

Special ♦ Reprint ♦ Edition



As seen in



January 18, 2010

OBAMA'S INAUGURATION / ONE YEAR LATER

Assessing the strength of his words

One year ago, Barack Obama came into office with soaring approval ratings as the nation struggled with two difficult wars and a deepening recession. Americans, it seemed, put great stock in their new leader.

That was then.

One year later, the president's approval ratings have plummeted to 50%, down from 64% shortly after he took office, according to the latest USA TODAY/Gallup Poll.

Obama also has had trouble fulfilling some top campaign promises, such as closing the Guantanamo Bay detention facility. The public is split over a key goal: passing health care legislation. Efforts at the bipartisanship he promised have withered.

USA TODAY's **Mimi Hall** takes a look at what Obama had to say last Jan. 20 and how some of his pronouncements turned out.

Honeymoon cut short

"I thank President Bush for his service to our nation as well as the generosity and cooperation he has shown throughout this transition."

Analysis: George W. Bush mostly has kept to what he said last March: that his successor "deserves my silence." Bush even praised Obama on Saturday for "his swift and timely response" to the earthquake in Haiti, and no words were exchanged about Bush's response to



By Rob Curtis, Army Times Publishing Co.

44th president: Barack Obama speaks to the packed National Mall after he is sworn in at the U.S. Capitol.

Hurricane Katrina, of which Obama was critical.

Bush's vice president, Dick Cheney, has taken the opposite tack, going public with repeated harsh critiques of Obama's national security policies. Last month, Cheney told Politico that Obama's "slow response" to the alleged bomb plot on Christmas Day suggests the president "is trying to pretend we're not at war" against terrorists.

Change — in Americans' outlook

"Less measurable, but no less profound, is a sapping of

confidence across our land; a nagging fear that America's decline is inevitable, that the next generation must lower its sights."

Analysis

Percentage who are dissatisfied with the way things are going in the U.S.?



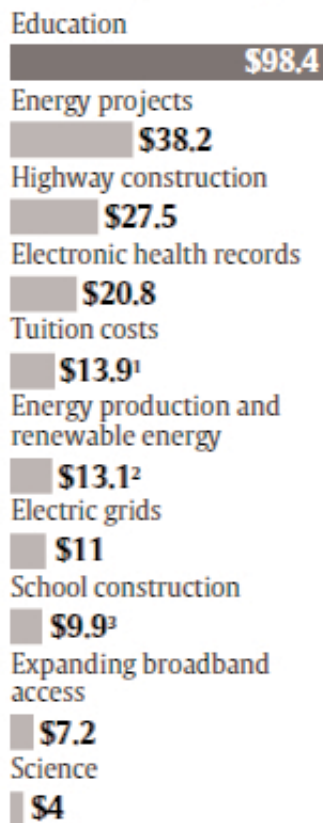
Source: Recent numbers from USA TODAY/Gallup Poll of 1,023 adults Jan. 8-10. Margin of error ±4 percentage points.

By Julie Snider, USA TODAY

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Boosting the economy

President Obama last February signed into law a \$787 billion stimulus package to pay for a host of infrastructure projects and tax incentives, aimed at saving and creating jobs. Here's how the funding matched up to his inaugural address (in billions):



1 – tax credits; 2 – tax cuts;
3 – tax-exempt bonds
Source: Congressional Quarterly

By Julie Snider, USA TODAY

Barriers to bridging the aisle

"On this day, we come to proclaim an end to the petty grievances and false promises, the

recriminations and worn-out dogmas that for far too long have strangled our politics."

Analysis: Most new presidents pledge to usher in a new era of civility in Washington politics – and most fail.

Obama's early efforts at bipartisanship included hosting cocktail parties and basketball games with Republicans in Congress. But his legislative efforts went south almost immediately when no Republicans in the House of Representatives and only three in the Senate supported the \$787 billion economic stimulus package.

