What does Obama face in his first 7 days?

From the beginning of his candidacy, President Barack Obama has been declaring he would begin implementing changes on “day one” of his term in office. It was campaign promises about the Iraq War, the economy and education that helped win him the election, but have left him with a hefty to-do list. Now into his first week, there are a few things that have become clear priorities for the new administration.

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Senior Reporters

THE IRAQ WAR:

It’s been more than five years since President Bush delivered his infamous “Mission Accomplished” speech but the war still continues. Recent news out of Iraq has proven more optimistic, especially following the more than 20,000 troop surge that officials say has lead to a reduced number of violent attacks. As America has made progress in Iraq, the voices in the Senate chamber calling for withdrawal have lessened and concerns over the economy have taken their place.

Yet, one of Obama’s biggest promises to voters was to bring an end to the Iraq War, and millions are paying close attention to his first few days in office. In July 2008 Obama said, “I intend to end this war. My first day in office, I will bring the Joint Chiefs of Staff in, and I will give them a new mission, and that is to end this war responsibly and deliberately but decisively.” Since then he has made several statements indicating that withdrawal will take some time.

According to a Washington Post article Obama will meet with members of the National Security Council today to reassess Iraq and Afghanistan.

THE ECONOMY:

The woes of the economy are hard to miss. The Dow Jones Industrial Average has sunk to lows not seen in years. The Federal Reserve cut the interest rate to near zero percent and $24,500 jobs were lost in December. Even before Obama was sworn into office on Tuesday, American’s looked to him for solutions to the current economic predicament.

Given the grave predictions of many economists, America’s financial situation will be Obama’s first and most important challenge in office.

So far, Obama has worked with members of Congress to build an $825 billion fiscal recovery package that was presented by House Democrats on Jan. 15. The plan involves $550 billion in government spending and $275 billion in tax cuts. Some of the government expenditures include $87 billion for a temporary increase in aid to states for Medicaid costs; $79 billion in aid to local school districts and public colleges to prevent cutbacks; $90 billion in infrastructure spending; and $54 billion to encourage energy production from renewable sources.

The House is expected to vote on this package in the next two weeks.

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Students from the Muslim American Youth Academy walk past a classroom with younger students displaying their artwork honoring Martin Luther King Jr., in Dearborn, Mich., Thursday, January 15, 2009. The pre-school to K-8 students are part of the more than 400,000 Muslims that live in the Detroit area, the largest concentration of Muslims in the United States.

THE BUDGET:

The current ceasefire agreement between Gaza and Israel is a delicate state that can be ended at any moment by any incitement of violence from either side. The precious land that the conflict started over now represents the political, religious and cultural differences that have separated the Israeli’s and Palestinians for some time. The June 2008 ceasefire only lasted several months when Israeli forces began to launch ground and air attacks again in November.

So far Obama has been mum on details about what he will do about the current issues in the Middle East. His staff has continually said that there is “only one president at a time.” But now that Obama has sworn into office, the world is watching to see what role the United States will play in this sensitive and historic conflict.

GUANTANAMO BAY:

Obama has said that he will issue and executive order for the closing of Guantanamo Bay Detention Center which has received ongoing criticism for using violent or torturous methods to interrogate prisoners. One of the obstacles with closing the facility is where to send the 250 military prisoners who are currently living there. If Obama closes the prison, many detainees are expected to be shipped to other high security prisons and some may be released completely.

A Guantanamo Bay protest was staged in Washington, D.C. the day before the inauguration.