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Our Last Best Hope

In my 2007 book, *It's Getting Ugly Out There: The Frauds, Bunglers, Liars, and Losers Who Are Hurting America*, I went way out on a limb and wondered whether there might actually be a positive, if unintended, consequence of the otherwise miserable legacy of President George W. Bush's eight years in office. I speculated that it might come in the form of a sudden nationwide awakening near the end of the Bush era, leading to a 2008 stampede to polling places as the citizenry desperately fought to save its democratic system—a runaway train heading off a cliff into oblivion.

I had been screaming, in my way, about “broken government” for a couple of years in hundreds of “Cafferty File” segments on CNN's *The Situation Room*. But as the economic crisis seizing America became *the* story that drove the election, voters were desperately fighting to save not only their political system but also their homes, their jobs, their 401(k)s, their bank savings, and, no doubt, their sanity. And people were paying attention: my “Cafferty File” blog often got three million hits a day and as many as ten thousand e-mail replies flooding in after one of my questions of the hour.

I'm *still* screaming about what's gone wrong, and I've written it all down in *Now or Never: Getting Down to the Business of Saving Our American Dream*. The book captures our country at a crossroads unlike any we've ever faced in living memory—a momentous period of crisis, threat, challenge, choice, and change as we emerge, *finally*, into the Barack Obama era. The book also fixes its unflinching, take-no-prisoners sights on what now needs to go right in the first term of President Obama if we hope to survive as the nation we know ourselves to be before it really is too late. As *Now or Never* makes urgently clear, this is a time for change we not only need, as Obama's campaign mantra put it, but for change we will believe when we see it.

So many of the things that I suggested were wrong in my first book, *It's Getting Ugly Out There*, have proved to be quite wrong. The nation's confidence in its leaders took a huge hit during President George W. Bush's two terms in office. Warning signs that we saw a couple of years ago weren't taken seriously. With, arguably, the exception of the sharp decreases in sectarian violence and U.S. troop casualties in Iraq, we're in a lot worse shape now than we were two years ago—for a lot of the reasons that I suggested in the first book. The incompetence, dishonesty, and corruption of Washington under President Bush had come together to create the dark economic storm now raging over the Obama administration as it faces the enormous challenge of turning America around.

This book examines the issues, turning points, and personalities that shaped 2008's historic White House race and Obama's victory—notably the astonishing two-year economic slide toward the unprecedented \$700 billion bailout plan signed by Bush a month before Election Day; the treacherous new phases of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; and the rival characters and strategies of the Obama-Biden and McCain-Palin tickets that made the '08 campaign such an extraordinary moment in our history.

The stakes could hardly have been higher. Domestically, our sinking economy is making the new president's search for solutions—from war-zone strategies to energy and health-care reform; from funding Medicare and Social Security to securing our borders—as daunting as any since Franklin Roosevelt was elected in 1932, during the Great Depression. Globally, the new commander in chief faces escalating tensions in our dealings with Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Russia, China, North Korea, Iran, the Middle East, and India, particularly since the horrific terror attacks in Mumbai in November 2008.

Obama has eight years of George Bush to thank for the immensity of his task—and for inciting an angry American electorate to action. *Now or Never* examines the corrosive legacies of the Bush reign; they include its fiscal recklessness, its illegal surveillance and sanctioning of torture, and a sweeping agenda of secrecy, deception, and expanding executive power. Bush is gone, but damaging precedents have been set. As I wrote in *It's Getting Ugly*, my hunch was that Bush's two-term record would prove to be “so misguided, ineffective, and reckless while his political base was so egregious and arrogant in its corrupt abuse of power that Bush & Co. unwittingly woke up the American people and proved to them that their country was indeed broken and in urgent need of repair before it got too late to undo the harm they had done.”

If I was clearly on to something, I underestimated how bad things would get.

This was a year before the Treasury Department and the Federal Reserve started to commit hundreds of billions of taxpayer dollars to shore up, bail out, and seize control of giant financial and insurance institutions better known for boundless greed than for bended-knee groveling. It was months before Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson Jr. scratched out what read in parts like a three-page ransom note (“Decisions by the Secretary . . . may not be reviewed by any court of law or any administrative agency”) laying out terms of the initial \$700 billion

Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP) to buy back worthless mortgage-backed securities from failing banks as a way to keep credit flowing. The economy was strangling itself, he said; only a massive infusion of credit between banks, and from banks to businesses, consumers, car loan seekers, home buyers, and so on, would keep it breathing.

