

PREVIEW OF THE STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS

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MODERATOR: Welcome to the Washington Foreign Press Center. And we also would like to welcome our colleagues up in New York at the New York Foreign Press Center. I am pleased to introduce Allan Lichtman. He's a history professor at American University. Mr. Lichtman will talk to us today and give a preview of the State of the Union Address and provide insight and analysis of President Obama's agenda for his second term.

Without further ado, Mr. Lichtman.

MR. LICHTMAN: Thank you very much. Good morning. This is a great morning for conspiracy theorists, the Pope having resigned. You can figure he surely did this to upstage Mr. Obama's State of the Union Address. Probably, he had bigger – a bigger agenda than that, I would imagine, but it's a great morning for news stories.

I'm going to speak briefly about the State of the Union, about its history, its importance, about what Obama might be saying or not saying tomorrow, and the significance for the second term agenda, policies of the United States, and the legacy of Barack Obama. I'll try to speak fairly briefly and then open it up for questions. You can ask me anything you like about American – not everything – (laughter) – American politics, American history. Don't ask me about the opera, and we will be just fine.

The two iconic presidential speeches here in the United States, of course, are the Inaugural Address, given at the beginning of a presidential term, and the State of the Union Address, given every year by the incumbent president. Of the two, only the State of the Union Address is actually in the Constitution. The Inaugural Address is not mandated by the Constitution, but it is like so many other traditions, one of those established by the first president, George Washington. He gave an Inaugural Address. Every president has followed since. But the State of the Union Address is set forth in Article III, Section 2 of the U.S. Constitution, that the president from time to time should inform the Congress of the State of the Union and propose whatever measures the president deems expedient. I'm, of course, paraphrasing.

This shows a couple of things about the nature of American government. It shows the importance of the presidency, of course, that the presidency should be – the president should be the one to set forth views on the State of the Union. And it also shows that the Founding Fathers, way back in the 1780s, did not intend the Congress and the president to be separated by a watertight barrier, but rather, the president had a critical legislative function in proposing measures to the Congress of the United States.

The State of the Union speech was originally presented in person until Thomas Jefferson, who was elected in 1800. Thomas Jefferson was the great democrat, the man of the people, and he thought it was too magisterial, too kinglike, to present a State of the Union Address in person, and he submitted it in writing. And that tradition lasted for over a century, until broken by

Woodrow Wilson in 1913, a great orator. Unlike Thomas Jefferson, who was a great writer but not a great orator, Wilson presented the State of the Union Address in person.

In 1923, Calvin Coolidge became the first American president to have his State of the Union Address broadcast by radio. Prior to that, almost no one heard the State of the Union Address. And there really wasn't much information about it presented to the American people.

1947, Harry Truman became the first president to have his State of the Union Address broadcast by television. And in 1966, for the very first time, the opposition had a chance to give a response, and it was given by the minority leaders of the House and Senate, Everett Dirksen and the Senate and Gerald Ford in the House. And of course, Gerald Ford would go on to become the only president of the United States never elected president or vice president. He was appointed vice president and then became president upon the resignation of Richard Nixon.

There has always been a fundamental difference between the Inaugural Address and the State of the Union Address. The Inaugural Address has been meant to inspire. And there have been many memorable lines from Inaugural addresses: Thomas Jefferson, in the spirit of harmony, saying, "We are all Federalists. We are all Republicans." Franklin Roosevelt saying, "We have nothing to fear but fear itself" in the depths of The Depression. Abraham Lincoln, in his second Inaugural, looking ahead to the end of the war, saying, "With charity for all – with malice toward none, with charity for all." John F. Kennedy famously stating, "Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country." Ronald Reagan saying the government is not the solution; it's the problem.

These are all from Inaugural addresses. We don't have these great, ringing, memorable phrases from State of the Union addresses. In fact, many of the things we remember from the State of the Union, we remember with great irony: Bill Clinton declaring, "The era of big government is over" in 1996. And of course, since then the federal budget has tripled. The era of big government has exploded, not ended. George W. Bush in 2002 coining that famous phrase the "axis of evil," identified as North Korea, Iraq, and Iran.

