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October 2, 1994

TO: George S.

FROM: Bill Galston *WAG*

SUBJ: Our 9:45AM Monday meeting

At the end of August, I sat down and drafted a memo to the President that I never sent, in part because I wasn't sure how these strategic matters were being handled in the new regime. A copy is attached. Some of this has been outrun by events, and I would want to extend the analysis by taking subsequent events and public opinion surveys into account. Still, it may help kick off our discussion.

Setting aside details, the crucial point is this: If we treat our current plight as a "communications" problem, we won't get anywhere. The American people have some very deep complaints, rooted the experience of their daily lives, about the way things are going. If we don't learn how to listen and respond to them better, we'll keep on losing--and we'll deserve to lose.

DRAFT/August 31, 5PM

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: BILL GALSTON

SUBJECT: TELLING THE STORY OF YOUR PRESIDENCY

Introduction

Over the next few months, it will be important for you to tell the story of your presidency in a compelling manner. That means rising above the details and "connecting the dots" thematically. It also means building a bridge between what you have accomplished thus far and what you hope to accomplish in the remainder of your first term.

There is, however, a significant obstacle to carrying out this task, an obstacle that is a source of tremendous frustration to many of us in your administration and, we suspect, to you as well. We all believe that your record has been one of great accomplishment that is increasing opportunities for many millions of Americans: workers, students, and children, among others. But the evidence suggests that most Americans don't share this view. About two-thirds don't think we've accomplished very much; roughly the same percentage believe that our country is on the wrong track.

It is vital to understand why so many citizens feel this way. For if the story of your administration is to be told effectively, it must somehow be connected to the deepest sentiments and needs of the people. The purpose of this memorandum is to outline my understanding of the basic reasons why Americans remain dissatisfied in spite of the economic recovery and to suggest some measures that may alleviate these discontents.

Sources of public dissatisfaction

There are, I believe, three basic sources of public dissatisfaction today: government, economics, and culture.

1. **The government.** The American people are not pleased by the way governmental institutions are functioning. They perceive a failure of government to act decisively and effectively, a federal government that is overextended at the expense of states and localities, an excess of wrangling between two seemingly outdated political parties, and a proliferation of special interests that drown out the voices of average citizens.

2. **The economy.** In spite of the recovery, many Americans remain insecure and anxious about their economic prospects. They expect continuing restructuring and job loss that will affect the middle class and managers as well as manufacturing workers. They

suffer from "fear of falling"--the expectation that if they lose their jobs, their next jobs will provide lower pay and reduced benefits. They do not see a change in the twenty year-old trend toward family income stagnation. They believe that just to keep their heads above water, both men and women will have to work longer hours, leaving less time for children and family. And they have not regained confidence in a better future. Indeed, they fear that their children will not enjoy that same opportunities that they themselves did.

3. **The culture.** As you know, many Americans are pessimistic about basic trends in our society and culture. They perceive disintegration in such basic social institutions as family, neighborhood, and community. They see a cultural fragmentation into competing separate subcommunities--ethnic, racial, religious, and many others--that makes it increasingly difficult for our country to pull together and articulate shared standards of conduct based on a common moral vision. They experience important elements of the culture (especially television) as working against parental efforts to raise children with sound character and values. In general, there is a pervasive sense of loss of control that leads many to a search for renewed sources of certainty and authority, including religion.

The road ahead

Much of what you have already accomplished (and articulated) bears directly and positively on these sources of public dissatisfaction. Nonetheless, I believe there are additional steps you can take that could demonstrate your understanding of public sentiment, help solve the underlying problems that give rise to this discontent, and enhance the credibility of the public account you may offer of your administration's record of achievement and program for the future.

1. **Reform of government and the political system.** Some elements of an agenda that will help identify you with the cause of political reform include:

- o vigorously implementing the recommendations of the National Performance review. (The forthcoming September anniversary of this project would give you an excellent opportunity to underscore your personal commitment.)

- o pushing hard for passage of both lobbying and campaign finance before the end of the current congress

- o similarly, pushing hard for passage of the unfunded mandates bill before the end of this congress

- o renewing your strong public support for the line-item veto or the strongest possible version of enhanced recision authority

- o coming out swinging for congressional reform (for a start, making sure laws that apply to the executive branch and average citizens apply to Congress as well)

- o taking a hard look at ways of enhancing direct public/citizen participation in the activities of the federal government

2. Promoting economic security for workers and families.

During your presidential campaign, you spoke about making change our friend. But while the administration has certainly embraced change, we have not yet persuaded many Americans that the future benefits of economic change outweigh its current costs. The previous generation's desire for economic security was satisfied to a significant extent by strong unions, relatively stable corporations, and reliable public and private retirement programs. Today, these structures of collective security have all been weakened, and our plan for individual security based on improved education and training is not seen as a fully adequate replacement.

It may well be that the degree of security American workers enjoyed in the 1950s and 1960s can never be regained. Still, it is worth thinking about a new economic security agenda that is compatible with our commitment to market-driven economic change. The following steps would help you move toward such an agenda:

- o You have not yet gotten credit for the top-to-bottom changes you have initiated in America's system of education and job training. Events and speeches highlighting your accomplishments in this area should be a focus of activity between now and next January.

- o Without suggesting government-mandated training expenditures for the private sector, you should emphasize your belief that a better-trained workforce is in the long run smarter for business than endless "downsizing" as a strategy for productivity, profitability, and international competitiveness.

- o To create a tax code more friendly to middle-class families, you should seriously consider a revenue-neutral strategy for funding a family tax cut in the form of a children's tax credit financed by cuts in special-interest tax subsidies.

- o To address declining confidence in private and public retirement systems, you should consider both pension reforms and steps to reassure younger workers that Social Security will be there for them when they retire.

- o To address declining wages and the fear of falling, you should ask the Department of Labor to examine strategies that might provide a significant measure of wage insurance for displaced workers.

3. **Stemming cultural decline.** Your use of the bully pulpit to speak out on issues of cultural decline and renewal has produced some of the peak moments of your presidency. I believe that you should renew these efforts and pursue them systematically. This could include:

- o setting forth your vision of "e pluribus unum"--what binds us together as a national community across all the lines of our differences

- o reaching out regularly to religious leaders and faith communities

- o incorporating the principle of personal responsibility into every administration initiative to the maximum feasible extent

- o mobilizing non-profit organizations--national and community-based, religious and secular--to fight family disintegration and teen pregnancy

- o building on the crime bill to mount a broad assault on all forms of violence in our society

- o bringing national and community service back to stage center as a symbol of the new ethic of citizenship you are trying to foster (The September 12 kickoff day for AmeriCorps is a wonderful beginning, but it should be viewed as just the opening gun in a sustained effort to refocus attention on the importance of service.)

Conclusion

I recognize that this is a daunting menu of possibilities. I offer it in the belief that by promoting an agenda that focuses on the principal sources of public discontent, you can tell the story of your administration in a way that begins to close the gap between your objective record of accomplishment and the public's perception that progress has been disappointingly minimal.