

Americans React To Obama's Address To The Nation **News**

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President Barack Obama used his State of the Union address to make his pitch that the nation must address persistent problems, from unemployment to immigration to the gap between rich and poor.



Slowed by Congress, Obama vowed that if lawmakers won't act, he will use his executive power when possible for his plans, which include raising the minimum wage for some workers hired by federal contractors and making it easier for low-income Americans to save for retirement.

The Associated Press spoke with a sampling of viewers from around the country to gauge whether the president succeeded in selling them on his proposals or whether his words fell flat.

JOBLESS FIND SOME COMFORT, LITTLE FAITH IN LOFTY WORDS

Long-term unemployed listeners said they were happy to in a sense be the stars of the speech, but what they didn't need was more talk. They needed jobs.

"He was talking about me tonight," said Scott Valenti, a 41-year-old from Woodland Park, Colo. "But I can tell you, I'm no more reassured than when he started."

After years of work, Valenti finally got a bachelor's degree. After a post-graduation position fell through, he's been jobless for a month with two teenage children to provide for and a mortgage to pay.

"When we look back 40 years from now and say, 'that Obama initiative in 2014 led to some change,' well, I'm sure that will happen," he said. "But I need a job now."

Mary Lynn English, 44, who has pursued more than 100 marketing jobs in recent years without success, said she wasn't impressed by Obama's positivity.

"All of that is happening in a stratosphere that's going to take a good long while to get to western North Carolina," said English, who lives in Asheville.

FROM MINIMUM PAY TO 'STAY OUT OF MY WAY'

Obama made several proposals to reduce the wealth gap, from recommending a minimum wage hike to an "easy to remember" \$10.10 to encouraging employers to raise it for their workers without government intervention to pushing a new retirement savings account for lower-income Americans.

"Businesses don't have to wait on Congress to help their employees have a living wage," said

22-year-old Naquasia LeGrand, who works part time as a fast-food employee at Kentucky Fried Chicken and was happy to hear Obama point to a pizza store owner who had raised his employees' wages.

LeGrand, of Brooklyn, has campaigned to raise the minimum wage to \$15.

Alan McIntyre, 43, who's self-employed and lives in the Mount Airy neighborhood of suburban Cincinnati, called the speech and its economic suggestions "disgusting."

Of MyRA, the president's proposal to help lower-income Americans save for retirement, McIntyre was negative toward the idea of a guarantee that people wouldn't lose what they put in.

He said liberal Democrats "want to talk about how bad off people are and how they can guarantee things for people. I only need you to guarantee one thing for me: that you'll stay out of my way."

SOME SAY BREAK OUT THE PEN; OTHERS SAY NOT SO FAST

When Obama suggested he would use executive power to go around Congress when possible, Dean Weygandt, a 52-year-old electronics technician from Toledo, Ohio, thought it was about time.

"I think he's used executive privilege less than he should have," Weygandt said.

"He's tried to work with those people," he said, referring to Republicans in Congress. "There are times before he could have used it and didn't."

Bill Deile, 70, a retired Army colonel and attorney living in Cape Coral, Fla., said he took notice of what he called a "veiled threat" in the president's promise to take action when Congress wouldn't.

"That I think, if it doesn't spur Congress into some sort of action to clamp down on this guy, I think you're going to see it from the states," he said.

WHISTLING PAST THE BORDER ON IMMIGRATION

Regardless of their underlying feelings on immigration, some said the president was too vague.

Phil Erro, 69, said Obama forgot or flew past farmers like him and the workers they need. "He's completely skirted the immigration issue," said Erro, an almond farmer in California's Central Valley.

"I was disappointed," he said, adding that he would have liked to see "some notion" about how Congress could reach agreement on immigration reform and that he wanted Obama to push for a path to legal residency that's short, such as three to five years.

Raul Sanchez, 38, a graduate student at the University of Texas, said the president's words on immigration were "a lot of what I'd heard before."

"I don't think that he's put pressure on members of Congress the way that he could have," he said.