

White House promises 'non-traditional' State of the Union

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Washington: The White House is promising President Barack Obama will deliver a "non-traditional" State of the Union address next month, eschewing the standard litany of policy proposals for a broader discussion on the challenges facing the country.

The format reflects the legislative reality for Obama's final year in office. Much of what the White House and the Republican-led Congress could realistically achieve in an election year is already underway, including discussions on criminal justice reform, and the ticking clock on Obama's presidency leaves little time to jumpstart major new initiatives.

The president is scheduled to deliver his last State of the Union on Jan. 12, less than three weeks before Americans begin voting in the presidential primaries.

In a briefing for reporters Thursday, White House officials said Obama's agenda for his last year in office includes securing congressional approval of the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade pact, additional steps to address climate change, and bolstering gun control measures. The latter steps will be taken through executive action, though officials wouldn't say whether the measures would be ready in time for Obama's address to Congress.

Officials also did not commit to a timeline for sending lawmakers a long-delayed plan for closing the Guantanamo Bay detention center.

Rather than fade into the lame duck phase of his presidency, the White House said Obama is eager to use 2016 to take steps that drive the debate in the 2016 race. He also expects to be active on the campaign trail, stumping for the Democratic presidential nominee and other party candidates, the White House said.

An active campaign role for Obama would be a marked shift from the 2014 midterm elections, when he was marginalized by his party.

The White House said it's still possible the president could endorse in the Democratic primary, which is a two-way contest between front-runner Hillary Clinton and Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, her closest challenger.

- AP