

Barack Obama Is About to Do This 1 Last Time

U.S. President Barack Obama will voice optimism in a State of the Union speech on Tuesday, his last before he is eclipsed by would-be successors campaigning on concerns about illegal immigration, terrorism and economic inequality.

The televised speech, in Congress, will be one of Obama's few remaining chances to capture and hold the attention of millions of Americans before the election of a new president in November who will take office next January.

Scheduled for 9 p.m. ET (0200 GMT on Wednesday), Obama's speech is expected to stick to themes he hopes will define his legacy but steer clear of new legislative proposals that his fellow Democrats are laying out on the presidential campaign.

Aides say he will try to generate support for such favored issues as a Pacific trade pact, tighter gun laws and closure of the Guantanamo Bay prison while offering a more optimistic view of U.S. standing, compared with the dire assessments put forth by some presidential hopefuls.

In an NBC "Today" show interview broadcast on Tuesday, Obama was asked about his failure to unite Americans after a message of hope and change swept him into the White House in the 2008 election. "It's a regret," he said.

He took a swipe at Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump's rhetoric on the campaign trail where the billionaire real-estate tycoon has derided illegal immigrants.

"I'm pretty confident that the overwhelming majority of Americans are looking for the kind of politics that does feed our hopes and not our fears, that does work together and doesn't try to divide us, that isn't looking for simplistic

solutions and scapegoating,” Obama said in answer to a question about Trump.

Asked whether he could imagine Trump as president giving his own State of the Union address, Obama said: “I can imagine it in a Saturday Night skit,” referring to the late-night Saturday Night Live television comedy show. But he added that “anything’s possible. And I think, you know, we shouldn’t be complacent.”

Obama is likely to tout last year’s Iran nuclear deal and improved relations as achievements, while urging Congress to back criminal justice reform, support the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade pact and close the U.S military prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

He will also likely discuss the U.S. fight against Islamic State, which has generated criticism from Republicans as being too meager.

“There is one thing that we hope to hear from the president, and that is a comprehensive plan to defeat ISIS,” House of Representatives Speaker Paul Ryan told reporters, using an acronym for the militant group that has taken over large areas of Syria and Iraq.

“Americans are so anxious right now about their security, about what’s going on around the world,” said Ryan, a Republican.

Guantanamo Closure

Aides say Obama plans in his last year in office to make good on a 2008 election campaign promise to close Guantanamo prison, which has housed foreign terrorism suspects after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the United States.

“One of the president’s first promises was to follow through on closing the prison at Guantanamo Bay. This certainly is not

a problem that he wants to pass on to the next president, whether that's a Democrat or a Republican, frankly," White House spokesman Josh Earnest told Fox News.

He said closing the military prison in Cuba would likely entail sending some inmates abroad and bringing some to prisons in the United States, but he did not say if Obama would issue an executive order to close Guantanamo.

The White House wants to portray Obama as setting the agenda, even on the campaign trail, with goals such as gun control that will reverberate past his time in office. He announced executive actions last week to tighten gun rules.

As usual, first lady Michelle Obama will host people in her seating area during the speech who reflect the president's priorities. This year's guests include Microsoft Chief Executive Satya Nadella and a Syrian refugee who lives in Michigan.

(Addition reporting by Doina Chiacu, Megan Cassella and Alistair Bell; Editing by Kevin Drawbaugh, Peter Cooney and Andrea Ricci)

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