Rather, the State of the Union is designed for policy. And if you could describe the speech in three words, it would be boring, boring, boring. You tend to get laundry lists of policy proposals rather than great dramatic themes or inspirational rhetoric. But sometimes the policies can be important. It was James Monroe back in the 1820s who used an Inaugural – excuse me, a State of the Union Address to set forth the Monroe Doctrine, one of the most important elements of American foreign policy throughout our history, that essentially told Europe to keep hands off the Americas. It was Franklin Roosevelt, after his third unprecedented election in 1940, who used the State of the Union Address to prepare the nation for aiding the victims of Nazi aggression and even eventually America entering the war. He used the State of the Union Address to articulate his famous Four Freedoms – freedom from fear, freedom from want, freedom of speech, freedom of worship – principles that still guide this country today. It was in 1964 that Lyndon Johnson sowed his plans for a Great Society and a War on Poverty. So in fact, although generally lacking in inspiration, the State of the Union Address can be very important in laying out policy.

This may be the most important speech of Barack Obama's career, going against the tendency of the State of the Union addresses to be rather unmemorable. Why do I say that this may be the most important speech of Barack Obama's career? Because despite having the great accomplishment in his first term of comprehensive healthcare reform, something that had eluded American presidents for many decades, the legacy of Barack Obama is still much unfinished. There is still much to do in terms of domestic and foreign policy.

And second terms are notoriously difficult. We know, of course, Bill Clinton was impeached in his second term. George W. Bush left his second term with some of the lowest approval ratings in the history of the presidency. Richard Nixon resigned. The great Franklin Roosevelt and Ronald Reagan had difficulties in their second terms. So second terms are tough. And you've got to strike when the iron is hot. You've got to strike when you have that election mandate, you have the attention of the American people, and the country is not entirely wrapped up as yet in the midterm election and the next presidential election. Unfortunately, we have something in America called the perpetual campaign. We never seem to stop campaigning. And already we're talking about the next presidential election and the next mid-terms.

So this is the time for Barack Obama to strike and to set out an agenda. And as you know, Barack Obama has two enormous problems in implementing major policies during his second term. The first is the polarization of the political parties. That cannot be overstated. It used to be, just 30 or 40 years ago, that there were conservative Democrats and liberal to moderate Republicans, particularly conservative to moderate Democrats from the South and liberal to moderate Republicans from the Northeast. They're gone. They're almost wiped out entirely. And you have a point today – and this has been measured by political scientists – where political polarization approaches the mathematical maximum – the mathematical maximum. That is the most liberal of Republicans is still more conservative than the most conservative of Democrats. The two parties open up as complete scissors with virtually no overlap. This is unprecedented in the recent history of the country.

And it's real. The two parties simply do not agree on issues ranging from taxes to spending, to the environment, to catastrophic climate change, to abortion rights, to immigration. There is a great ideological divide between the parties. Second problem, of course, is that the House is controlled by Republicans. President Obama has to face divided government, and that is extremely difficult. And the truth is no Democratic Party president in the history of the republic has been able to achieve major domestic reform changes – as opposed to foreign policy – without also a Democratic Congress. That was true of Franklin Roosevelt; that, of course, was true of Lyndon Johnson – the two great Democratic, domestic reformers.

So how does Barack Obama overcome polarization that's nearly at the mathematical maximum that's real, that's ideological, that's fundamental? How does he overcome having a Republican House which is controlled by conservative Republicans? He can't do it by glad-handing; he can't do it by schmoozing; he can't do it by meeting with the House leadership. None of that is going to work because the divide is too fundamental. Rather he has to take advantage of a fundamental feature of the United States Congress, and that is that Congress is like Wall Street. It operates on two principles: greed and fear. He ain't going to make them greedy for his policies. But how does he make them fearful?

