



Politics

[\[Print\]](#) [\[Email\]](#)



Congress' action on health care may dictate State of the Union schedule

By: [Susan Ferrechio](#)
Chief Congressional Correspondent
January 10, 2010

President Obama may break a decades-old tradition of delivering the State of the Union address in January in order to give Congress more time to pass a health care reform bill that he would be able to tout in his speech.

It would be only the second time since a constitutional amendment shifted the government's timetables in 1934 for a president to move the date past January. The only president to move the date was Ronald Reagan, who delayed his address by a week in response to the Jan. 28 explosion of the space shuttle Challenger.

If Obama moves his speech, however, it would be for the political reason of sparing him from having to tell the nation that the yearlong health care reform effort was still in progress even as Americans are clearly anxious for the White House and Congress to tackle jobs and the economy.

On Friday, the Obama administration reported that the December unemployment level did not budge from 10 percent and that 85,000 people joined the ranks of the unemployment, disappointing economists, who were hoping to see fewer jobs shed.

Democratic strategists believe a health care victory speech could bolster the nation's spirits, and Obama's poll numbers.

"It would be much preferable from the perspective of the White House and the Democrats in Congress to be able to start the speech by saying the state of the union is going to be much improved because we have taken our powers and we are going to transform our broken health care system," said congressional scholar Norm Ornstein, of the American Enterprise Institute. "That's a powerful message."

But some political observers said Obama should not play politics with the speech, which was first delivered by George Washington in 1790 to inform Americans about the condition of the country.

People may note its absence this month. President Obama's address to a joint session of Congress in February 2009, which was not an official State of the Union address, drew more than 53 million

viewers.

"It would be a bad idea for the president to change the time of the speech," said Jim Campbell, chairman of the Political Science Department at the State University of New York at Buffalo. "The address is supposed to be about the state of the union, not the state of his legislative agenda, and certainly not a time to gloat about legislative victories."

Princeton University political science professor Larry Bartels said the date of the speech is not mandated in the Constitution.

"I don't think doing the speech in February would violate either the letter or the spirit of that mandate, and I don't see why anyone should care whether he does it then or in January," Bartels said.

Obama could end up talking about an unfinished health care bill even if he postpones his speech until February.

House and Senate Democrats are struggling to resolve differences over who should pay for the bill and how it should be implemented. The dispute could drag into February. Their effort will not be helped by the limited work calendar Congress has designed for itself in January and February, which calls for just 17 workdays in the House and 23 days in the Senate.

sferrechio@washingtonexaminer.com

Find this article at:

http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/politics/Congress_-action-on-health-care-may-dictate-State-of-the-Union-schedule-8739312-81034147.html

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.