Phrases in the air evoked the Great Depression—“a race against time,” “grave threats,” “bank runs,” “bread lines,” “Armageddon,” “once-in-a-century financial crisis”—that from former Federal Reserve chairman Alan Greenspan. Former General Electric chairman Jack Welch predicted “one hell of a downturn”; Warren Buffett called the markets an “economic Pearl Harbor.” Was this crisis about Wall Street extortion or Main Street extinction? Thirty-five senators and 435 congressmen were up for reelection. No one wanted to vote for a risky rescue bet that could go bad and turn 2008’s electoral battlegrounds into 2009’s dustbowl. This was Congress, not a casino, yet its members were under intense pressure to move fast and approve a complex, high-stakes, instant wager that would cost more than all the mountains of chips Bush had blown on his five-year war of choice in Iraq. Lawmakers worried about signing over a blank check to Treasury without any clear plan to protect taxpayers and homeowners. They required some strict oversight. Writing in the *New Yorker*, John Cassidy called Paulson’s three-page proposal for the rescue “suspiciously vague and scandalously arrogant”—with virtually no mechanisms in place for oversight and regulation.

Could we trust *anyone’s* judgment on the largest fiscal gamble in our history? When would we learn to say no to these people? Guys like Paulson and Federal Reserve chairman Ben Bernanke go, well, we’ve got to have \$700 billion to fix this mess, and we go, sure, here you go. It was absolute insanity—Monopoly money. Who knew what the fallout would be on Main Street from the fat cat bailout on Wall Street? As Joseph from Illinois wrote, “I would rather lose my job and starve to death than see one person get bailed out for their bad decisions. These idle threats of complete disaster if we do nothing are bold

face lies. Of course the Wall Street folks are going to say that so we save their ass. We will survive even if the market ‘melts down.’ Sure it will be tough, but as long as the government steps out of the way it won’t be more than one bad year.”

Stepping aside wasn’t going to happen. Bush briefly, belatedly addressed the nation to warn that “our entire economy is in danger” and that “without immediate action by Congress, America can slip into a major panic.” His grim, fearmongering tone echoed the Iraq war run-up, only now the WMD (weapons of mass destruction) were mushroom clouds of toxic subprime mortgage debt rising over our cities and towns. The Fed applied a choke hold of its own: the *New York Times* quoted Fed chairman Bernanke, a Great Depression scholar, as telling lawmakers on Capitol Hill, “If we don’t do this, we may not have an economy on Monday.” Was a bailout really the lesser of two evils, or just another looting of the little guy by the golden-parachuted masters of the universe—one final \$700 billion Bush-era bridge to nowhere?

This crisis threw congressmen, candidates, commentators, and even economists into uncharted territory. I didn’t pretend to know whether a \$700 billion or \$1 trillion bailout package would work. Pessimists suggested that if we did nothing, we’d be headed off a cliff. Granted, the markets, in time and left to their own devices, would likely self-correct. But could the country stand the pain that this would undoubtedly involve? On the other hand, to allow the federal government to, in effect, take over and/or manage some of our biggest financial institutions is to compromise our capitalism. The engines that drove our economy to be the most powerful the world has ever seen are free markets and an entrepreneurial spirit that allows those willing to take big risks to reap big rewards. You didn’t hear pundits or stock-pickers talking much about the long-term effects of messing with that.

In late September, the bipartisan House leadership assured us all weekend that an agreement and passage of a rescue plan were

at hand. As the vote on the bailout approached, Wall Street and the stock market were hinting that they wanted passage. As the votes were being tallied and approval loomed, the Dow Industrials recovered a large part of a 600-point loss—a good thing for the middle class that had stood by and watched their 401(k)s hemorrhage for months.

But in the end, politics trumped everything else. The elected leaders had lied. Again. They weren't so close to a deal, after all. Nancy Pelosi had given a partisan, Bush-bashing speech that angered some House Republicans, and, bingo, the whole project went right down the toilet. The last-minute mutiny by those Republicans sank the first vote (228 to 205) on Monday, September 29, 2008. After a later roll call, the bill bit the dust and everyday Americans bit the bullet: the Dow registered a 778-point, 7 percent drop, its largest single-day point loss in history. In one five-minute span of the roll call, the Dow Jones Industrial Average went into a 450-point death spiral. As the sun set on Black Monday, \$1.2 trillion of investor wealth had been vaporized.

