

November 4, 2012

Dear Family and Friends,

Like most politically-aware people I know, I'm profoundly anxious about Tuesday's election.

Living in the reddest of red states, there's essentially nothing I can do to alter the outcome, leaving me in the worst of all worlds: thoroughly worked up about something over which I have no control. Because I like to think of myself as a "Better to light a single candle than curse the darkness" person, though, I thought I'd record some thoughts in writing. I have no illusion they'll make any difference, but part of me hopes that if I put something out into the universe, good things will happen. At a minimum, I hope the process will calm me down a bit.

I grew up in Rockefeller Republican kind of household. Combine those roots with a deep-seated aversion to change and for the longest time I've found myself in a horrible political no-man's land: I loathe the Republicans because I profoundly disagree with so many of their positions and policies; and I hold the Democrats in contempt because of their political ineptness.

Perhaps there's a bit of a "scorned lover" backlash in my reaction to the Republicans; i.e. I feel betrayed, so am disproportionately disgusted with them. But I know I share with many others a feeling that, while my views haven't changed much, the GOP has sure shifted well away from me. Part of me understands this shift as both the result and unintended consequence of a clear-eyed yet stunningly cynical strategy to win elections. Most of me, though, cannot begin to fathom the fundamentally anti-science, ideology-trumps-reality, internally-inconsistent and wildly hypocritical approach the Republicans bring to most issues, putting them firmly on the wrong side of history at almost every single turn. As a result, they lost me long ago.

Yet I can't bring myself to embrace the Democrats either, for it seems that, at every opportunity, they prove themselves profoundly inept at getting their points across. In his career, Obama has been blessed by that greatest of all political gifts: a series of weak opponents. Yet neither he nor his party seems capable of messaging their way out of a paper bag. Ceding the messaging-cum-politicking field to the Republicans, this has too often translated into an inability to effectively lead. Their fallback is to rely on the American people to have the common sense to understand the policy differences between the parties, but to grossly understate the case, that approach has its limits. As a result, the GOP has a decent chance of controlling the government come January, which will primarily be the result of the Dems not making the effort, or perhaps not having the skills, to explain their policies and actions clearly and effectively. That's inexcusable.

Put much more simply, having rejected the Republicans, I'm ready to be wooed. Unfortunately, the Democrats don't seem to have the voice or skills to do it.

Here's the clearest example I can offer. To me, the election would have long ago been settled in Obama's favor had he and his party been consistently able to clearly articulate a few basic points.

1. "I inherited an extraordinary economic mess, one that took the GOP eight years to create. It took my administration four years to stabilize the situation, and thanks to what we've done, regardless of what happens on Election Day, the economy is poised for a long period of growth. A pretty heady accomplishment for just four years.
2. "That noted, as a nation we stand at risk of falling back into recession. Why? Because Governor Romney and his team are proposing a return to the same basic policies that not only got us into this mess, but have failed England over the last couple of years as well.

"It gets worse, for Governor Romney is actually proposing a more extreme version of the Bush policies that so messed things up. Governor Romney may not say so directly

– he doesn't say anything directly – but look at the platform of his party, the policies of his Vice-Presidential choice, and the statements of the people who are advising him. Everything they propose is something we've already tried and already been burned by. If you live in a fact-based world, there's no reason to think it will work this time.

3. "The same thing is true with foreign policy. The Bush years were a disaster, and it's taken us four years to begin to fix the damage. Many of the same people who got us into the Bush messes now have key roles in Governor Romney's team, and the policies they, Governor Romney, Congressman Ryan, and the Republican platform advocate won't work again. Just as they didn't work before.
4. "Completing the trifecta, the same thing is true with most of the most pressing non-economic policies you can think of. Women's issues? Health care? Climate change and the environment? Education? In all these cases and more, Governor Romney's ideas are simply recycled, more extreme versions of what failed us under President Bush. Fool us once; shame on you. Fool us twice; shame on me.
5. "Then ask yourself this: What does Governor Romney stand for? You don't know. I don't know. None of us know. Is he an extreme conservative or a Massachusetts moderate? We don't know. Is he for or against abortion, gun control, action on climate change, or you name it? The answer is both "yes" and "no," depending on the time and audience. Heck, he won't even be clear about his personal finances.

