

How President Obama Now Can Govern

Written by Earl Ofari Hutchinson
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President Obama was a good and a bad prognosticator about his future in 2009. In the first two weeks after he was sworn in for his first term he told an NBC interviewer that if he didn't deliver he'd be "a one term proposition." Obama knew better than anyone else that as the first African-American president, a moderate to liberal Democrat, and a relatively inexperienced, untested Oval Office occupant, he would be on the firing line to deliver and deliver fast on his reform promises. He knew that he'd have to deliver with a hostile, unyielding GOP that would do everything it could to make his words about a one term president a reality. Despite the GOP's bad intentions for him and his worry about making headway on getting the economy moving and health care off the drawing board, he far exceeded expectations on both counts. And along the way he managed to deliver on his promise to wind down the Iraq war, track down Osama Bin Laden, patch up relations with the European allies, keep a civil dialogue with Russia, and soften relations with the Muslim world.

This was more than enough to keep his neo FDR coalition of youth, African-Americans, Latinos, labor rank and file, and middle class professional women intact to win reelection. They powered him to a smash victory in 2008. This coalition reflects the fast changing diverse, multi-ethnic reality of America that a GOP still stuck in a time warp thinking that it can win elections solely with white, male conservative, and rural votes didn't grasp. The 2012 win rendered his public musing about being a one term president a false fear. His strong democratic, diverse coalition gives him some breathing space to do what incumbents that win reelection want and hope to do, and that's to sail back into office on the crest of both voter hopes and euphoria about the prospect of further change and reform.

There's both promise and challenge here. The first go round Obama as many new presidents do promised not to do political business in the old ways, to make too drastic legislative changes, and quickly reverse the bad old policies of their predecessor. It was the fabled man on the white horse coming to the rescue. This is, of course, just that a fable. Real politics and an impatient

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public knock that storybook notion for a loop.

This happened the first time around when Obama's approval ratings see sawed up and down on the wave of impatience, obstructionism, and inflated expectations about his promise of making instant reforms. He won't make that mistake again. He has a Democratic controlled Senate that will make it much easier for him to reach across the aisle and get things done. Those things are the obvious, deficit reduction, and tax, education and energy independence reforms.

The still crucial job that the voters in 2008 believed he could do best and still want done in 2012 is to make the economy right, rein in the Wall Street greed merchants, save jobs and homes, and get the credit pipeline to businesses open. He also will continue to be the firewall against all efforts to gut Medicare, Social Security and Medicaid. His ability to accomplish these things didn't fully happen during his first for years. The modest proposals that he put forward to attack these towering problems only gave an armed to the political teeth GOP ammunition to rally millions to harangue, hector, and obstruct Obama's efforts. The GOP still has a firm lock on the House and Obama's popular vote victory over Romney was just close enough to tempt some in the GOP to try and continue to subvert Obama's agenda.

But Obama has enough latitude with his win not to have to worry about reelection to forcefully blend tact and political diplomacy with a strong willed determination to get his stalled legislation and initiatives moving. He also has the added luxury to expand his vision and agenda for the country. This should include tackling the staggeringly chronic high black unemployment rate, the widening income inequality gap, drug and criminal justice reforms, comprehensive immigration reform and pouring more resources into the nation's crumbling urban infrastructure.

2013 will mark the fiftieth anniversary of the 1963 March on Washington and the following year 2014 will mark the fiftieth year of the passage of the 1964 civil rights bill. This gives the president a golden opportunity to open a long neglected and much needed dialogue on two daunting issues that have been glaringly missing from the nation's public policy plate for decades, namely how to combat poverty and further strengthen civil rights.

Obama's reelection has effectively shaken the ghost away of his of having to look over his shoulder at every turn to appease and conciliate the avowed enemies of social and political progress and reform. His reelection won't make them totally go away. But he's firmly in the command seat now and can now fully govern the way he vowed to millions he would.

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