



Dear Ian,

A belated thank you for including me in last week's discussion with the Obama Transition Team on early childhood education. On behalf of the Committee for Economic Development, we deeply appreciate your interest in early childhood education and stand ready to provide whatever assistance we can. In that vein, I want to offer some follow-up suggestions. Feel free to share them with whomever you please.

You and your colleagues received many important and valuable suggestions, most of which relate to the ongoing operations or administration of existing federal, state, and local programs. These ideas will be extremely important for the next Secretary of Health and Human Services and for the HHS senior team.

My approach here, as I think was evident from my comments last week, is somewhat different and reflects my experience in an earlier White House.

A president has an opportunity to effect change in only three or four areas of domestic policy. President Obama will have to address an economic crisis which he inherited. He will be judged on how he manages that situation, but obviously the economic crisis was not a priority when he began his campaign or even when he secured the nomination. He does have an opportunity to identify and place his own stamp on three critical domestic policy areas: early education, health care reform, and the environment.

Most modern American presidents starting with FDR can be categorized as either conviction presidents (FDR, Truman, LBJ, Nixon, and Reagan) or managerial presidents (Ike, JFK, Ford, Carter, George H.W. Bush, Clinton, and George W. Bush). One approach is not necessarily better than the other (for example, Ike was a successful managerial president), but conviction presidents tend to have a longer-lasting impact on the country. LBJ was an example of a conviction leader who had a positive impact on our domestic agenda but a negative effect because of Vietnam.

My hope is that President Obama will set a course to become a conviction president. My recommendation is that he approach this opportunity with three "man on the moon" initiatives:

- Early education -- make universal, quality early education a major infrastructure and investment priority for the country.
- Health care reform -- restructure the current system and announce a national goal of finding a cure for Alzheimer's disease by 2019. (This goal needs further elaboration and involves establishing intergenerational tradeoffs that also relate to Social Security reform and entitlement reform. It can also be tied to the early education goal. I'd be pleased to elaborate later.)
- The environment -- achieve energy independence from fossil fuels by 2019.



These are obviously ambitious goals, but our country at this time needs goals in which it can believe. I clearly remember John F. Kennedy's announcement to put a man on the moon within ten years. It was galvanizing, and we actually did it.

America currently suffers from a short-term fixation which affects everything from Wall Street and education to diabetes and roads and bridges. Part of presidential leadership is to help change the culture by having very clear, tangible goal-oriented investments that involve a longer-term perspective. Set those goals and then work back from those goals to map out the internal department, agency, and budgeting details. (The alternative is to start with the details as discussed last week and try to shape a message. In my view, that approach would mean a missed opportunity and a lot of wasted, unfocused time.)

Finally, here is another way to come at the opportunity. You can summarize Ronald Reagan's presidency in six words: lower taxes, less government, stronger defense. The issue is not whether one agrees or disagrees; the point is that Reagan was a conviction leader who came into office with a limited agenda and delivered. Now, take 10 or 20 words each and try to summarize George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush. It is hard to do. So, start with how you want Barack Obama to be characterized (six words) and then develop a set of conviction goals that will define his presidency, motivate the American people, and have a lasting impact.

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