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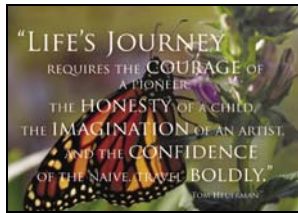
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BE A FIGHTER MR. PRESIDENT

My fellow Americans, we can't continue in this mode of "Dumb as we wanna be." Thomas Friedman, New York Times

Below is a letter I wrote to White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel on July 27, 2009.

July 27, 2009

Dear Mr. Emanuel:

You are a busy man. I will be brief and to the point. What in the hell are you people doing?

President Obama was elected to transform this country. He was provided a clear majority in the House and the Senate.

Instead of using that power to effect change, you are trying to win over recalcitrant Republicans who slowly erode your power and credibility. They are your enemies vowing to bring down President Obama. Trying to appease them is a huge mistake. You are wasting this rare opportunity to use the power given to you by the American people to bring about real change.

Do not dilute the President's vision. Please, please, please stop trying to make nice with the backwoods Republicans and craft legislation around energy, economics, education, and health care that satisfies those who elected the President for that purpose; they are the enlightened in our society. At times I think the White House is more interested in meeting the needs of their enemies than of their friends. This cannot succeed.

And take charge now. The President needs to come out of the August recess with a new plan for effecting change-use your power to do good things for America or you will lose it. Results are what matter. Hold onto your vision and use your power to make it real.

Seeking consensus makes cowards of all of us. We need strong leadership. You don't always have to get buy-in on the front end as nice as it is to have. Sometimes leaders have to go first into the unknown to show the way. You can gain acceptance after the vision is enacted if what you enact works.

Changing the culture in Washington will happen slowly, if ever. Thinking you can win over those whose values are fundamentally different than yours is naïve leadership of change (talk to Jack Welch about leading change). They will feign cooperation on occasion but will always return to the core of who they are. And who Republicans are today is not good for America.

You need some ruthlessness as well as idealism to be a transformative leader.

That was last July.

This week the voters of Massachusetts betrayed the legacy of Ted Kennedy and the uninsured of America and selfishly and irrationally voted against national health-care reform by electing a Republican who vowed to be the 41st obstructionist in the Senate thus stopping national health care reform and anything else Democrats propose. After all, he said, the citizens of Massachusetts have universal insurance. Why should they help others get what they have?

If the voters of Massachusetts wanted change, why did they elect a Senator who represents those who created the mess this country is in and who vow to fight for the status-quo on every major problem facing America? The status quo in America equals decline. What short memories the voters have.

Democratic complacency allowed this tragedy to happen: they ran a weak candidate who ran a bad campaign. National Democratic leaders were slow to see the danger and responded too late to make a difference. That is the same arrogant incompetence made commonplace by George Bush and Republicans in Congress.

I cannot believe that thoughtful Americans want what

Republicans offer today, which is nothing but obstructionism. Republican need to spend their time in the wilderness and develop new ideas and new leaders before they will be ready to assume power again. Reacting against Obama's vision is not a vision and giving power to Republicans now is to repeat the Bush years.

I understand the frustration of voters. I am frustrated too as my letter to Emanuel showed. But to elect the enemy of change because promised change isn't happening fast enough for you is cognitive dissonance in action: up is down and right is wrong.

This election was a vote against real change—it was a vote to repeat a failed past, a vote for a quick fix to make people feel better for a moment. Massachusetts made real transformation for America more difficult.

Crazy is winning in America.

What to do now?

President Obama will give his State of the Union speech next week.

I've been a huge supporter of Obama. I am close to giving up on him. He cannot be a transformative leader without a streak of ruthlessness to compliment his compassion.

Instead of burying Republicanism after his election, he gave them a hand up to their recent electoral successes. That was naïve. Great leaders learn that enemies will rarely be won over; they must be defeated and neutralized.

I hope the President now understands that he cannot compromise his way to national renewal on health care, education, global warming, and financial stability—not with Republicans who are his mortal enemies.

I hope he realizes that he has nothing to lose by fighting for the middle class of America. Absent a vibrant middle class, America's decline will continue.

It would be immoral to walk away from health care reform now because Democrats fear losing elections. If they won't fight, they won't get anything on their agenda passed and they will deserve to be thrown out of office.

I hope President Obama will stand before the nation and the Congress and call upon the House of Representatives to

pass the Senate health care bill and commit to improving on that bill until all Americans have the health care that is their right.

The Senate health care bill's brand is damaged—not by its content but by Republican lies and distortions and by the Democratic deal making in the Senate. Democrats can confront the lies, clean up the process, and repair the image of the bill.

Democrats are right on the issues: financial reform to prevent future economic crashes; health care for all Americans as a moral right and economic requirement; reverse global warming for our national security and a sustainable future; and educational reform for a competitive economy. But being right is not enough.

The President and all Democrats must get out in front of the American people and connect their programs with American values. They must educate the people of our country, and they must do it over and over again on all issues.

If they fight, they will win because they are doing what is right for America. Obama needs to draw lines in the sand and make members of Congress stand up and be counted. Americans will reward him for doing so. If not, I'd rather he fight for what he believes in and lose than be passive and lose anyway.

No one respects quitters. If Democrats quit on health care, they will quit on everything else when the going gets tough. If Democrats want my respect, they have to fight for what they believe in and risk, not fear, losing. They must confront and define their enemies who only understand power.

America needs some authentic and courageous leadership that reflects our values, our deep optimism, and our capacity to change—leaderships that inspires courage in our citizens.

This is a defining moment in Obama's presidency and a defining moment for America. For if Obama fails to change the course of the many crises' that face us, the nation fails and will fall into the darkness.

