

A Day to Remember

continued **▲** from front

nation must "respond to the threat of climate change" and tackle the comprehensive immigration reform that has eluded Washington for years.

"Our journey is not complete until we find a better way to welcome the striving, hopeful immigrants who still see America as a land of opportunity," he said.

Obama urged the nation to set an unwavering course toward prosperity and freedom for all its citizens and protect the social safety net that has sheltered the poor, elderly and needy.

In an era of looming budget cuts, he said the nation has a commitment to costly programs such as Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security. "These things do not sap our initiative, they strengthen us," he said.

"Our country cannot succeed when a shrinking few do very well and a growing many barely make it," Obama said in his relatively brief, 18-minute address. "We believe that America's prosperity must rest upon the broad shoulders of a rising middle class," he added, echoing his calls from the presidential campaign that catapulted him to re-election.

Moments earlier, Obama placed his hand on two Bibles - one used by the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and the other used by Abraham Lincoln - and recited the brief oath of office. Michelle Obama held the Bibles, one on top of the other, as daughters Malia and Sasha looked on.

Vice President Joe Biden was also sworn in for his second term as the



Supporters of President Barack Obama and others gather near the U.S. Capitol building on the National Mall for the 57th Presidential Inauguration on Monday in Washington.

nation's second in command.

Monday's oaths were purely ceremonial. The Constitution stipulates that presidents begin their new term at noon on Jan. 20, and in keeping with that requirement, Obama was sworn in Sunday in a small ceremony at the White House.

The inaugural fanfare spread across the capital Monday, with a joyful parade down Pennsylvania Avenue and two glitzy inaugural balls in the evening. The president also lunched with lawmakers in the

Capitol following his address.

Sandwiched between the bruising presidential campaign and relentless fiscal fights, Monday's inaugural celebrations marked a brief respite from the partisan gridlock that has consumed the past two years. Perhaps seeking a fresh start, Obama invited several lawmakers to the White House for coffee before his speech, including the Republican leaders with whom he has frequently been at odds.

Looking ahead to those challenges, Obama implored Congress to find common ground over the next four years. And seeking to build on the public support that catapulted him to the White House twice, the president said the public has "the obligation to shape the debates of our time."

"Not only with the votes we cast, but with the voices we lift in defense of our most ancient values and enduring ideals," Obama said.

Because inaugural celebrations are historically not held on Sundays, organizers pushed the public events to Monday, the same day the nation marked the late civil rights

leader King's birthday.

Obama soaked in the history on a day full of traditions as old as the Republic. Gazing over the crowd before retreating into the Capitol, he said, "I want to take a look, one more time. I'm not going to see this again."

After a stunning sunrise, the weather for the swearing-in and parade was chilly -- upper 30s rising into the lower 40s -- and overcast.

Once the celebrations subsided, Obama will be confronted with an array of pressing priorities: an economy still struggling to fully recover, the fiscal fights with a divided Congress, and new threats of terrorism in North Africa. The president has also pledged to tackle immigration reform and stricter gun laws in the wake of the school shootings in Newtown, Conn., - sweeping domestic reforms that will require help from reluctant lawmakers.

The president did not offer any specific prescriptions for addressing the challenges ahead, though he is expected to offer more detail in

his Feb. 12 State of the Union address.

Asserting "America's possibilities are limitless," he declared at the Capitol: "My fellow Americans, we are made for this moment, and we will seize it, so long as we seize it together."

Obama's second inaugural lacked the electric enthusiasm of his first, when 1.8 million people crammed onto the National Mall to witness the swearing-in of the nation's first black president. Far fewer people attended this year's inauguration -- officials estimated up to 800,000 people -- but the crowd still stretched from the Capitol to the Washington Monument. And shortly before the president spoke, U.S. Park Police announced that the public viewing areas on the Mall were full.

David Richardson of Atlanta and his two young children were among the early-goers who headed to the Mall before sunrise.

"We wanted to see history, I think, and also for the children to witness that anything is possible through hard work," Richardson said.

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