"Why does this matter? Because we know all-too-clearly what the Republicans in Congress want – a radically conservative approach to all issues, something not only out of touch with most Americans but out of touch with the reality of today's world. Will Governor Romney stand up to these folks, or will he enable their worst tendencies? We simply don't know.

"And it gets worse. These guys are so ideologically driven, so out of touch with the reality of the world, that they put politics ahead of country. Two years ago, the Republican leader of the US Senate said his main goal was not to help the country address its challenges, but to see me fail as a President. If that's how they view the world, what makes you think that Senator McConnell, or his party, or Governor Romney, care for anything except their own narrow political agenda? Ditto Governor Romney's 47 percent comment. What they want may help fire up their base, but it certainly isn't good for the country.

6. "What do I want? For four years, I've been driven by two simple goals: to help America succeed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and for America to be a place in which everyone has a fair shot at participating in that success. Not a guarantee of success – that part's up to you. But a fair shot at success. This means a tax code in which people pay not too much, but do pay their fair share. A healthcare system in which people don't have to worry about being excluded, or having medical bills crush them. An education system which nurtures talent and addresses shortcomings, for students and teachers alike. And an economy and foreign policy which recognize that, in this rapidly-changing world, the United States is still the essential nation, a nation with a singular responsibility to offer hope to the world, and opportunity to its workers and entrepreneurs.

"These are the principles that have guided all of my actions as President. Some have succeeded; some have not. But in every case I've stuck by these principles, and in every case I've learned. If you re-elect me, I'll take combine that learning with the foundation for success we've laid during these past four difficult years, and help America ready itself to continue to its economic and global leadership for the rest of the century, and long thereafter.

Sure, some of this is platitudes. But it's all so obvious. Yet why is such a simple, straight-forward argument it seemingly beyond the ability of Obama or his party to make? This drives me crazy, and leaves me in my awful political no-man's land: I passionately want to believe in a something larger than me, but instead feel stuck between a party whose policies I loathe and one which rarely fails to disappoint.

Moving to a more positive, if entirely fanciful, subject, here's what I would love to hear Governor Romney say on Tuesday night.

"My fellow Republicans, my fellow Americans.

"A few minutes ago, I called President Obama to congratulate him on his re-election, and offer him my best wishes for success. We may have different philosophies, both we both love our country deeply, and we both want America to thrive.

"Losing hurts – there's no sugarcoating that. To the best of our abilities, my team and I did all we could to produce a different outcome tonight, but ultimately we failed. And while we can take solace in knowing we made our best effort, ultimately the American people made their choice, and I respect that.

"There are so many people to thank that, had I an entire evening, I couldn't begin to do them all justice. In the days and weeks ahead, I will reach out to each of you individually to thank you for all you've done for, and meant to, me and this campaign. But in the few minutes I have tonight, I only have time to offer my deepest and truest thanks to those people in this world who mean the most to me, and without whose love and support I would not be here tonight: my wife Ann, my five sons, their wives, and my grandchildren. I love you all so much, and I can never thank you enough for who you are and what you mean to me.

"The nature of politics is that losing candidates are soon forgotten. Recognizing that the national spotlight may never again shine as brightly on me as it is right now, as I take my leave from the national stage, I'd like to offer my nation and party three lessons I've learned since I first began running for President six years ago.

"First, the amount of money involved in politics is both insane and exceptionally harmful to our country. Between the two campaigns and the many independent groups, perhaps three billion dollars were spent in this election. And that's just for the Presidency. What did we get for that? An onslaught of attacks and negativity that not only did little to advance the nation, but will likely leave it even harder to govern.

"My fellow Americans, we just spent billions to make essentially no difference in our nation's governance, for the Presidency and Senate will remain in Democratic hands, while the House will be controlled by Republicans. What a waste. Each side could still have effectively trashed each other for half as much money, and how much better it would have been to spend the other half on something that would truly make a difference, like hiring thousands of new, well-paid teachers.

"Putting my businessman's hat on, our current system of political campaigns is a vast waste of resources, one which doesn't work and one we simply cannot afford economically or politically. Going forward, I hope you will join me in helping figure out a better alternative.

"Second, because I lost, my party is about to enter a period of fratricide. During the coming weeks and months and years, blood feuds will erupt over whether I lost because I wasn't conservative enough, or too conservative, or what have you.

