

The President's Weekly Address

January 4, 2014

Hi, everybody, and happy New Year.

This is a time when we look ahead to all the possibilities and opportunities of the year to come, when we resolve to better ourselves and to better our relationships with one another. And today I want to talk about one place that Washington should start, a place where we can make a real and powerful difference in the lives of many of our fellow Americans right now.

Just a few days after Christmas, more than 1 million of our fellow Americans lost a vital economic lifeline: the temporary insurance that helps folks make ends meet while they look for a job. Republicans in Congress went home for the holidays and let that lifeline expire. And for many of their constituents who are unemployed through no fault of their own, that decision will leave them with no income at all.

We make this promise to one another because it makes a difference to a mother who needs help feeding her kids while she's looking for work. It makes a difference to a father who needs help paying the rent while learning the skills to get a new and better job. And denying families that security is just plain cruel. We're a better country than that. We don't abandon our fellow Americans when times get tough; we keep the faith with them until they start that new job.

What's more, it actually slows down the economy for all of us. If folks can't pay their bills or buy the basics, like food and clothes, local businesses take a hit and hire fewer workers. That's why the independent Congressional Budget Office says that unless Congress restores this insurance, we'll feel a drag on our economic growth this year. And after our businesses created more than 2 million new jobs last year, that's a self-inflicted wound we don't need.

So when Congress comes back to work this week, their first order of business should be making this right. Right now a bipartisan group in Congress is working on a 3-month extension of unemployment insurance, and if they pass it, I will sign it. For decades, Republicans and Democrats put partisanship and ideology aside to offer some security for job seekers, even when the unemployment rate was lower than it is today. Instead of punishing families who can least afford it, Republicans should make it their New Year's resolution to do the right thing and restore this vital economic security for their constituents right now.

After all, our focus as a country this year shouldn't be shrinking our economy, but growing it; not narrowing opportunity, but expanding it; not fewer jobs, but doing everything we can to help our businesses create more of the good jobs that a growing middle class requires. That's my New Year's resolution: to do everything I can every single day to help make 2014 a year in which more of our citizens can earn their own piece of the American Dream.

After 5 years of working and sacrificing to recover and rebuild from crisis, we have it within our power right now to move this country forward. It's entirely up to us. And I'm optimistic for the year that lies ahead.

Thanks, and have a great weekend.

NOTE: The address was recorded at approximately 4:30 p.m. on December 19, 2013, in the Roosevelt Room at the White House for broadcast on January 4. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on January 3, but was embargoed for release until 6 a.m. on January 4.

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