At the end of the day, Bush couldn't get it done because he had zero political capital left. Nancy Pelosi couldn't get it done, and minority leader John Boehner couldn't get it done. Obama couldn't get it done. And all of this despite the efforts of Arizona senator John McCain, who impulsively “suspended” his campaign, parachuted into the Washington fray, said he'd bail out of the first debate with Obama in two days if his maverick magic was still working “across the aisle,” and anointed himself the “country first” savior of the rescue bill. The more he claimed that his intent was to transcend partisan politics, the more partisan his media-grabbing gamble seemed. As House Financial Services Committee chairman Barney Frank put it, “We're trying to rescue the economy, not the McCain campaign.” With McCain in town to save the day, he and Obama, who both urged bipartisan cooperation, were summoned by Bush to a Thursday powwow with House leaders. They didn't get it done, either.

Bottom line: the middle class had taken it once again in the shorts. “Why any of them deserve to be reelected is a mystery to me,” I said

on the air the day after Black Monday. “By the way, the market rallied [485 points] today because of talk in Washington that this idea is not dead yet. Once it is dead and buried, watch out.”

Within a week, the Senate easily passed its own rescue version (Paulson’s 3-page plan swelled to 110 pages in the House and 450 in the Senate). Its eventual passage in the House was greased, of course, by what the *New York Times* called “old-fashioned political inducements added by the Senate.” Most notably, they included \$125 billion in pork barrel sweeteners and a wide and bizarre array of tax breaks (more on these later); they also raised the limit on FDIC protection of consumer banking deposits from \$100,000 to \$250,000, put a cap on participating CEOs’ pay, and imposed tighter regulation of lenders. Pressured by everyone from Bush to fed-up blue-collar wage-earners contacting their representatives, the House passed the vote.

Bush signed the rescue package into law less than a week after Black Monday. “We’ve just performed emergency surgery,” said House majority leader Steny Hoyer of Maryland, “but unless the patient starts eating right and exercising, the problem’s coming right back.” In the six weeks that followed, the stock market fell roughly another 20 percent. Recovery would indeed be slow, not without recurring pain, and the patient’s long-term prognosis remains unclear at best.

What else was new? The government and its leadership have repeatedly failed us big time, Democrats and Republicans alike. After the September–October surprise of 2008, do we need further proof that our entire system is not only broken but hurtling beyond repair? McCain was left with egg all over his face for his impulsive, debate-week campaign gamble; Obama called his actions “erratic.” Postdebate polling had the Obama-Senator Joe Biden ticket slowly pulling away. (More later as well on McCain’s other bizarre “country first” gamble: picking running mate Governor Sarah Palin of Alaska, and her brash, if vacuous, mission to babble her way to victory and sit a heartbeat away from the presidency of the United States.) In the prevailing climate of voter fear, mistrust, and anger, I asked on the “Cafferty File” whether

the House's initial rejection of the bailout was reason enough to vote all of its incumbents out. Dave from Arizona wrote, "Now I know why revolutions happen. Our revolution must happen in November at the voting booth and get these self-serving, incompetent, and plain old dumb clowns out of office."

Long before Election Day, the housing boom made millions of people feel rich and extravagant while we as a nation were going broke and were hated around the world. Our national debt ceiling had doubled under Bush from \$5.6 trillion to \$11.3 trillion. The Iraq troop surge helped point us toward a phased pullout, possibly within three years, while a wave of attacks by Taliban and al Qaeda extremists tightened their grip on towns and cities across Afghanistan and made 2008 the deadliest year there yet for U.S. troops in a war we were told we had "won" in 2002. Now, the Treasury-draining war had finally come home to haunt the economy. Voters' attention shifted from the dusty, distant Fallujahs of Iraq to the picket-fence foreclosures next door.

We endured mounting unemployment; inflation; soaring energy, food, and health-care costs; the housing bust; the subprime mortgage meltdown; and alarming rates of foreclosures, credit card defaults, and personal and business bankruptcy filings. Forty-six million Americans live without health insurance, while twenty-eight million live on food stamps. We're still being held hostage to foreign sources of energy. In the middle of all this, the administration spent \$43 million tax dollars just to let you and me know that Bush would be sending out \$160 billion of someone else's money in the form of economic stimulus rebate checks. Those checks were barely in the bank before *stimulus* deteriorated into *rescue* and rescue into *panic*.