Great policy change in America usually takes place because of two things. One, a terrible crisis like the Great Depression – obviously Obama's not hoping for that. Or very strong and powerful grassroots pressure and a grassroots movement like the civil rights movement. And that is the key to the puzzle for Barack Obama. The only way he is going to get fundamental change through the Republican House is if he has the public behind him and major grassroots pressure on the politicians. The politicians themselves are not going to change; they're only going to do so if forced by the people.

And I think Obama made a good start with an Inaugural Address that I thought was stronger in many ways than his first Inaugural Address. And usually second Inaugural Addresses are weaker. This was a stronger Inaugural Address. It was a very liberal Inaugural Address. He didn't give in. He didn't give quarter to the conservatives. And he highlighted a number of extremely important issues, including, remarkably, and I think very wisely, what he spent his most time on, which was not what people expected – wasn't taxes, wasn't the deficit – it was catastrophic climate change and the threat that climate poses not just to the United States but to human civilization.

So he has to build on the momentum of his Inaugural Address in his State of the Union speech. He can make some gestures to bipartisanship and cooperation, but he has to speak not just to the Congress but he has to speak to the American people and try to get the American people behind his ideas. We already saw that in the excellent speech he made on gun control. And that contributed to a 15 to 20 point swing in public opinion on strict gun control. Obviously, the tragedy at the school in Newtown was the main driving force behind that, but Obama's unrelenting position and very powerful and eloquent speech on gun control was important.

One of the great failings, maybe the greatest failing – and he admitted this himself – of the first term from Barack Obama was he didn't use the bully pulpit enough. He didn't use his rhetorical ability. He didn't use his great oratorical powers to really take control of national debates and build massive public support for his policies. He's got to do that now.

And he has got to avoid what is the great distraction of American politics. We are all focused on this sequestration, these automatic budget cuts that are not going to – that are going to take place if the Congress and the President don't agree on some immediate budget cuts. That could not be less important. It really doesn't matter whether we cut \$100 billion or don't cut \$100 billion out of a nearly \$4 trillion budget. It's not important, and in fact, Obama has got to see it's counterproductive. You don't want austerity in the short term. The economy is weak. It grew negatively, minus .01 in the last quarter. The last thing you want to do is a program of austerity during hard times. And yet, for some reason, we're all focused on this and we're all distracted by it. It's not important in the long run; and number two, it's the wrong thing to do.

Yes, we have to focus on the deficit but not with short term budget cuts that are going to hurt the economy. We need long-term, fundamental entitlement reform. That's the exploding time bomb. And we need a way to deal with a very large defense budget. Do we really need many, many, many thousands of nuclear weapons in this new era? Aren't there ways in which we can deal with defense cuts, with cuts in an overly bloated, obsolete farm subsidy program? Can we

deal with corporate welfare? Why are companies like Exxon getting special tax breaks when they're making \$40 to \$50 billion in profit? There are lots of fundamental things we can do about the deficit. But the wrong thing is to focus on austerity in the short term. He's got to have growth. He's got to have jobs.

And that ties into, of course, this enormous issue of catastrophic climate change that Obama spent more time on than any other issue in his Inaugural Address. Now the issue is, all right, we saw the backswing and it was great. Now we need the follow through. We need specific, real proposals to deal with catastrophic climate change, and not cap and trade. A number of you are from Europe and you know cap and trade doesn't work. It's not enforceable. It only affects carbon emissions at the far margins. He needs something fundamental. He needs to end all the subsidies to all the big energy companies. He needs to adopt something like a fee and dividend program, where you impose a fee on carbon and then redistribute the money to the people. So you're doing two things: You're controlling the pollution and the emissions; at the same time you're stimulating the economy by putting money in the pockets of people. He's got to unite those two issues, which have been severed apart – climate change and the economy. It's – we really can't afford to deal with what may be the greatest challenge facing humanity because it'll hurt the economy. Nonsense. There are ways to do it that can actually help the economy.

