State of the Union address.)

In contrast to Haley's soft-peddling, presidential candidate Rand Paul issued a more strongly worded



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critique of the presidential address in a video he released right after the speech was completed. Among Paul's remarks:

Here are some things you didn't hear from the president tonight:

Under this president, our national debt has nearly doubled. The next president must be someone with a balanced budget plan, to end massive spending and deficits.

Under this president, we were promised an end to two wars that were past their time and mission. But, instead, our soldiers are continued to ask to risk their lives in Iraq and Afghanistan. In fact, President Obama and Hillary Clinton took us to war in Libya and Syria without constitutional authority.

The next president will have the daunting task of rebuilding an overextended military while ensuring that we are capable and prepared to defend ourselves. If we continue to engage in nation building and policing the world, we won't have the resources to maintain our national defense.

This president pledged to take over our healthcare system, and he sure did. Costs are rising, doctors are leaving their practices, and insurance companies are leaving the exchanges. Obamacare has failed. The next president will have to repeal Obamacare and make health insurance affordable once again.

The current president pledged to raise taxes, and he sure did. He pledged to add regulations to job creators and he did. Some estimate that his policies cost our economy two trillion dollars every year in regulations.

Though many constitutionalists may simply be glad that this will be Obama's last State of the Union address, looking at the field of candidates from both parties likely to succeed Obama, few should expect much improvement in the next presidential administration.

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