

Obama lifts America's spirit in speech of hope, budget details to be released this week

Written by Hazel Trice Edney, NNPA Editor-in-Chief
Monday, 02 March 2009 18:27

WASHINGTON (NNPA) – In his first speech before Congress, filled with the soaring inspiration reminiscent of his campaign, President Barack Obama Tuesday night promised the nation, “We will rebuild, we will recover, and the United States of America will emerge stronger than before.”

Surrounded by cheering and applauding Democrats and less optimistic Republicans, he said, “The weight of this crisis will not determine the destiny of this nation. The answers to our problems don't lie beyond our reach. They exist in our laboratories and our universities; in our fields and our factories; in the imaginations of our entrepreneurs and the pride of the hardest-working people on Earth. Those qualities that have made America the greatest force of progress and prosperity in human history we still possess in ample measure.”

America has been devastated by the economic crisis with millions now unemployed and Black unemployment nearing 13 percent. Millions were glued to their television sets, looking for a word of hope as Obama prepares to unveil his first budget later this week.

The President was realistic:

“You don't need to hear another list of statistics to know that our economy is in crisis, because you live it every day. It's the worry you wake up with and the source of sleepless nights. It's the job you thought you'd retire from but now have lost; the business you built your dream upon that's now hanging by a thread; the college acceptance letter your child had to put back in the envelope. The impact of this recession is real, and it is everywhere,” he said. “What is required now is for this country to pull together, confront boldly the challenges we face, and take responsibility for our future once more.”

Part of the exuberance among Democratic members of the House and Senate was no doubt their recollection that it was the eight-year Republican Administration of President George Bush that has led to the crisis.

“The Bush Administration left our nation in fiscal shambles. The problems our country faces are significant and it will require a lot of hard work to put America back on the road toward economic recovery,” said Congressional Black Caucus Chair Barbara Lee (D-CA) in a statement. “President Obama laid out a plan to rebuild our fragile economy so that we can emerge stronger than before through job retention and creation, investing in our infrastructure and greater accountability and oversight of our financial institutions. Additionally, he understands that we must resist the temptation to balance the budget on the backs of the most vulnerable Americans doing so would be particularly cruel in today's economic climate.”

Among the specifics that Obama said would be reflected in his budget:

- Tax cuts for 95 percent of working families, beginning April 1.
- Comprehensive health care reform.
- Ending tax breaks for corporations that ship jobs overseas.

He also promised to eliminate wasted money through:

- Reforms in the defense budget that would stop payments for “Cold War-era weapons systems we don't use.”
- Eliminating the “no-bid contracts that have wasted billions of dollars in Iraq.”

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He also reiterated some of the hallmarks of his economic stimulus plan, including unemployment benefits, continued health care coverage to help the unemployed and job retention and creation.

“Over the next two years, this plan will save or create 3.5 million jobs,” he said. “More than 90 percent of these jobs will be in the private sector - jobs rebuilding our roads and bridges; constructing wind turbines and solar panels; laying broadband and expanding mass transit.”

Obama says his anticipated budget will not be just “a laundry list” of items on paper. “I see it as a vision for America - as a blueprint for our future.”

He continued, “My budget does not attempt to solve every problem or address every issue. It reflects the stark reality of what we've inherited -- a trillion-dollar deficit, a financial crisis, and a costly recession.”

Leading Black members of Congress, anticipating how the President’s first budget will deal with the poor and historically disadvantaged are optimistic:

“I look forward to learning the details later this week,” said Congresswoman Maxine Waters (D-CA.) in a statement. “Clearly, America cannot afford to spend and spend and spend given the recession and the record deficit run up by George W. Bush. However, we can also not afford to neglect essential programs that assist our most vulnerable populations and that offer opportunity for all people to share in the American dream. I am confident that the President’s budget will recognize these priorities, and I look forward to working with him to move our country in a new direction.”

House Majority Whip Jim Clyburn (D-S.C.) concludes, “This is a bold and decisive start to the challenges we face...And it must include the least among us.”