

Obama's Strategy: A Debate

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A Liberal Shock Doctrine: Our economy is collapsing. There's a Democratic majority in the House and possibly a supermajority in the Senate. In the last election, both parties campaigned on change and the candidate accused of socialism won, by a solid majority. There will never be another time like now.

Obama must take swift action to pass radical change. Fill the cabinet with vocal progressives, push a series of strong progressive bills thru Congress, take full advantage of the first hundred days. Anything else will squander the promise of this election.

The Audacity of Patience: If Obama tries to pass his wishlist in the first hundred days, it will blow up in his face. Not because America is a center-right country, but because it's a left-wing one. The radical conservatives knew it was unlikely they would hold on to power, so they had to do as much as they could in the time they had. Progressives don't face that deadline; it now seems possible to permanently destroy this incarnation of the Republicans Party.

What's needed is not urgent action, but the slow and careful work of building an enduring majority. That means bringing in Republicans, occupying the rhetorical (if not political) center, and passing incremental steps that lead to lasting change. But most importantly, it means being effective. We don't need partisans, we need people with experience who can get things done. Even moderate bills passed now can ensure Democratic domination for a generation, allowing plenty of opportunity to improve things in the decades to come.

Open the Overton Window: This is how it starts. First it's the campaign, then the first hundred days, then the midterms, then reelection, then more midterms, and then the next nominee's campaign (who is unlikely to be as talented or progressive as this one). There's always an excuse to put off the important changes.

If you're serious about lasting change, hiring moderates is the wrong way to go. It doesn't attract Republicans; it just sends the message Democrats aren't serious. The electorate likes success; if success comes from Democrats, then they'll like Democrats. A progressive cabinet can move the ball forward by

having their agencies implement countless small reforms while using their status as public figures to build support for bigger ones. All of which will further cement the Democrats' reputation as the party of progress. The country isn't left-wing because it likes people with blue logos and D's next to their names; it's left-wing because it wants shared prosperity and security. If Democrats don't deliver, they'll turn to someone else.

Spin Up the Noise Machine: It's not the Cabinet's job to push new policy ideas. They can't — their job is to push the President's agenda and promote official doctrine. Building support for new ideas is the job of the ideological infrastructure that Democrats have been building over the past eight years: CAP, CAF, TAP, and the rest. Sure, during the Bush Administration they had to spend all their time fighting bad ideas, but with a Democratic president they can start rallying support for good ones.

And a President who leads as a consensus figure will be much more effective at passing them. America is sick of fierce partisanship; it longs for a government it can believe in again. A Cabinet of moderates and conservatives will be much more convincing salespeople for progressive proposals than a group of fire-breathing liberals.

An American Renewal: Do you seriously believe that? Sure, we can all agree this administration has been a disaster, but once Bush and his cronies recede into the distance, this coalition of moderates and conservatives will fall apart. The factions will start sniping at each other in the press, use their control over staff to advance their own agendas, and just generally try to sabotage the President's proposals — and with it, his appearance of effectiveness.

This country has been very badly misrun for almost a decade. Shills for industry pervade the regulators, conservative loyalists have burrowed deep into every agency, and public discussion has been pulled so far right that most people don't even remember what a left-wing idea looks like. (As opposed to the purely *factual* questions the left has been consistently correct about.) What's needed is a process of serious American renewal. A bunch of DC think-tanks pushing policy papers isn't going to do it; the problems are serious enough that leadership has to come from the top.

Blow-Up: Which brings me back to where I started. You can't just spin this country around in an instant; it will take years of hard work. Sure, a coalition

of moderates may end up falling apart, but a group of fervent partisans will never get off the ground. Even with the crisis, America just isn't ready for a complete policy reversal. Our best hope is to take them there gradually — passing increasingly ambitious policy, appointing increasingly progressive officials, electing increasingly progressive candidates. There are no quick fixes; that's what we'll have to do if you really want to win.