

Obama's proposal, goals don't line up

by *The Detroit News*

Credit President Barack Obama for heeding calls to strike a more hopeful tone in his address to Congress and the nation Tuesday night. Americans needed a break from the relentless predictions of economic doom and to instead hear that things will indeed get better.

But the programs, policies and promises laid out in his speech are a mess of contradictions that the president will have to reconcile if he hopes to keep the public's confidence.

An overriding theme of the address was fiscal responsibility. Obama repeated his promise to halve the federal deficit, now well in excess of \$1 trillion, by the end of his first term. Even if he does that, it will merely take the deficit back to where it was before the stimulus spending began late last year. Overspending revenues by a half-trillion a year doesn't shout fiscal discipline.

He said he would reach his goal by purging wasteful spending from government — a promise often made in Washington, but never delivered — and by ending the war in Iraq and raising taxes on the wealthiest Americans.

But Obama also plans to escalate operations in Afghanistan in pursuit of Osama bin Laden and the al-Qaida terrorists. That will eat up much of the money saved by an Iraq withdrawal.

And pledging a tax hike on those Americans who invest the most private money in the economy would seem to work against the president's stated goal of creating jobs by stimulating private investment.

For a guy who claimed not to believe in bigger government, Obama promised to make it much bigger with an array of new initiatives from energy to education. Financing those programs will require higher taxes on a far broader swath of Americans than the 2 percent of wealthiest citizens he said he would limit the tax punishment to.

While the president said his priority is putting Americans back to work, he also committed to a cap-and-trade carbon plan that would kill jobs, particularly in the manufacturing sector, and limit the country's ability to power industrial growth.

Presumably, the president will have more details when he releases his budget Thursday to back up his vow to fix the broken financial system. Tuesday night, he limited himself to pledging more regulations and oversight,

with no details about how he will break the credit freeze. The lack of a detailed financial plan from the administration is eroding investor faith in its ability to handle the job and is contributing to the ongoing stock market decline.

Finally, Obama promised a "retooled and re-imagined" American auto industry. But he has entrusted that retooling and re-imagining to a Washington panel that doesn't include a single car guy, and precious few members who even drive American vehicles.

The president ought to simplify. All Americans want him to do right now is get the economy moving. Policies that work at cross-purposes won't accomplish that goal.

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