

An Open Letter to the President

Dear Mr. President:

Congratulations on a tough win. I'm sure you were worried there for awhile, what with the never-ending questions about the economy and job losses, Iraq, your military service, terrorism, oil and energy prices, tumult on the Asian peninsula, and just what should be America's role in this topsy-turvy world.

But rough and tumble as you may have thought the campaign, it's nothing compared to what's ahead for you. Allow me to explain (hey, as far as you know, I voted for you).

The campaign was filled with negativity, and moreover, retrospective. That's electoral politics, I guess, but now that it's over we need to look ahead. While you've been crisscrossing the country telling anyone who would listen that your opponent was a coward during the Vietnam War 30 years ago, the rest of us have been waging our own battle over lingering financial and job instability. Recent gains in the GDP probably owe to the boatful of Tums we've consumed trying to quell our seasickness from 45 months of uncertainty. The Silicon Valley is becoming the Silicon Gulch. Over the past three years, we've exported more high-tech manufacturing jobs than munitions. What's truly unsettling is that now, after 18 or so months of decent economic growth, these jobs haven't come back and the skilled and talented folks who held them are either still unemployed or have gone off to do other things, for instance, teaching what they know to foreign competitors who are out to eat our lunch.

That's if anyone is left to cook it. What do you know of this revamped so-called Fair Labor Standards Act? The new rules remove tens of thousands of workers from the ranks of the time card punchers, taking away their right to overtime pay. That further insults the finances of untold numbers of line operators trying to live the American Dream. As your first executive order, set aside the revised rules. (There's no conflict of interest here, Mr. President: you and I are both exempt under either policy.)

But there's even bigger fish to fry, Mr. President, and no, I don't mean deciding what to feed Mr. Putin the first time he pops in for lunch. You need furrow your brow no further than our own electronics industry, the sector perhaps most critical to our nation's security and economic welfare, er, well-being. We're running to and fro, exporting our best technology – and technologists – overseas. Over a weekend at Camp David, convene a group of leading engineers and product specialists and develop a roadmap that defines what, exactly, are our goals and strategies. What's that? You think the “marketplace” is best suited to resolve this? I ask you, was putting a man on the moon President Kennedy's problem? It was, once he considered the need to channel the nation's scientific prowess in order to counter the Soviet threat. Not your problem? With all due respect sir, make it your problem.

While we're at it, let's table the talk of protectionism and corporate “responsibility” to its workers. As my 18-month-old son has all too painfully learned, pointing a finger just leads to a poke in the eye. Let's work on a way to reward those companies that want to invest onshore.

Then there's this lead-free movement. You probably didn't know it, since you have plenty of well-paid advisors to protect you from this type of thing, but while you were off campaigning about how we need to protect the environment, a mandate was set in motion to ban lead from electronics in the European Union. The domino effect will mean a *de facto* ban here in the U.S. That's good, right? No more babies poisoned from chewing on circuit boards. That'll be worth a point or two in the polls (not to mention legions of healthy future voters). Think again.

Remember the Kyoto Protocol? Good, because we can't just opt out like we did there. Believe it or not, Europe has its own government capable of making its own rules – misguided as they may be – and enforcing them. Between now and July 2006, the 3,000 or so companies that produce electronics in the U.S. will trade more than 50 years worth of tried-and-true soldering practices for new materials whose long-term reliability has more question marks than my freshman year English papers. While I've never been aboard Air Force 1, I did see the movie and it sure looks swell. Now imagine taking that ride on a bird that has no reliability testing to ensure it will stay aloft. Harrison Ford probably felt safer, even after the terrorists jumped him.

You're probably not worried about any of that right now, Mr. President. The campaign was a drain and now that it's over you deserve a nice rest. Take the rest of the day off – heck, take the weekend! – watch some football, enjoy dinner with the Missus, and be ready first thing Monday morning. You have four years to set things right, and the clock is ticking.

Regards,

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