

Washington Update – December 9, 2008

Most of us look at the coming year with some concerns. Even if our personal lives and finances are secure, we have friends who face situations which seemed unlikely just months ago. And we are being forced to address ways to control costs and match them with our projected revenues.

Now magnify that situation by a magnitude of a hundred and you begin to feel the pressures on Barack Obama. Nothing seems easy. Terrorism in India reminds him that we cannot simply focus on the domestic economy. Some of America's largest companies say they require massive loans – which may or may not really rescue those companies and protect the jobs of hundreds of thousands of workers. Those who played key parts in a two-year campaign, which culminated in his election just over a month ago, are demanding action on their agenda items – virtually all of which represent new spending initiatives. He is staffing up his organization, but knows that it will take at least six months to get the team assembled, and even then there is a learning curve for those picked.

He has a cacophony of voices, Members of Congress and governors and mayors and more, who are integral players in a media frenzy, where a local community pulling the plug on a Christmas lights display becomes national headline news.

During these troubled times, the President-elect seems to be reacting in a methodical and disciplined way. He is meeting with governors and former opponents and announcing nominations that are consistent in competence. And his Transition Team is embracing some of the same innovative communications channels that allowed his campaign to raise an astonishing and record-breaking amount of contributions. And he is repeating his vision of not just creating jobs, but creating jobs that will help the U.S. economy long-term through diversification of our energy supply and with projects that are "green," reducing both obvious and more hidden costs of pollution.

These steps make it justified and appropriate to react as a unified nation to the challenges we face in the months ahead. Philosophical differences are important assets to debates over alternative remedies, and we can all participate by sharing ideas and also listening to the ideas of others with open minds.

It is also time for being open to innovation. The RV industry recently held its national trade show in Louisville and there was certainly a marked decline in the level of enthusiasm about sales. But the show also included a remarkable array of lighter-weight and lower-cost units that can still offer the ingredients of the RV lifestyle. And these redesigned units will appeal to those who still love the fun of the outdoors but who are not lulled into complacency by the low gas prices of December 2008.

The list of companies that have responded successfully to changes in technology and costs is long. IBM lost its typewriter market as well as most of its mainframe

computer business, but is now the global leader in information-technology services. The long-distance communications business has changed dramatically, but economic success continues as companies shift from carrying signals to providing services. The Las Vegas gaming industry has withstood competition from Indian gambling and more. And Wal*Mart is faring well under a new slogan: "Spend less. Live better."

If the recreation community shows ingenuity and insight into the American character over the next year, we can put smiles back on our faces – and the faces of all Americans. And that will win us friends and allies in the new Administration and the Congress and among politicians across the land.

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