



First 100, next 1,360

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By Donald Cohen

It's the next big mega-moment for the American news media: Obama's 100-days report card.

So, this is my take. But first, let's start with two steps.

First step: As you read this, think about the challenges you've faced in the last 100 days to reflect on what you've been able to accomplish. Doesn't seem like a lot of time, does it?

Second step: While my Republican friends say that we shouldn't spend time bemoaning the past, a respect for history's role in understanding the present and plotting the future requires that we at least recognize the position the Bush administration got us into.

It's hard to imagine how one eight-year presidency could have done so much damage to our international reputation, our government's ability to manage the economy and our regulatory structures that keep our food, consumer products, and workplaces safe. And how could we have let years slip by without addressing the looming health-care crisis and global environmental crisis?

Now that we've looked back, we can evaluate how Obama is measuring up to the challenge of taking the country where Americans want to go.

Regardless of party, I believe most Americans want to reestablish America's leadership in the world and work our way out of the worst national recession since the Great Depression. Most Americans want a stronger, more stable and more environmentally sustainable economy, to help the record number of unemployed Americans and to solve the health care crisis that leaves tens of millions uninsured.

It still amazes me that anyone would want the job of president, and in particular want it now. Having denigrated the very idea of measuring the first 100 days (because of step one and two), I'm actually pretty impressed.

Obama's most significant accomplishment has been to dramatically shift the tone of our national discourse and our interactions with the rest of the world. He speaks plainly and honestly about our challenges; we have to address them. He admits he doesn't know everything and that he makes mistakes. And he shows he can treat other nations with respect in a way that reestablishes America's global leadership and partnerships.

For a new president who had to land running and who has had to deal with industries (banking and auto) in collapse and an economy seemingly in freefall, he has actually racked up a respectable list of legislative, policy and diplomatic accomplishments:

- Signed The Lily Ledbetter act that corrected a gross injustice that allowed the discrimination of women in the workplace.
- Expanded the Children's Health Insurance Program that gave healthcare to millions of children
- Passed a recovery package that, while in my view was not big enough, will create real jobs and put real money in people's pockets to create demand in the economy and meet critical infrastructure needs.
- Began the process of establishing new EPA regulations to regulate heat trapping gases that are causing global warming.
- Directed the EPA to reconsider California's request to regulate greenhouse gases from auto emissions.
- Ordered a government-wide review and reforms to end the practice of blank check, limited oversight wasteful government contracting.
- Eased the anachronistic and absurd travel bans to Cuba.
- Reestablished America as a nation that doesn't torture.
- Has performed more than admirably on the international stage. Nations around the world — both their leaders and citizens — like Obama, and that means they're starting to like us again.
- And then of course there's the dog. It's very cute.

Some argue that Obama has taken on too many things and should focus only on the economy. But Obama recognizes the interconnectedness between economics and relationships with trading partners, healthcare, the environment and the daily struggles of families and businesses that can't be ignored.

He is a multi-tasking president in a world that demands multi-tasking. Given the enormity of the challenges and the rapid pace of global change, Obama has no choice but to be a domestic president, foreign-policy president, environmental president and economic president. Change happens slowly so we simply can't afford to do one thing at a time.

Obama's first budget is an indication that he is a president with a strategy. Our most intractable issues - education, health care and the environment - will be the administration's big picture focal points, amidst and despite the noise and messiness of the real world. Those priorities, along with the new direction and framework for international affairs, are the right ones. Global solutions to these issues have eluded the nation for decades and Obama understands that. Now let's hope he can get it done.

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