Obama's efforts on a health care overhaul have fared no better. In the House, just one Republican backed the legislation; in the Senate, none did. Acrimony over the legislation got so bad that Rep. Joe Wilson, R-S.C., yelled out "You lie!" during Obama's prime-time speech to the nation on health care on Sept. 9. It was a stunning break with decorum for a joint session. Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., called the outburst "totally disrespectful." Wilson called the White House that night to apologize.

Economic recovery: Hard to figure

"The state of our economy calls for action, bold and swift. And we will act, not only to create new jobs but to lay a new foundation for growth. We will build the roads and bridges, the electric grids and digital lines that feed our commerce and bind us together. We'll restore science to its rightful place and wield technology's wonders to raise health care's quality and lower its cost. We will harness the sun and the winds and

the soil to fuel our cars and run our factories. And we will transform our schools and colleges and universities to meet the demands of a new age. All this we can do. All this we will do."

Analysis: The \$787 billion stimulus bill has been dishing out money to states and cities for crumbling bridges, school construction, electronic medical records, weatherizing homes and more – all projects aimed at making the nation more modern and efficient while saving and creating jobs.

The Obama administration says it has saved or created up to 2 million jobs, a figure that has generated controversy. "What's the American public going to believe? Self-serving and deceptive numbers being put out by the White House on the stimulus, or the numbers that say we're at 10% unemployment? Another word for it is propaganda," Rep. Darrell Issa, R-Calif., said earlier this month.

Transparent government

"Those of us who manage the public's dollars will be held to account, to spend wisely, reform bad habits and do our business in the light of day, because only then can we restore the vital trust between a people and their government."

Analysis: As a candidate, Obama pledged to have the most open and accessible administration in history. In one of his first acts in office, he directed federal agencies to adopt a new attitude in favor of complying with Freedom of Information Act requests.

Obama also has made widely

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available, for the first time, the White House visitor logs — lists of those who have come to meet with the president and his top staff. Briefings are live-streamed on the White House website, and agencies have been directed to open their records to the public. Press secretary Robert Gibbs, however, has been asked in recent weeks why Obama won't fulfill a campaign promise to allow health care talks to be aired by C-SPAN. He hasn't responded.

Spending give-and-take

"The question we ask today is not whether our government is too big or too small but whether it works. ... Where the answer is yes, we intend to move forward. Where the answer is no, programs will end."

Analysis: Obama's budget proposal for 2011 is scheduled to come out next month.

So far, a handful of big programs have met the ax, despite heavy resistance in Congress. Among them: the Pentagon's plan to buy seven more Lockheed Martin F-22 fighter jets for \$1.75 billion.

Lawmakers have defied veto threats on other programs, though. In October, Congress authorized \$560 million for a second engine for the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, despite White House objections.

Guardian of financial sector

"This crisis has reminded us that without a watchful eye, the market can spin out of control."

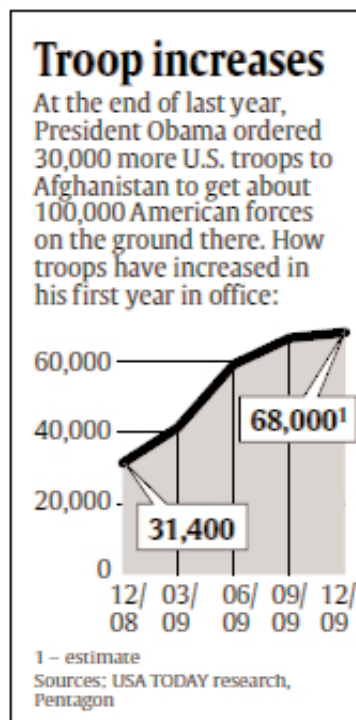
Analysis: That watchful eye is in the form of financial regulatory legislation Obama proposed last summer.

If it clears Congress, the legislation

will impose strict government oversight of the financial industry in an effort to prevent another meltdown that brings the U.S. to the brink of depression. The House passed its version last year, but the Senate's legislation has been bogged down by a host of disputes, including whether a new government agency should be created to protect consumers and how to set limits on executives' compensation.