And he needs to be really serious about rebuilding a green infrastructure in America. The old smokestack industries are not coming back. That's not the way we're going to get employment reignited in America. Just like we had the technological revolution of the 1990s in cellphones and personal computers that really fueled the boom, we need the new boom in the green technology for the second decade of the 20th century. So he's got to put job creation, which is so important, stimulating the economy, together with catastrophic climate change. That is the great challenge of the State of the Union Address: to avoid the distractions and focus on the very big picture.

And of course, there are other issues that he needs to deal with, but I don't think they're nearly important. Yes, we do need better gun control and that is an important issue. But the truth is, there are 250 million guns already in America. Whatever we do about gun control is not probably going to fundamentally change the tragedy of gun crime and gun violence in America. It should be done, but whether it changes the course of the country is very questionable.

Immigration reform. Extremely important. We do need to regularize the status of 11 million undocumented people in the United States who, by the way, contribute in a major way to our economy. If we gave in to some of the hysterical cries to deport them all – all right, tomorrow, the hospitality industry would shut down, the restaurant industry would shut down, the domestic service industry would shut down, the farm industry would shut down. Do we really want that to happen in this country? I don't think so. There's got to be a way to regularize the status of these folks who are making such important contributions to the economy. And that is another issue that the President needs to address.

But again, I would put at the absolute top climate change and the economy, and everything else, including immigration and gun control, are secondary. And I think the President will talk about

education as well because old, unskilled jobs are not coming back. The future of the country is in education.

I hate to tell you, I once made a very abortive run for the United States Senate. I ran in the Democratic primary in Maryland. And I assure you a much better political analyst than I ever was political candidate. But we talked about education. And I'm an educator, and I said to the people, you know how many educators there are in the United States Senate? You want to take a guess? You know how many there are? Zero. Education is supposed to be our future. Zero educators in the United States Senate, maybe one or two in the United States House. We have all these professional politicians, but we don't have people who know how to work.

Where are the scientists in our House and Senate who could advise us on climate change? The union leaders, the – they're not there. But he's got to talk about education as well and what he is going to do to ensure everyone in the country has a real opportunity to be educated to the best of their ability. We still don't have that in the United States.

Foreign policy, I think, will be a lesser theme. I mean, the big question is will he talk about the hot issue right now, the drone strikes, and particularly the drone strikes against U.S. citizens abroad, which hurts him in his base, just like the surge in Afghanistan hurt him within his base. And will he talk about the tragedy in Syria, the nuclear weapons program in Iran, the war on terror in North Africa, our relations with China and Russia. I think he will briefly touch upon those things, but I think this will be fundamentally a speech devoted to extremely important domestic issues, as it generally is except in times of war or when war is imminent.

So this is the challenge for Barack Obama: Take a speech that normally is boring, boring, boring, and make it exciting, make it interesting, don't be distracted by the small issues however prominent they may be in the headlines. Don't let that stuff fool you; keep your eye on the big picture, President Obama, and inspire the American people to get behind a big agenda.

Thank you so much. I'll take any questions.

MODERATOR: And just a reminder before we start, please state your name and your news organization. And we will start in the back.

MR. LICHTMAN: Yeah, let me remind you all I speak only for myself, not for the U.S. Government, the U.S. State Department, American University, or even for my wife, Karyn Strickler, who is here in the audience today. Just speak for me.

Yes, sir.

MODERATOR: Go ahead.

QUESTION: Okay.

MODERATOR: Yes, go ahead.

QUESTION: Zheela Nori from VOA, Voice of America Afghanistan service. It's great to hear all this preview about this State of the Union. My question's of course related to Afghanistan. Since he will be – I can sit down? Okay. Since he will be speaking on foreign policy agenda, so one of the things is also defense cut, and then the change in the leadership, like Chuck Hagel is just approved to be a new Secretary of Defense, and the leadership of NATO change. And I'm just – I would like to know your view that – is Afghanistan is one of the priority and his agenda, he's going to talk about it? And what do you think he's just offering something new post-transition 2014? Thank you.

MR. LICHTMAN: Yeah. I don't know what he's going to say about Afghanistan, but I don't think it's going to be a big feature of the speech, which I think will be focused on domestic issues. I think he may talk about the fact that America's combat role in Afghanistan is going to end during his second term, of course. And I would hope he would talk about what America's post-combat role in Afghanistan would be.

