

President Obama Takes State of the Union Speech to Public In the News February 1, 2014

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President Obama traveled for two days after giving his State of the Union speech to Congress and the nation earlier this week. He visited four states to support policy plans he proposed in his yearly message.

The traditional road trip after a State of the Union speech first took the president to a community in Maryland. He spoke to workers at a Costco store. He told them “nobody who works full-time should ever have to raise a family in poverty.”

In his message to Congress, one of Mr. Obama’s major points was that he would reduce the increasing differences in income between America’s rich and poor. Other major issues included jobs and immigration.

The president said he will continue to reach out to Congress to work on long-term issues. But he said he also plans to use executive orders, or presidential powers, to press for his goals.

These include his plans to raise the minimum wage. It would require federal contractors to pay their federally-financed employees what he called a fair wage. He said that amount would be at least ten dollars and ten cents an hour. The current federal minimum wage is seven dollars and twenty five cents an hour.

If job creation and other improvements continue, Mr. Obama said 2014 could be a year of good progress. But he criticized Republican protests against his health care law, the Affordable Care Act. The law is more commonly known as Obamacare. He urged Republicans in Congress not to vote again to cancel it.

“The question for folks in Washington is whether they are going to help that progress or hinder that progress, whether they are going to waste time in creating new crises for people and new uncertainty like the shutdown. Or are we going to spend time creating new jobs and new opportunities?”

The shutdown took place last October. It involved a temporary suspension of government services. It took place because lawmakers failed to pass a spending bill in the required time.

Mr. Obama noted improvements in the economy, including lower unemployment and increased manufacturing. The jobless rate is now at 6.7 percent, a five-year low. Mister Obama said the drop results in part from an increase in manufacturing jobs. But, the president said it is not enough that more people are working.

The president also told the nation about plans to help people who are in the country illegally become citizens. He urged Congress to approve an immigration reform measure that passed the Senate last year. But intense opposition from conservatives has tied up the bill in the House of Representatives.

After the speech, Congresswoman Cathy McMorris Rodgers gave the Republican Party response. She suggested a different way of balancing the difference in income between rich and poor. She suggested less government.

“We hope the president will join us in a year of real action – by empowering people -not making their lives harder with unprecedented spending, higher taxes and fewer jobs.”

Senate minority leader Mitch McConnell criticized the idea of Mr. Obama using executive orders to gain his goals.

From VOA Learning English, that’s In the News. I’m Steve Ember.