

STATE OF THE UNION



President Barack Obama gives his the State of the Union address before a joint session of Congress on Capitol Hill in Washington on Tuesday.

Obama warns against election year cynicism

WASHINGTON (AP) — Eyeing the end of his presidency, Barack Obama urged Americans Tuesday night to rekindle their belief in the promise of change that first carried him to the White House, declaring that the country must not allow election-year fear and division to put economic and security progress at risk.

“All the talk of America’s economic decline is political hot air,” Obama said in his final State of the Union address. “So is all the rhetoric you hear about our enemies getting stronger and America getting weaker.”

“The United States of America is the most powerful nation on Earth. Period. It’s not even close,” he said.



Vice President Joe Biden and Speaker Paul Ryan of Wisconsin applaud President Barack Obama during the State of the Union address.

The president’s address to lawmakers and a prime-time television audience was meant to both shape his legacy and put his imprint squarely on the race to succeed him. He defended his record — and implicitly urged the public to elect another Democratic president to build on it — but acknowledged the persistent anxieties of Americans who feel shut out of a changing economy or at risk from an evolving terror threat.

While Obama did not directly call out Republicans, he sharply, and at times sarcastically, struck back at rivals who have challenged his economic and national security stewardship.

challenges of his presidency, Obama vowed a robust campaign to “take out” the Islamic State group, but chastised Republicans for “over the top claims” about the extremist group’s power.

“Masses of fighters on the back of pickup trucks and twisted souls plotting in apartments or garages pose an enormous danger and must be stopped,” he said. “But they do not threaten our national existence.”

The president’s words were unlikely to satisfy Republicans, as well as some Democrats, who say he underestimates the Islamic State’s power and is leaving the U.S. vulnerable to attack.

Obama was frank about one of his biggest regrets: failing to ease the persistently deep divisions between Democrats and Republicans. The GOP-led Congress Obama stood before Tuesday night is hostile to his ideas and angry about his executive orders on issues from guns to immigration.

On the campaign trail, Trump’s heated rhetoric is seen by some voters as a welcome contrast to Obama’s cool calls for civility. On his Twitter account Tuesday night, the candidate dismissed Obama’s speech as “really boring.”

As for political disagreement, Obama conceded, “The rancor and suspicion between the parties has gotten worse instead of better. There’s no doubt a president with the gifts of Lincoln or Roosevelt might have better bridged the divide, and I guarantee I’ll keep trying to be better so long as I hold this office.”

He specifically called for ending the gerrymandering of some congressional districts that gives parties an iron grip on House seats. He also urged steps to make voting easier and reduce the influence of money in politics.

Mindful of the scant prospect for major legislative action in an election year, Obama avoided the traditional litany of policy proposals. He did reiterate his call for working with Republicans on criminal justice reform and finalizing an Asia-Pacific trade pact, and he also vowed to keep pushing for action on politically fraught issues such as curbing gun violence and fixing the nation’s fractured

immigration laws. The president also touted a new effort led by Vice President Joe Biden to fight cancer, aimed at increasing public and private resources and breaking down barriers to collaboration among researchers. Biden’s 46-year-old son died last year from brain cancer.

Yet Obama was eager to look beyond his own presidency, casting the actions he’s taken as a springboard for future economic progress and national security. His optimism was meant to draw a contrast with what the White House sees as doom-and-gloom scenarios peddled by the GOP.

Republicans were largely dismissive of the president’s address. House Speaker Paul Ryan, assuming the speaker’s traditional seat behind the president for the first time, said Obama’s “lofty platitudes and nostalgic rhetoric may make for nice sound-bites, but they don’t explain how to” solve problems.

Tuesday’s address was one of Obama’s last oppor-

tunities to claim a large television audience as president. However, the State of the Union has suffered a major drop-off in viewers in recent years. Last year, Obama’s speech reached 31.7 million viewers, according to Nielson, down from 52 million for his first State of the Union and 62 million for George W. Bush in 2003.

Obama’s final State of the Union address revived some of the gauzy nostalgia that was a hallmark of his political operation. Among those sitting in first lady Michelle Obama’s guest box was Edith Childs, the South Carolina woman who first introduced Obama to the “Fired up! Ready to go!” chant that was a staple of his 2008 campaign.

The president himself appeared to get momentarily caught up in the emotion of the moment. As he walked toward the exit after his hour-long speech, he turned back to the crowded House chamber and said, “Let me take one more look at this thing.”

With Democratic race narrowing, Clinton rips into Sanders

Associated Press

AMES, Iowa — Facing a narrowing primary contest, Hillary Clinton ripped into rival Bernie Sanders on Tuesday, saying the Vermont senator was offering unrealistic policies and overstating his anti-establishment credentials.

For days, Clinton has cast Sanders as a less forceful advocate for gun control, honing in on a 2005 vote he cast that gave immunity to gun manufacturers. On Tuesday, she broadened her critique, arguing that if Sanders wouldn’t combat the National Rifle Association, he can’t be trusted to take on other special interests.

“If you’re going to go around saying you stand up to special interests, then stand up to that most powerful special interest — stand up to the gun lobby,” she said, as she accepted the backing of a major gun control advocacy group.

Clinton added: “Don’t talk to me about standing up to corporate interests and big powers. I’ve got the scars to show for it.”

Sanders campaign spokesman Michael Briggs said the senator had “spent a career standing up to powerful special interests whether they be Wall Street, big banks or Big Oil or the pharmaceutical industry, you name it.”

Briggs added, “He has also stood up to the National Rifle Association,” noting that Sanders lost a 1988 congressional race in part because he supported a ban on assault weapons.

The fresh critique marks an effort by Clinton to undermine the central argument of Sanders’ campaign — that the Vermont senator is an outsider offering liberals a “political revolution.”

At one point, she alluded to his mantra, telling supporters, “If that’s the kind of ‘revolution’ he’s talking about, I’m worried, folks.”

With a touch of sarcasm, Clinton derided Sanders’ plans for a single-payer Medicare-for-all system and said President Barack Obama’s work to pass an

overhaul to the nation’s health care system was a major accomplishment.

“I wish that we could elect a Democrat who could wave a magic wand and say, ‘We shall do this and we shall do that.’ That ain’t the real world we’re living in,” Clinton said. In Dubuque, Clinton said she hoped that Sanders “hurries up” and releases more details of his tax plan “because you deserve to see the comparisons side-by-side.”

In an emailed fundraising appeal, Sanders campaign manager Jeff Weaver dismissed Clinton’s criticism and instead reiterated the senator’s goal of guaranteeing health care for all Americans.

“It is a national disgrace that the United States is the only major country in the world that does not offer health care as a right,” Weaver said. “We need a president who will fight for the 29 million Americans without health care.”

Clinton also touted her foreign policy credentials, drawing another, more implicit, contrast with Sanders, who has made tackling economic inequality the focus of his campaign. “I’m prepared to do all parts to the job,” she said, after offering voters a detailed account of her time in the Situation Room during the killing of Osama bin Laden.

Though Clinton has the backing of Democratic leaders and top donors, polls show a tight race in Iowa while Sanders has built a slight lead in New Hampshire, which borders his home state of Vermont. Losses in both states could raise worries among Democrats about her strength against Sanders, who was relatively unknown when he started the campaign but has attracted big crowds.

A poll released on Wednesday by Quinnipiac University showed Sanders winning 49 percent of likely Democratic caucusgoers in Iowa, compared to 44 percent for Clinton. The same survey showed Clinton leading in a 51-40 percent match-up just a month ago.

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