We made a big mistake in Afghanistan, right, at the end of the 1980s when after the withdrawal of the Soviets, America kind of withdrew from Afghanistan as well. "All right, we got the Soviets out of there, what do we care about Afghanistan?" That was a big mistake, and I think people realize that was a big mistake. And I hope he will at least briefly say in terms of rebuilding Afghanistan in a peaceful way, we'll still stay engaged there.

MODERATOR: Okay, let's come up to the front.

QUESTION: Thank you. Swiss Television, Tomas Miglierina. How do you reconcile what you were saying about the fact that he needs to address grassroots and be strong with climate change? That doesn't seem to be a top priority in the moment in the American public. And this issue about building grassroots, if I understand, is turning his campaign into some kind of Political Action Committee or something.

MR. LICHTMAN: He is.

QUESTION: How much can he be explicit and so on and reconcile the fact that he doesn't have anything more to win with the fact that the party, presumably, wants to win the elections in two years?

MR. LICHTMAN: Great points. I'm going to address your second point first, the bigger point. What kind of power does Barack Obama have since he's not running for re-election again? He has tremendous power if he realizes it. Some of you may have heard my presentation before the 2012 election on the keys to the White House. Any of you hear that? Yeah. And so that's a system for predicting and explaining how presidential elections work. It's been correct since 1984, almost thirty years. I've been predicting since I was nine years old and it's hit eight elections in a row. And the theory, which I think has been validated by this prediction, is this: That the re-election of the party holding the White House depends upon the performance of the incumbent president whether or not that president is up for re-election.

So George H.W. Bush won the presidency in 1988 not because he was such a great candidate – people thought he was a terrible candidate. He was the guy who couldn't complete a sentence, who reminded every woman of the first husband that they had dumped, who had called Ted Koppel Dan Rather on national television. Why did he win? The record of the Reagan years. Second term, peace, prosperity, domestic tranquility, enormous growth in jobs and the economy. Why did John McCain lose in 2008? Admittedly, he wasn't the greatest candidate. Because of all the disastrous record of the George W. Bush Administration, leaving office with the lowest approval ratings in history, the economic meltdown, the foreign policy problems.

So what the Democrats have to realize is if they want to win in 2016, there better be a very successful second term for Barack Obama or the presidency will turn over to the Republicans. So every Democrat, especially those like Hillary Clinton and Andrew Cuomo and Joe Biden, who might have presidential ambitions, have to be doing everything in their power to make sure that Barack Obama has a successful term. And by the way, one of the keys to the White House is achieving major policy change. He won that in his first term with health care. It would help the Democrats a lot if he'd win in his second term.

With respect to your first – you're absolutely right, climate change has not been a front-and-center issue for the American people. But why not? Because there's been no leadership on climate change. It was the orphan issue of the 2012 campaign. It was barely mentioned by the candidates. I don't think it came up at all in any of the presidential debates. And if you look at the polls, even though when you ask them what's the most important issue facing you, it always says the economy and climate change comes down, there is – and in – now, not just a scientific, but a public consensus that climate change is real and that we do need to do something about it. So that's a huge challenge for the President and the Democratic leadership to make this an important issue, to really explain to the American people why nothing else may matter unless we solve climate change.

And again, as I tried to stress, to tie it into the economy and to try to break this false dichotomy, to – we can do something about climate change and we can help the economy, but we can't do both.

MODERATOR: We'll take one more question here, and then we'll go to New York. So let's come up here.

QUESTION: Thank you, professor. My name is Bingru Wang with Hong Kong Phoenix TV. Whenever the U.S. politicians talk about economy and unemployment rate, they always point a finger in China, especially Chinese currency. Do you think this will be mentioned in the State of the Union, or in Obama's second term, will Chinese currency be – still be an issue when they talking about the U.S. economy? Thank you.