Two days before Christmas, Senate Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs Committee Chairman Chris Dodd, D-Conn., and the top Republican on the committee, Alabama Sen. Richard Shelby, promised to work together to resolve any remaining differences before the Senate reconvenes on Tuesday.

"The economic crisis our country faced over the last year exposed serious weaknesses in our financial regulatory structure," they said. "The lesson was clear: Our country needs financial regulatory reform."



By Julie Snider, USA TODAY

Security without being walled in

"As for our common defense, we reject as false the choice between our safety and our ideals. ... Those ideals still light up the world, and we will not give them up for expedience sake."

Analysis: Obama has reinforced this message repeatedly since he took office, beginning with an executive order last January to close the detention center at Guantanamo Bay, which he says has become a recruiting tool for terrorists.

Most recently, he was emphatic when talking about the alleged Christmas Day plot to blow up a Detroit-bound airliner. "We will not succumb to a siege mentality that sacrifices the open society and liberties and values that we cherish as Americans," he said when releasing a report on the intelligence failures that preceded the incident. "Great and proud nations don't hunker down and hide behind walls of suspicion and mistrust."

Balancing war and politics

"We will begin to responsibly leave Iraq to its people and forge a hard-earned peace in Afghanistan."

Analysis: A month after he was sworn in, Obama announced he would begin withdrawing U.S. troops from Iraq with the goal of bringing most of them out by the end of this August.

How to forge the peace in Afghanistan was a more difficult decision. It consumed Obama for months, until he announced in December a rapid escalation of the war with a plan to deploy 30,000 more U.S.

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servicemembers to add to the 68,000 already on the ground.

The decision caused a revolt on his political left and was applauded by many conservatives, including Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., who said he thought the plan had "a good chance of working."

Rep. Louise Slaughter, D-N.Y., was incensed. "We all thought the change we could believe in was that he would get us out of this war," she said.

All eyes on his prize

"America must play its role in ushering in a new era of peace."

Analysis: Little did the new president know that shortly after his inauguration, he would be nominated for the prestigious Nobel Peace Prize. In October, the chagrined president was named the winner in an announcement that stunned the world and the White

House. "I do not view it as a recognition of my own accomplishments but rather an affirmation of American leadership on behalf of aspirations held by people in all nations," he said.

Discussion

1. How has President Obama encouraged bipartisanship? Has he discouraged it? Why is it sometimes difficult to get Republican and Democratic members of Congress to work together?
2. What can a country do to rebuild its economy?
3. What are the benefits and drawbacks of government transparency?
4. Do you think the federal government should have a large or a limited role in citizens' lives? How big a role does the current government play?
5. What is a "siege mentality"? What civil liberties does President Obama want to protect even in the face of terrorism?
6. What controversial decision did President Obama make about the war in Afghanistan? Do you agree with the decision? Why or why not?
7. What specific steps can the U.S. take to usher in "a new era of peace"? Identify at least three.

Activity 1

In small groups, reread the article and highlight the actions that President Obama has taken over the last year. Use this information to determine and list the president's powers (i.e., the actions he has the authority to take) and duties (i.e., the actions he is required or expected to take). Next, discuss what other powers and duties the president has, or, in your opinion, should have. Then, adopt the role of the Framers of the Constitution and develop the language for Article 2, Section 2, which outlines the powers granted to the president, and Article 2, Section 3, which outlines the duties of the president. Share your work with peers. Finally, as a class, read Article 2, Sections 2 and 3 of the Constitution. Which of the powers and duties that students outlined are in the Constitution? Which are implied by the document? Which powers and duties, if any, should be added to or deleted from the Constitution? Why?

Activity 2

Use the graphic organizer on the following page to evaluate and respond to Obama's actions during his first year as president. Refer to the article as needed.



“Assessing the strength of his words”

	What did Obama promise?	What has he accomplished?	Where has he failed?	Do you think his efforts will be successful eventually?	What would you do?
Economic stability					
Financial regulation					
Bipartisan civility					
War					
Security					
Government transparency (accountability)					
New era of peace					