"Fight all you want, but here's the truth. In order to win the Republican nomination, I had to position myself as deeply conservative. No regrets for doing that, for if I hadn't, I wouldn't be standing

here tonight.

“But the reason I stand defeated tonight is because America simply isn’t a deeply conservative country. Pockets of it are, but not the entire nation. The only reason I came close to winning was because, in the last month, I began to portray myself as more moderate. It almost worked, but the gap between where I had to be to win the nomination and where I had to be to win the Presidency was just too great to close. And close doesn’t count in politics.

“So, my fellow Republicans, as you examine what went wrong this year, I urge you to start by taking a deep look at yourselves. There is a vast chasm between where we are as a party and where we need to be in order to win national elections. Going forward, we need to ask ourselves whether it’s more important to win or to be ideologically pure. Standing here in defeat, I cast my lot with winning.

“Finally, in my conversation with President Obama, I not only offered my congratulations, but told him I would do all I could to help him bring the country together. That is a big task, but for the good of our nation, nothing is more important.

“Two years ago, Senator McConnell said that his highest priority was to see President Obama fail. Politically, that made perfect sense. However, it’s also a statement which should give all Americans pause, for it offers a profound, and profoundly disturbing, insight into the state of our politics.

“As is the case today, two years ago America faced extraordinary challenges both domestically and abroad. Yet in that period of great challenge, our nation’s highest-ranking Republican felt it was not just completely acceptable to put politics ahead of the nation’s welfare, but also more important. Yes, Senator McConnell had real and significant philosophical differences with the President. So do I, and so does my party. And the reality is that so, too, do a majority of Americans.

“But what Senator McConnell’s statement implied was that it was far more important to focus on those differences than work to solve America’s problems. That’s so wrong for so many reasons, not least of which is this: For America to succeed, we all have to work together. Had I won tonight, the only way I could have hoped to succeed as your President was with the support of the Democrats in Congress. And had they fought me, I would have called them out on it, for it would have meant they were putting politics ahead of nation. That would not be acceptable to me as President, and it is not acceptable to me as a private citizen.

“To that end, I told President Obama that, to the extent I am able, I will help him take the steps America needs to take to get its economy growing, its fiscal house in order, and its political mess cleaned up. The challenges are too great, and the time too short, to continue to engage in the kind of naked partisanship, profound toxicity, and destruction-for-destruction’s sake that have marked our politics of the last several years. America is better than that, and we have to start acting in that way.

“In closing, the three points I’ve just made may sound to many of you as heresy, as a betrayal of our party and our shared beliefs. I respectfully disagree. Instead, let me share with you my inspiration.

“Arguably the greatest general in American history was the one who ended up on the losing side of the nation’s most wrenching conflict: The War Between the States. When the war’s conclusion was inevitable, Robert E. Lee faced a choice. He could have encouraged his men to scatter, form a guerrilla army, and continue to fight the Union on behalf of the values they shared. This approach never would have saved the Confederacy, but it would have satisfied the South’s true believers by causing tremendous turmoil for the Union for years, if not decades to come.

“Alternatively, General Lee could have done what he ultimately chose to do: Surrender his army and ask his troops to return home to their families, farms, and businesses, channeling their

prodigious skills and courage into re-building the country they loved.

“When he realized he had no alternative but to surrender his army, General Lee said: ‘Then there is nothing left for me to do but go and see General Grant, and I would rather die a thousand deaths.’ I felt the same way when I realized I had to call President Obama to concede defeat. But as with General Lee, I also realized that the time had come to focus no longer on destruction, but on rebuilding.

“That is where America is today. We Republicans have fought our battle and acquitted ourselves well. The other side has won, though, and it is now time to put our differences behind us and focus on helping America remain the example to the world of all the good that can be done by free men living freely, with the blessings of their Creator.

“To end where I began, I cannot thank all of you enough. To quote General Lee once again: ‘You will take with you the satisfaction that proceeds from the consciousness of duty faithfully performed; and I earnestly pray that a merciful God will extend to you His blessing and protection. With an increasing admiration of your constancy and devotion to your country, and a grateful remembrance of your kind and generous consideration of myself, I bid you an affectionate farewell.’

“Thank you, God bless you, and God bless America.”

I very much doubt I will hear this on Tuesday night, but where are we without our dreams?

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jonathan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial 'J'.