MR. LICHTMAN: No question Chinese currency will continue to be an issue. It was a pretty strong issue in the presidential campaign. That's not going to be dropped as an issue in the second term. But I don't think it's going to be a centerpiece of Barack Obama's approach to the economy. And if mentioned at all in the State of the Union, I think it will be mentioned very, very briefly. He's got to talk about things that can be done as opposed to, "Yeah, we're going to

make China change its currency policy.” It sounds nice, but as we know, that’s not something an American president can snap his fingers and do.

MODERATOR: New York.

QUESTION: Thank you very much. I am from the Sustainable Development Media, so what I’m hearing is music to my ear. Now, I’m looking at June 1999, Clinton-era executive order to help the challenge of global warming by requiring each federal agency to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from energy use in buildings by 30 percent, below 1990 levels by 2010.

Now, this thing was effective. Why not continue to use executive orders in order to achieve results that is impossible to get through Congress?

MR. LICHTMAN: That’s a great point. We’ve already seen Barack Obama using executive orders on the issue of gun control. He’s issued a number of executive orders to help achieve some tightening of gun control regulations even without getting legislation from Congress. I couldn’t agree with you more. Obama has nothing to lose by issuing executive orders. It might make Republicans in Congress angry with him, but so what? They’re angry with his policies anyway.

I think given the difficulties of (a) first rallying the public and (b) getting something through the Congress, that Obama should very carefully look through the possibility of executive orders. He can do much more than you think, as your example pointed out, through executive orders. The Defense Department, for example, is one of the greatest consumers of energy of any institution around the world. There are some things that are being done to deal with that issue, but not nearly enough. So I think Obama should definitely explore that route on every issue, particularly if he does seem to be hitting roadblocks, as he may well in the Republican House.

MODERATOR: Let’s go in the middle right here.

QUESTION: Hi, my name is Nick O’Malley. I’m from the Sydney Morning Herald of Australia. Can you tell us anything about the mechanics of putting together a State of the Union speech? Is there lobbying from various parts of the Administration for the inclusion or exclusion of positions?

MR. LICHTMAN: There’s lobbying from everybody. This is the speech where you lay out the policy. The inaugural address is very personal, and usually – especially someone like Barack Obama, who’s a great writer and great speaker, will largely do the inaugural address himself. But there will be enormous input into a State of the Union from – of course, from elements within the Administration, from the Democrats in the Congress. And while they might not be able to get to the President, there’s also intense lobbying by all the special interests.

So, absolutely, a lot goes into the speech, which is why it often comes out looking like a laundry list because you’re dealing with so many different – I hope Obama doesn’t do that. I hope it’s more in the way of a coherent thematic speech that hits a few of the really big themes and avoids what I call overemphasis on the distractions.

MODERATOR: We'll take one more question here and then go back to New York. Let's take the gentleman in the back there.

QUESTION: Thank you very much, Simon Carswell with the Irish Times in Ireland. Just wanted to ask, you talk about the importance of the State of the Union speech, but what about the reaction of the Republicans and how important it is this time out, particularly with this kind of existential crisis that the party is going through at the moment?

MR. LICHTMAN: Well, you're absolutely right. The Republican Party is going through an identity crisis, what I call an implosion. It's not so much anything the liberals have done to them, but an implosion in terms of the contradictions within their own ideologies.

And one thing I really need to stress to all of you here is a lot of what you hear about Republicans and conservatives is just wrong. Conservatism has nothing to do – and I repeat that – nothing to do with fiscal responsibility or small government. Who was the biggest spender in the history of the presidency? Anybody know? George W. Bush, by far. Who built the biggest bureaucracy in the history of the world? George W. Bush in Homeland – in the Department of Homeland Security. If conservatives were really serious about fiscal responsibility, they obviously would be considering a mix of tax and spending. Everyone knows you can't do it by spending alone.

Terms of big government – nothing to do with big and small government; there's liberal big government, there's also conservative big government. Look how apoplectic the conservatives are about cutting defense. They don't want small government when it comes to defense. They don't want small government when it comes to the military. They don't want small government when it comes to social issues like abortion, pornography, gay rights.

