

Today In America

Today is one of the most emotionally charged days of my political and public life. I share the sentiments of many Americans. I am sad. I am fearful. Not only is today the last day of the remarkable and historical Presidency of Barack Obama, but today is also the start of the most unpredictable and unbelievable Presidency of Donald Trump. President Obama inspired me and so many others in America and around the world with his, “Yes, we can” message of hope and service to others, articulating that we must work boldly to get stuff done on behalf of all Americans. President Obama did lead us out of the Great Recession, brought millions the healthcare they needed, rescued the auto industry from near collapse, stood up for civil rights, human rights, LGBT rights and many other causes, made climate change a focus for our nation and the world, tried to make our country and world safer from terrorism, led an Administration with integrity and honesty, and he and his family brought a stature, dignity and grace to his service that anyone of any race, gender or political party would have to admit was admirable. President Obama understood the meaning of public service and knew the importance of words, empathy and leadership. He is thoughtful, kind, tough, passionate and compassionate. He is a public servant in his heart, mind, body and soul. President Obama is someone that any young, or not so young, person would want to emulate and look to as a role model.

I have spent one-third of my life as an elected public official, as a Philadelphia City Councilperson and as Mayor. I’ve been involved in community organizing and political campaigns for more than half of my life. I am also a dedicated public servant and public policy professional. I know the meaning, value and responsibility of public service, leadership, power and authority. Being a candidate is one thing, being an elected official, at any level, is completely different. One must grow comfortable with power and authority, and learn the intricacies of the job or position. Each level of service, local or state or federal, have their own levels of complexity, duty and responsibility. I would suggest though, that Executive level positions carry an even greater challenge and opportunity. An Executive position, Mayor or Governor and certainly President, carry with them the additional and unique aspects of implementation, follow through, outcomes and consequences. When you speak from one of those positions, you speak for and to everyone, whether they voted for you or not, because you are now responsible for and to ALL of the people in your city, state or country. In these positions, you must come to fully understand that YOU, the elected leader, must change, adjust and transform yourself and your leadership team to address the legitimate concerns of a large constituency of citizens, who may or may not have voted for you, but who have a RIGHT to expect certain things from you because now YOU are their leader, they are citizens and YOU work for them. The leader must finally realize that they have not only won an election, but more importantly, that the leader must now LEAD, and that the campaign is over and governing must begin. All the fights and scars of the political battle must end and heal. The bitterness and anger of heated political rhetoric must be replaced with Lincoln’s call of maturity and understanding as he expressed it so eloquently, “With malice toward none, with charity for all...”

President Obama has said it best recently in expressing that becoming President of the United States of America brings with it a great amount of reality when you understand the enormity of the position. He said that, “reality has a way of changing your views.” It is not clear to me today that Donald Trump has yet to come to grips with the reality of the enormity of being President of

the United States of America. He has yet to demonstrate a maturity that indicates that he realizes the campaign is over, that the stakes are high, the expectations of a nation are now his responsibility and that he knows that it is now his duty, obligation and responsibility to lead ALL of America, to be a leader on the world stage and that things have changed for him and that HE must change also. He must become “Presidential” in words, actions and deeds.

I’m sad and fearful today, not just because a great President is leaving office after performing his duties with excellence for eight years, but because there is virtually no indication that the incoming President is actually ready to lead, to inspire, to empathize, to focus, to mature, to change, to act responsibly and to truly understand the power, duty and responsibility of his new position. Today feels like the final episode of a reality TV show, and that tomorrow we’ll all just watch something different to entertain us. Well, today is real, an election did happen, the peaceful transfer of power is complete, America is still strong and we will move on with our lives. It’s been said that hope is the only thing stronger than fear. I plan to use my unending hope in America to overcome my fears about our new President. I would encourage America and the world to do the same.

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