

In his State of the Union Address last week, President Obama spoke about the reality of the hard times that facing our country, as well as the determination and optimism that have helped America overcome hardship in the past--the same qualities that are essential to our recovery today.

When President Obama took office a year ago, many feared that America was on the brink of a Second Great Depression. The President and Congress dedicated the last year to avoiding that disaster and sparking an economic recovery. And we have seen significant progress: the Recovery Act, according to the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office, has been responsible for as many as 2.4 million jobs; it also has our economy growing at its fastest rate in two years.

And perhaps the most promising news yet, is that we learned last week that in the final three months of 2009 the economy grew by 5.7% - the highest rate of growth in six years.

But while indicators suggest that we are moving in the right direction, far more work remains to restore the promise this nation has to offer. President Obama understands that, which is why job creation and strengthening the middle class were front-and-center in his address, and why the Congress will be passing a jobs package in the coming weeks.

At the same time, tackling our long-term deficit has a place along with job creation at the top of our agenda. President Obama's commitment to fiscal responsibility was unmistakable. He urged the passage of a pay-as-you-go law, to ensure that America pays for what it buys, and he announced the creation of a bipartisan commission to address our most pressing fiscal challenges at a time of high deficits and debt. I hope that my colleagues across the aisle will join us and lend their effort and ideas to the struggle of deficit reduction.

Finally, the president reminded us that, even in hard times, we cannot neglect policies that strengthen our future prosperity and national security. One of those is health insurance reform, which can reduce costs for families, provide more freedom to workers, and create some 4 million jobs over the next decade; for those reasons, the president reasserted his strong support for reform.

It is also essential to pass Wall Street reform that will bring accountability to our financial sector and put an end to the reckless gambles that endanger the future of millions of average Americans. Setting high standards for education and creating jobs with clean energy are also crucial to a recovery that is sustained and widely shared. And the president also pledged continued vigilance against terrorism at home and abroad.

President Obama laid out an ambitious agenda that meets the needs of America's struggling middle class in this time of recovery. I look forward to working with him and my colleagues in Congress—on, I hope, both sides of the aisle—to make this middle-class agenda a reality.