So the debate between liberals and conservatives has nothing to do with the size of government or fiscal responsibility. It has everything to do with what you want government to do. Nobody cuts government. Of course, everybody screams about cutting government when they're out of power, but once they're in power, nobody cuts government. Ronald Reagan didn't cut government. He redirected government to more conservative priorities, but he didn't cut it.

So I do think the Republicans have a lot to figure out here, and I guess Marco Rubio will be doing this. And what everyone is going to be looking for, of course, is immigration policy. After all, he is the Latino face of the Republican Party, and people are going to be looking to see what Marco Rubio has to say about immigration, and they're also going to be looking to see, does he have something positive to say other than kind of being the party of no, just contradicting the Democrats.

So I do think that – usually nobody pays any attention whatsoever to the opposition response. But I think because it's Marco Rubio and because there is this crisis within the Republican Party, there will be a lot of attention paid there.

MODERATOR: Our next question will come from New York.

QUESTION: Hi, my name is Mercedes Gallego with the newspaper El Correo from Spain. Tomorrow is Lincoln's birthday. We all know how much this President love Lincoln, and this is the year of Lincoln in Hollywood, so I have two questions about that.

First, what do you expect Obama to say about Lincoln tomorrow? And second, what do you think Obama has to learn from Lincoln's second term?

MR. LICHTMAN: All right. I'm going to – and I don't know exactly what he's going to say about Lincoln. Probably not a whole lot; you got to be careful to compare yourself to Lincoln. (Laughter.) It's like if you're a baseball player comparing yourself to Babe Ruth or if you're a soccer player – football player for all of you – comparing yourself to Pele. It's a pretty high bar to set. So I think he'll be brief about Lincoln.

Here's what I think he has to learn from Lincoln, that – something I've really been saying, that you got to be willing to take political risks and go after the big issues. As you know, there's this film Lincoln, and it focuses on the passage of the 13th Amendment, one of the most important measures in the history of the country because it ended slavery. And as you – if any of you saw the movie or read any biographies of Lincoln, it was not a sure thing. It was very, very difficult to get through the 13th Amendment, and people within his own cabinet didn't want him to do this, but he was willing to think big and go after the big prize.

Secondly, what I think he can learn from Lincoln is you can grow and change in office. Lincoln evolved to being an abolitionist when it came to slavery. He didn't enter into office that way at all. He had – was not advocating abolition, didn't even think we had the power to do so. And his priority early on was getting the union back together, not ending slavery. But he grew and he developed and he understood that you – you couldn't have a harmonious union while you still had slavery, that ending slavery was part and parcel to binding the union back together.

And he came to this extraordinary realization, expressed in one of the greatest speeches in all of American history, the Second Inaugural, that this terrible, horrible, bloody civil war, by far and away the most bloody war in American history per capita, given how small the population, may well have been expiation for the sins of slavery. Can you imagine a president saying that kind of thing today when no one's ever asked for sacrifices or to look hard within themselves? That's another thing he can learn from both Lincoln and from Kennedy. Maybe you need to ask the American people for some sacrifices. Maybe you need to ask them to look hard within themselves and realize that perhaps this country has not always been on the right course, and some fundamental course corrections are needed.

So those are a couple of the things I think he can learn from Lincoln.

MODERATOR: We will go to the gentleman here, and then the lady in the back.

QUESTION: Hi, how are you? Thank you for doing this. My name is Xavier Villa, Public Radio, headquartered in Barcelona. You mentioned that healthcare – besides healthcare, his legacy, Obama's legacy, isn't finished. Do you think, though, that only that is enough as to build

a legacy on? Or put another way, if he did nothing else, would that be enough to be remembered as a very good president? Thank you.

MR. LICHTMAN: That's a really good question. And I'm an historian, and one of the things historians hate to do is give you instant historical analysis, right? As you know, the legacy of presidents actually change. Harry Truman left office despised. He had approvals ratings down where Nixon's and George W. Bush's were, and yet today we regard Harry Truman as a near-great president. Dwight Eisenhower was kind of derided as this out-of-touch golfer when he was president. Today we have great esteem for Dwight Eisenhower.