Small wonder the voters sent a resounding message to their elected officials: the game as you slimeballs have known it and played it is over. November 4, 2008, was arguably the most significant Election Day in the last hundred years. Bush, Cheney & Co. had seen fit to turn it into nothing less than a national referendum on our economic survival and, more fundamentally, on our future as a nation of laws

and the inalienable rights of its citizens. McCain promised change, but he had voted for Bush policies 90 percent of the time. Obama, four years into his first term as a senator from Illinois, offered a stark alternative to a virtual third Bush term under McCain-Palin. By picking the forty-four-year-old Palin, the moose-huntin', pro-life, "drill, baby, drill" oil-exploration booster and lipstick-loving pit bull of a hockey mom of five, not to mention ex-mayor of a town of six thousand now just twenty months into her term as governor, McCain won the conservative base's embrace. But it practically made a travesty of his own core attack on Obama's "inexperience."

The 2008 presidential election played out as a sometimes nasty, race-tinged, history-making drama in two acts. Act I was dominated early on by McCain's stunning comeback from oblivion to win his party's nomination and, for far longer, by the bruising, divisive fight for the Democratic nomination between the first-ever woman candidate—then New York senator Hillary Clinton and President-elect Obama's eventual pick for secretary of state—and the first-ever African American candidate from a major party. There were a number of provocative characters and plot twists featuring Bill Clinton, onetime Weather Underground founder and "unrepentant bomber" terrorist Bill Ayers, and the ranting, racist, paranoid Reverend Jeremiah Wright, Obama's longtime, now former, pastor in Chicago.

Act II was shaped at first by McCain's shocking pick of the unknown Palin, a fresh, far-right voice of blue-collar, red-state, you-betcha, darn-tootin', tax-hatin' Joe Six-Pack America. Her wow factor at the GOP convention, unloading sassy, smirking talking-point zingers scripted by a Bush speechwriter, energized the party's social conservative base, which had resisted the unpredictable, too-moderate McCain. It showered its love on Palin and family, even after news promptly broke that she was under investigation in Alaska for abusing her power, and that her unwed seventeen-year-old daughter was five months pregnant. God bless 'em, those flexible (or was it hypocritical?) enforcers of GOP family values. Then came the race to the finish line—from the

bailout drama to Palin's blathering interview sound bites, to negative (and patently misleading or false) ads by both candidates, to disturbing rabble-rousing rallies on the increasingly desperate McCain-Palin trail, as their poll numbers slid week after week.

Before McCain-Palin tried to co-opt Obama's message of hope and change in Washington, Obama campaigned as a no-strings-attached newcomer determined to raise the level of public debate, stick to the high road, and avoid smears and the politics of personal destruction. With his camp's brilliant, youth-targeted use of the Internet, he transformed the rules of political engagement and redrew the electoral map by turning some red states blue. He took the fight to McCain in places where McCain shouldn't have had to defend himself. Obama was just a once-in-a-generation candidate. His style was buoyant, graceful, and eloquent, but some backers and critics alike called him too aloof, too condescending and cerebral to connect with everyday Americans. Even his supporters worried that he couldn't summon the killer instinct or populist passion needed to counter smears and negative ads and to cut through racial or class issues that were possibly hiding beneath the polling numbers.

Obama is the son of a Kenyan father and a white American mother who bore him at age eighteen when she and Barack Sr. were University of Hawaii students. Obama grew up in Hawaii and, for several years, in Jakarta, after his parents split and his mom, Ann Dunham, married an Indonesian. (His dad went to Harvard and became an economist in Kenya; Obama rarely saw him again.) Back in Hawaii, Obama was raised largely by Ann's parents before attending Columbia University and going on to become the first African American editor of the *Harvard Law Review*. He worked for several years as a community organizer and a lawyer on Chicago's South Side, but despite his modest background and activist community legal work, his aura of cool, calm, and intellectual prowess later earned him his opponents' "elitist" rap.

