

Democratic response to State of Union

by UPI

TOPEKA, Kan. -- Kansas Gov. Kathleen Sebelius Monday night delivered the Democratic response to President George Bush's State of the Union address. "Good evening. I'm Kathleen Sebelius, governor of the state of Kansas, and I'm grateful for the opportunity to speak with you tonight. I'm a Democrat, but tonight it really doesn't matter whether you think of yourself as a Democrat or a Republican or an independent or none of the above. "Instead, the fact you're tuning in this evening tells me each of you is, above all, an American first. You're mothers and fathers, grandparents and grandchildren, working people and business owners, Americans all. "And the American people, folks like you and me, are not nearly as divided as our rancorous politics might suggest. "In fact right now, tonight, as the political pundits discuss the president's speech, chances are they'll obsess over the reactions of members of Congress: "How many times was the president interrupted by applause?" Did Republicans stand?" Did the Democrats sit?" And the rest of us will roll our eyes and think, "What in the world does any of that have to do with me?" "And so I want to take a slight detour from tradition on this State of the Union night. In this time, normally reserved for a partisan response, I hope to offer something more -- an American response. A national call to action on behalf of the struggling families in the heartland and across this great country. A wakeup call to Washington, on behalf of a new American majority, that time is running out on our opportunities to meet our challenges and solve our problems."Our struggling economy requires urgent and immediate action, and then sustained attention. Families can't pay their bills, they're losing their jobs, and now are threatened with losing their homes. "We heard last week and again tonight that Congress and the president are acting quickly on a temporary, targeted stimulus package. That's encouraging, but you and I know that a temporary fix is only the first step toward meeting our challenges and solving our problems. "There's a chance, Mr. President, in the next 357 days to get real results and give the American people renewed optimism that their challenges are the top priority. "Working together, working hard, committing to results, we can get the job done. "In fact, over the last year, the Democratic majority in Congress has begun to move us in the right direction with bipartisan action to strengthen our national security, raise the minimum wage and reduce the costs of college oans. These are encouraging first steps, but there's still more to be done. "And so we ask you, Mr. President: Will you join us? Let's get to work."We know that we're stronger as a nation when our people have access to the highest quality, most affordable health care; when our businesses can compete in the global marketplace without the burden of rising health care costs here at home. "We know that caring for our children so they have a healthy and better start in life is what grownups do. Governors in both parties and a large majority of the Congress are ready right now to provide health care to 10 million American children as a first step in overhauling our health care system. "Join us, Mr. President. Sign the bill and let's get to work. "Sitting with the first lady tonight was Steve Hewitt, the city manager of Greensburg, Kansas. "Many of you remember Greensburg, our town nearly destroyed by a tornado last year. Thanks to Steve's efforts, and hundreds of others in our state and across the country, Greensburg will recover. Folks rolled up their sleeves and got to work, and local, state and federal governments assisted in the effort. But more than just recover, the Kansans who live in Greensburg are building green, rebuilding a better community for their children and grandchildren; making shared sacrifices and investments for the next generation. "Greensburg is not alone. You and I stand ready, ready to protect our environment for future generations and stay economically competitive. Mayors have committed their cities to going green; governors have joined together, leading efforts for energy security and independence; and the majority in Congress is ready to tackle the challenge of reducing global warming and creating a new energy future for America. "So we ask you, Mr. President, will you join us? It's time to get to work. "Here in the heartland, we honor and respect military service. We appreciate the enormous sacrifices made by soldiers and their families. "As governor of Kansas, I'm the commander in chief of our National Guard. Over the past five years, I've seen thousands of soldiers deployed from Kansas. I've visited our troops in Iraq, attended funerals and comforted families, and seen the impact at home of the war being waged. "We stand ready in the heartland and across this country to join forces with peace-loving nations across the globe and to fight the war against terrorists wherever they may strike. But our capable and dedicated soldiers can't solve the political disputes where they are and can't focus on the real enemies elsewhere. "The new Democratic majority of Congress and the vast majority of Americans are ready -- ready to chart a new course. If more Republicans in Congress

stand with us this year, we won't have to wait for a new president to restore America's role in the world and fight a more effective war on terror. "The last five years have cost us dearly in lives lost, in thousands of wounded warriors whose futures may never be the same, in challenges not met here at home because our resources were committed elsewhere. America's foreign policy has left us with fewer allies and more enemies. "Join us, Mr. President, and working together with Congress to make tough, smart decisions, we will regain our standing in the world and protect our people and our interests. "I know government can work to benefit the people we serve, because I see it every day, not only here in Kansas, but in states across the country. I know government can work, Mr. President, because like you, I grew up in a family committed to public service. My father and my father-in-law both served in Congress -- one a Republican and one a Democrat. They had far more in common than the issues that divided them: a love for their country that led them from military service to public service; a lifetime of working for the common good, making sacrifices so their children and grandchildren could have a better future. They are called "the greatest generation." "But I believe, like parents across America, that our greatest generations are still to come; that we must chart a new course at home and abroad to give our future "greatest generations" all the opportunities our parents gave us. "These are uncertain times, but with strength and determination, we can meet the challenges together. If Washington can work quickly together on a short-term fix for families caught in the financial squeeze, then we can work together to transform America. In these difficult times, the American people aren't afraid to face difficult choices, but we have no more patience for divisive politics. "Tonight's address begins the final year of this presidency, with new leaders on the horizon and uncertainty throughout our land. Conditions we face, at home and abroad, are results of choices made and challenges unmet. In spite of the attempts to convince us that we are divided as a people, a new American majority has come together. We are tired of leaders who, rather than asking what we can do for our country, ask nothing of us at all. We are Americans sharing a belief in something greater than ourselves, a nation coming together to meet challenges and find solutions, to share sacrifices and share prosperity, and focus once again not only on the individual good but on the common good. "On behalf of the new American majority -- the majority of elected officials at the national, state and local level, and the majority of Americans -- we ask you, Mr. President, to join us. We're ready to work together, to be the America we have been and can be once again. Thank you for listening. God bless and sleep well. And in the morning, let's get to work.

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