So it's very difficult to give an instant analysis, but let me say this. Barack Obama would not be satisfied with just healthcare. He would not think that that's enough for the kind of legacy that he wants. He wants a bigger legacy. And he wants to do something that's hard to do, it's almost never done; build a lot of that legacy in your second term. Usually it's built in your first term. Almost all the New Deal programs of Franklin Roosevelt were first term programs. Ronald Reagan's – all of his economic programs, first term programs. Hard to build a legacy in your second term, but I think that's what he wants to do.

And that's why I think this particular speech is not one of those forgettable State of the Unions but an extremely important speech. And as I said, I think he's got to keep his eye on the big picture if this speech is going to be part of his legacy-building campaign. And remember, you don't build a legacy by going out to build a legacy. That doesn't work. You build a legacy by accomplishing things.

QUESTION: Carla Turner, Canadian Broadcasting. What do you think about the extent of his agenda that he's already laid out? I mean, isn't it pretty large and hard to accomplish – climate change, gun control, immigration, the economy? Can he accomplish all or part or any of it?

MR. LICHTMAN: It's going to be tough. It is a large agenda. But what's really interesting, if you look at the great reforming presidents like Lyndon Johnson, Ronald Reagan, Franklin Roosevelt, they accomplished a lot in a very short period of time. No one's ever going to do what Franklin Roosevelt did again: 15 major bills in 100 days. But reform does tend to come in clusters, and it is not impossible that he can accomplish maybe not all but much of his agenda. But he's got to prioritize. He can't put equal political capital on gun control and the economy, or gun control and catastrophic climate change. He's got to decide what is most important.

My view is it's the economy and the environment and climate change, and all the other issues are secondary. But he's got to make his own decisions, and it's a balance. All right, maybe these big issues are most important, but maybe I have a better chance on a smaller issue like gun control. That's always a balance that a president has to take. And I would hope he would tilt that balance towards the big things, but that remains to be seen.

MODERATOR: We'll take the gentleman in the back.

QUESTION: Dmytro Anopchenko, Inter Television Channel from Ukraine. Professor, I just want to ask, speaking about the immigration reform, which main messages should we expect?

And secondly, you're absolutely right that the President will address his messages not only to politicians but to other people, to people from the street. And this moment that the President is seeking for public support, how will it change his speech? Thank you.

MR. LICHTMAN: I think it will change the speech. As I said, I hope it will be less of the laundry list kind of speeches that you often get in the State of the Union and more like Franklin Roosevelt's State of the Union after his third election in 1940, where he hit on big themes, where he was eloquent, where he had this very memorable idea of the Four Freedoms. I hope that will be the model for Barack Obama's first State of the Union speech.

And I think the two issues, and I don't think they're the biggest ones, but the two issues where he's most likely to get something out of the Republican House are gun control, where he's likely to get some kind of expanded registration, and immigration reform. And the reason he's likely to get something about immigration reform out of the House is right now the Republicans are working against demography, and you can't beat demography, you can't beat birthrates, migration rates. It doesn't happen. Their base is white and Protestant, and that is the most shrinking part of the American population and the American voters.

They can't be a viable party losing 95 percent of the African American vote and 70 percent of the Hispanic vote, so they know they can't just be obstructionist on immigration reform. They're going to probably have to agree to something, maybe not everything that Barack Obama laid out in his speech, but certainly something, and it's got to be some combination of regularization for 11 million undocumented immigrants, some kind of stepped-up border control, although they've already done a lot to step up the border control, and then some kind of program for regularizing the influx of skilled workers.

MODERATOR: Any other questions here in Washington? And we'll turn to see if New York has any follow-up questions. Well, if there are no more questions, we will end there. And we want to thank Professor Lichtman for his time.

MR. LICHTMAN: My pleasure, thanks for the great questions. (Applause.) Thanks, guys.

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