Yet his message resonated with the people, especially the two-thirds of the country that, like him, wanted out of Iraq; he vowed to

raise taxes for the wealthy and cut them for 95 percent of working families; he called for racial and political unity and enlightened leadership. His ability to inspire first-time registrants, young voters, Hispanics, Catholics, and this group and that group was a testament to our appetite for change. Obama came along at the right time with the right message and the right organization—an awesome political and fundraising machine that raised an astonishing \$745 million throughout the long campaign, more than twice the amount raised by the McCain camp. It was as if fate had stepped in and said, all right, you guys have suffered enough for eight years with this jerk, so now we're going to give you somebody better. Obama spoke to the nation's craving for a leader with character, wisdom, and moral integrity—and a real-world vision and plan for restoring America's greatness at home and around the globe. Suddenly, everyone was riveted by politics. When 82 percent of the people polled in spring 2008 said we were on the wrong track, it dawned on voters that we were at a now-or-never crossroads nearing the end of the morally and fiscally bankrupt Bush era.

The primaries unleashed a tsunami of voters who racked up unprecedented registration and ballot-box numbers, particularly on the hotly contested Democratic side. In Pennsylvania, 200,000 folks registered as new Democrats; 178,000 registered Republicans switched parties just to vote in the Democratic race. North Carolina and Indiana saw close to 300,000 newly registered voters combined. In Ohio, young and first-time Democratic voters exceeded the 118,000-vote margin of victory over Senator John Kerry that clinched Bush's second term. (Obama won Ohio for the Democrats by 207,000 votes.)

Another sign that Election 2008 was itself a huge news story: constant coverage turned to ratings gold for broadcast and cable news networks alike, including CNN. *Eight million* viewers tuned in to follow the Obama-Clinton debate way back in January 2008. By late summer, thirty-eight million watched Governor Palin's convention speech at Xcel Center in St. Paul, Minnesota, just days after McCain

had plucked her from the Alaskan ozone (the one not caused by “human impacts,” as she claimed). Just as many watched Obama’s speech before eighty-four thousand people at the Democratic Convention at Denver’s Invesco Field, while an astounding forty million saw McCain’s speech at the Republican Convention, and *seventy million* viewed the Biden-Palin vice-presidential debate. These were all more like Super Bowl numbers.

Having felt ignored, abused, or deceived for years, the American electorate, too used to venting rather than actually voting, was itself now a major election-year story line. “The sleeping giant may be starting to wake up,” I said on March 25, 2008. Give Bush credit: for the lamest of lame ducks, W. rocked the vote like none other before him. The Obama “youthquake” was showing up to vote in numbers we had never seen before. “All it took,” I said one day, “was the illegal invasion of Iraq, which led to a war that’s now in its sixth year; the destruction of our civil liberties in the name of the war on terror; the quadrupling of oil prices; and the early signs of a recession that could be as bad as anything we’ve seen in a long time. And suddenly, the American voter is all ears.”

As I said during the primaries, if our worldwide reputation was shot for the first time in our history, it was because we had allowed it to happen. “By not being proactive in participating in our democracy, the forces that would exploit it and ultimately destroy it had a free rein,” I said. “But these voter registration numbers are very encouraging, because when Americans finally get up off our collective butts and decide to do something, they’re a force that’s simply unstoppable.”

We had largely abdicated the role of a vigilant citizenry, surrendering the country to the people whose self-serving agendas and more active and vested interests in working the system screw us year in, year out. It’s the lobbyists, corporations, and special interest groups that see the angles, work the loopholes (and often draft legislation), and manipulate the government (and a lazy electorate) as they amass not just money but political influence. But with an ironic assist from

W. himself, voters were fighting back—from seniors to slackers, from New Hampshire to New Mexico.

Change comes about in a democracy only when millions of ordinarily silent citizens get riled up enough to be mad as hell about the status quo that's crushing them and leaving the country teetering on the edge of economic collapse. When that poll showed more than four out of five of us feeling downright pissed off, McCain and Clinton were caught standing knee-deep in four decades of business-as-usual. Early attempts to tarnish Obama's glow by focusing on his inexperience and "extreme" liberalism and preposterous later charges that he was "palling around with terrorists," as Palin put it, reinforced his appeal as a legitimate, trustworthy advocate and change agent.

