

Editorial: Can Obama achieve his goals?

Publisher's note: *This editorial is from the Feb. 13, 2013, Los Angeles Times.*

In his first State of the Union address of his second term, President Obama delivered the most forceful defense of liberal values uttered on this occasion by any president since Lyndon Johnson. Obama argued for progress on the environment, common sense on guns, decency on immigration. On those issues, he has the support of the American people.

Yes, there are problems left over from his first four years: high unemployment and slow economic growth. He rightly called on Congress to close the nation's long-term budget gap by reforming entitlements and simplifying the tax code, rather than making across-the-board reductions that only chip away at the deficit. But it wasn't clear how he'd get his ideas, many of them recycled from his first term, through a polarized Congress.



President
Obama

Many of the proposals Obama laid out – initiatives to promote manufacturing, shore up infrastructure, expand exports, develop clean energy technology, prepare American workers for the demands of today's job market and fix a broken immigration system – would help build a stronger foundation for economic

growth. He added a new wrinkle to several of these proposals, calling for public-private partnerships in construction and education to reduce the cost to taxpayers.

The president also renewed his call to reduce carbon emissions, suggesting that he may spend some political capital on that vital issue. He endorsed sensible steps to deter gun violence, including new protections against sham sales that arm criminals. And he reconfirmed his commitment to ending the U.S. war in Afghanistan next year.

Leaders have to do more than set the right goals; they have to find ways to achieve them. There, Obama's course is unclear. In the first term, he courted Republican support and was rebuffed. With his inaugural address, he suggested a new approach: rallying the public in support of common values, transcending partisanship. This speech extended that idea, but achieving it won't be easy.

Obama did make one significant nod to the other side, announcing that he would pursue a free-trade agreement with the European Union. Although his own party may balk, it was a smart and bold move.

The president rightly argues that Washington should re-prioritize, not just cut back. Before him and Congress stand great opportunities to do just that. Pass immigration reform. Pass sensible gun laws. Work to improve the lives of average Americans regardless of which party benefits. Those are ambitions worthy of a great nation.