

Today, President Obama will deliver the State of the Union before a Joint Session of Congress, as required per the Constitution. The State of the Union is always a very grand occasion and opportunity for the three branches of government to come together and reflect on the well-being of our nation. But Americans are rightfully expecting more than a nice speech of recycled ideas this year. America is in a state of disrepair, and the President should be frank about the challenges and bold about the solutions. He should rise above election-year politics and present a thoughtful analysis of where we are, how we have gotten here, and how we can right our trajectory. Here are three points I hope to hear from the President:

The federal government is spending too much

Our economy continues to suffer. The reasons are multiple: a decade of government overspending, recklessness on Wall Street, increasing debt, an uncertain regulatory and tax environment, the shipment of manufacturing jobs overseas, financial globalization, and suppressed consumer demand have converged to create an oppressive business environment. Confidence is down among our nation's small business owners. These problems are intensified by one simple reality: Washington has spent much more money than it has.

The tax code is broken

Related to this is the need for a fairer and simpler tax code. When a variety of large corporations pay no taxes because they can hire an army of lawyers and accountants to leverage tax code loopholes, the tax burden is passed disproportionately onto small business owners and entrepreneurs. This year, I have made clear to my colleagues in the House and Senate that any plan to restore our economy must include comprehensive tax reform, making the tax code simpler and fairer for hard-working Americans.

A reasonable and measured regulatory and tax approach should also consider American businesses (particularly small businesses) as partners in achieving appropriate protections, rather than adversaries. More "Made in America" enterprises can help strengthen local economies, create jobs, and revitalize our nation.

Government cannot and should not solve all problems

As a young Eagle Scout said recently, "America depends upon the quality of her citizens." Government cannot solve all problems; a free and good society relies on the health and vibrancy of institutions of good formation in our culture. Our society is not perfect. There is deep woundedness in many aspects of our culture, and I hear from countless good Americans who have identified deficits in their communities that need solutions. However, the first question is

often, "how can the government fix this?" Institutions providing important social safety nets have become very entangled with government for funding and legitimacy.

A return to some first principles of federalism would be helpful here. Those closest to the problem should be empowered to seize the opportunity to find a solution. I recently learned of the example of a sixth-grader at Mickle Middle School, Josh Root, who understands this well. Josh took it upon himself to work directly with Lincoln Public Schools on a program to aid visually-impaired students—a small act, but a big demonstration of principle. He didn't come to Washington. He just did it. His civic engagement is a terrific example of how those closest to the problem should be empowered to solve it.

These are just three points I believe the President should emphasize to the American people tonight. Let's be clear: we are in a very deep hole. Only bold, creative, and non-political solutions will get us out of it.