

Obama lays out plans to improve economy

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President Barack Obama delivered his second State of the Union address last night in the House of Representatives, whose members broke traditional partisan seating in honor of Rep. Gabrielle Giffords, D-Ariz.

Obama opened his speech by addressing the Tucson shooting tragedy that occurred two weeks ago, which killed six and injured 13, including Giffords. In an effort to display unity during tragedy, Republicans sat next to Democrats, and all rose or remained seated at the most times throughout the speech — regardless of party affiliation.

The President said he hopes this unity will carry over to help the United States become more competitive against rising world powers.

"I believe we can. I believe we must," he said.

Obama then relayed the status of the national economy — an improving stock market, an increase in jobs and a growth in corporate profits.

But despite the gains in the corporate world, Obama admitted the majority of the nation is still suffering.

Obama said the tax cuts he passed in December — those created by former President George W. Bush and that Obama formerly promised to repeal — have increased paychecks and helped create more than one million jobs in the past year.

To get the economy back on its feet, Obama proposed improving the nation's research, education system and infrastructure.

"None of us can predict with certainty what the next big industry will be, or where the new jobs will come from. ... What we can do — what America does better than anyone else — is spark the creativity and imagination of our people," Obama said.

He said the government should invest more in research and technology to support innovators to create new technologies and jobs. In his budget address in February, he will propose increasing subsidization

for American scientists and their research to meet this need — including investments in biomedical technology and renewable energy.

While innovation, research and development is important to keep the United States in line with other nations around the world — and create more jobs for Americans — Obama said to maintain this competition, America needs to improve education.

Obama said he plans to help college students afford school by proposing to make permanent the \$10,000, four-year tuition tax credit.

"If we raise expectations for every child. ... by the end of the decade, America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world," the president said.

He also advised Congress take a stand on illegal immigration, especially in regard to those college students who are the children of undocumented workers and may be departed after they receive their degree.

"Let's stop expelling talented, responsible young people who could be staffing our research labs or starting a new business, who could be further enriching this nation," the president said.

Obama also described his plans for decreasing the nation's \$1.4 trillion deficit — a freeze on annual domestic spending for the next five years, which would reduce the deficit by more than \$400 billion over the next decade. This would also require cuts and consolidations to eliminate waste in the federal government, special programs and defense spending.

But Obama advised to not cut from education.

"Cutting the deficit by gutting our investments in innovation and education is like lightening an overloaded airplane by removing its engine," he said. "It may feel like you're flying high at first, but it won't take long before you'll feel the impact."

While throughout the speech, Republicans rose with Democrats in unison with most of Obama's ideas, one area showed divisiveness among the members — Obama's proposal to end tax cuts for the wealthiest 2 percent of Americans.

"Before we take money away from our schools, or scholarships away from our students, we should ask millionaires to give up their tax break," Obama said.

Despite this instance, Ruth Mandel, director of the University's Eagleton Institute of Politics, said the bipartisan image during the State of the Union address is important for the American public.

Americans are used to seeing the separate sides sitting and standing based on party affiliation, but Mandel said last night presented a hopeful image that Congress can work together to help the country get back on track.

"I'm not one to say that this is trivial," she said. "Images are important. Every politician running for office knows image is important."

This image of hope and unity is especially true for the president, who may be losing the public's confidence, Mandel said.

"I think everyone agrees that he's come into office at a very difficult time, and I believe he still has the support and really the sympathy and encouragement of a vast number of Americans, but that doesn't do away with their problems," she said.

It is important that the president demonstrate he can lead in troubled times to set the tone for the country — especially to improve the economy, the major issue on most American's minds today, Mandel said.

"Without a healthy economy, nothing else can happen," she said.

Rutgers University Democrats President Christopher Pflaum said fixing the economy is something that takes time, although the slow pace of recovery is frustrating for those who have been out of work for some time.

"I think that President Obama has made the economy his major focus right when he took office almost two years ago from now, and I think he's done a lot," he said.

Pflaum believes Obama in his address showed how the country can move forward.

"He finally challenged the American people to move up," Pflaum said.

But Rutgers College Republicans President Noah Glyn said despite the Obama administration's efforts to improve the economy, the nation is still facing a more than 10 percent unemployment rate.

"I think most people kind of get the feeling that there's nothing this administration can do," he said.

Glyn thinks to save the economy, the government needs to decrease deficit spending and maintain the tax cuts that have proven successful in the past.

"We need to move on to another option. The government just needs to show its flexibility," Glyn said.