On the day that I asked what it meant when as many as 80 percent of voters showed up for the primaries, Ifeanyi from Houston wrote, "It says that the people have risen to the call for change. Win or lose, Obama has done something that he should be very proud of forever: his clarion call for change was heeded by groups that never considered voting important, and his superb organization has been galvanizing people to register and vote. This is novel and should be a blueprint for motivating Americans in all spheres." Jean from Arizona wrote, "It tells me that eighty percent of Americans are gravely concerned over the present condition of this nation and its future. The U.S. is no longer exercising leadership here at home or abroad. I worry for the future generations of Americans. They will never know the country that so many of us have known and loved."

Whether W. wants to take credit for it or not, his legacy, beyond ending voter apathy, is actually an African American political progeny named Barack Obama, who owes his astonishing triumph to Bush, Cheney, and the arrogant neocons who loyally served their imperial regime. If it's not the legacy Bush wanted, it's the one American voters felt he deserved. Obama could not have gained maximum traction without the administration's wartime record of epic misjudgment, illegal spying, torture, corruption, cronyism, tax cuts for the wealthy, and

staggering incompetence that is still stinking up the Katrina coastline three-plus years later. Bush & Co. proved you could do anything you wanted—legal or not—and nobody questioned it, but if you questioned them, *you* were unpatriotic. Nobody was held accountable, unless you count Scooter Libby, whose sentence for his perjury conviction tied to the CIA leak case was commuted by Bush. There was no price paid, *nothing*. They pulled it off, like the Brinks Gang, and they all left town, pockets bulging.

As *Now or Never* amply demonstrates, politicians all crawl out of the same slime, with few exceptions. The political establishment, lobbyists and corporations included, couldn't care less about you. No wonder voters under thirty finally got off their asses in 2008. They saw what was in store for them. They saw how these aging white people in office screwed this country up. They saw that their own American Dreams—solid, upwardly mobile careers, well-schooled kids, and affordable homes, gasoline and heating fuel, food, and health care—might soon slip beyond their reach.

Voters got it that if we don't start to do things differently, the predators, the parasites, and the blood-suckers will continue to drain and weaken us until there's nothing left. Obama's edge was that he hadn't been inside the Beltway long enough to become covered (or at least to nearly the same extent) with the special-interest barnacles, the lobbyist sores, and the slime oozing from the pores of the slithering hacks we send there for decades on end. For all their love of patriotism, small government, fiscal control, and family values, the GOP could have nominated Jesus Christ and still lost in 2008. *Shake up Washington?* Please. Not a goddamn thing would have changed in a McCain-Palin White House. *Now or Never* reflects how desperate we are to fix our fractured nation and make it work for *all of us*.

I want to believe that goal is within reach, although I may still be from the “don't hold your breath” school. Even if we're just daydreaming through our despair, we cling to some tiny sliver of hope that our country can be saved. Will Obama deliver? His smart, hopeful

advocacy for working-class and lower-income families, for energy reform, and for universal affordable health care, among many programs, may prove unrealistic in the bailout era. Six weeks before Inauguration Day, Obama was talking about a huge two-year stimulus package of up to \$775 billion that focused on infrastructure projects such as repairing roads and bridges as well as giving some \$300 billion in tax breaks for individuals and businesses. He hopes the plan will create four million new jobs. The cost of his ambitious social programs may indeed face congressional resistance. He may emerge as a transformative “black JFK” or the biggest incompetent since sliced bread. I doubt that the latter will be the case. But if Obama—possibly our last best hope—does fail in the end, then God help all of us. I don’t pretend to know what he’s ultimately capable of achieving in office, but I sensed throughout Obama’s postelection transition period this huge sigh of relief—as if people felt someone was finally there to deal with our nation’s crises, take care of us, and be our daddy.

Given all of the ways our system is stacked against the common man, it *is* hard to be optimistic. But stranger things have happened. Americans aren’t stupid. They finally got it that Bush had turned us into just another Third World country with an aging nuclear stockpile. The history of the American people is interesting. We don’t pay any attention to anything until somebody kicks us in the balls. That incites us, arouses us to action, and, all of a sudden, the citizens figure out what’s being taken away that we’ve taken for granted, what’s worth fighting for, and how we can rise up and accomplish some phenomenal things in order to protect our way of life.

If Barack Obama can wrap his arms around this stuff and translate his spirited, unifying mantra of change into a galvanizing mandate for bipartisan healing, for economic renewal, and for restoring our role and reputation in the world as a positive force for global problem solving, although I may not quite be ready to declare “Mission accomplished,” I would sure call that a very good start.