

**PL11-- "MAKING HISTORY: WHAT CLINTON NEEDS TO DO HIS 2ND TERM", SALON, 11/06/96**

**M a k i n g   H i s t o r y**

**To: Bill Clinton  
From: Fred Branfman  
RE: Your Moment of Truth**

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**November 6, 1996 - Congratulations upon your reelection! This is a moment for which you have worked all your life, and it is no small accomplishment. It is a moment which cannot be fully savored, however. For you now face the most important existential decision of your life. Will you now take the risks necessary to make history? Or will you settle for the safer but mediocre path of your first term?**

**We live in momentous times. Information-era change accelerates faster than our minds, hurtling towards a global civilization which must balance legitimate desires for consumption with the survival of the ecosystem. The stakes are that big and they require wrenching, historic changes. Part of your job, therefore, will be to develop lasting strategies and programs that will radically shift resources, as did FDR when he restructured industrial society 60 years ago. You will have to use the presidential "bully pulpit" to the utmost to persuade Americans of the need to shift to a new ethic of information-age resource efficiency and global interconnectedness.**

**Do you have the courage to risk it -- that is, the willingness to fail in the attempt? You will likely sink in the polls. Advisers will tell you that this is a transition era in which "objective conditions" do not allow for such dramatic change; that in the absence of an overt crisis, people will simply not be moved that far. Are you up to this?**

**The evidence so far -- your desire to be liked more than respected, your tendency to temporize, your inability to focus, the seeming absence of core beliefs -- is not encouraging. Yet, we sense, you are still a work in progress. Your sharp intelligence, the risks you took**

**(finally) in Haiti and Bosnia, your gamble on universal health coverage -- all suggest the potential to rise above your limitations. Your reelection frees you from the political constraints that may have boxed you in. You no longer have any excuse to face the moment of truth. But you must move decisively, and move now.**

**First, you must draw the correct lessons from your earlier mistakes. Some will argue, for example, that the catastrophic failure of your one first-term attempt to make history -- health reform -- argues for incrementalism in your second. I would suggest the opposite. All great historical leaders -- Lincoln, Gandhi, Churchill -- experienced failures far greater. We remember them precisely because their failures inspired them to even greater accomplishments.**

**Second, you must articulate a greater vision than the one you have outlined during this campaign. Balancing the budget, "protecting" Medicare, education and the environment, putting more police on the street, even moving "a million people from welfare to work" -- none of this is the stuff of history. Truly protecting our health -- and the health of the earth -- requires actions far bolder than mere budget balancing or targeted tax cuts. Where is the clarion call to reform money-draining middle class entitlements, to avert global warming, or to meet the other great challenges involved in building your much-invoked "bridge to the 21st Century?" Once articulated, you must set about these goals with the same passion and commitment you have shown to getting elected. You must educate us, and take us with you.**

**Let me mention a few initiatives that your own advisors and supporters, past and present, urge upon you.**

**"If Bill Clinton wants to make history, he should propose the nation's top need: a lifelong learning system, funded by cuts in a government that is restructured to become performance-based. --David Osborne, author of "Reinventing Government."**

**Our overriding national economic goal should be the care and feeding of our skilled workforce, our key edge in the 21st century information-age economy. The "lifelong learning" system urged by your former**

**advisors, David Osborne and Doug Ross, would include public school competition, vouchers for college education, a lifetime "G.I. Bill credit card" for training and retraining, "Employment Maintenance Organizations" like private HMOs to give each worker state-of-the-art job training and placement, and a National Electronic Job and Talent Bank.**

**How to pay for it? Osborne suggests that some of it could come via another needed goal: reducing government spending by giving managers smaller budgets in exchange for greater autonomy. Matthew Miller, a former OMB official, suggests that you would need to shift 10 percent of GNP -- \$750 billion -- through investment increases and consumption decreases. Whatever the specifics, his overall point is correct: you will need to mobilize massive investment, far beyond anything you have yet discussed.**

**"(The welfare reform bill) is more dangerous than most people realize. No bill that is likely to push more than a million additional children into poverty -- many in working families -- is real reform." -- David Ellwood, former chief of the Clinton welfare reform initiative**

**Harvard professor David Ellwood, in charge of your welfare reform efforts during 1992-3, has spelled out the essential element of any serious effort to make welfare reform work: "Two years and you work ... after two years, most healthy adults would be required to work, preferably in a regular private job, but if necessary in a subsidized private, nonprofit or public-sector job." (emphasis added)**

**Other administration officials urge you to go beyond welfare reform and do more to combat poverty. One key is to provide youngsters in poor communities with the same preparation for the high-tech economy as is available to wealthier youth. Also needed is a greater commitment to such successful anti-poverty programs as Head Start, and such HUD initiatives as the plan to raze 100,000 of the worst housing units in the country, rebuild smaller, individually-owned units, and provide vouchers for people to move out of slums into working-class neighborhoods.**

**"The most important thing Clinton could do is (start) preparing for the retirement of the baby boom generation by reforming Medicare and Medicaid the right way, and making some adjustments in Social Security. We have this big problem coming, but if we take modest steps now, we won't have to make wrenching adjustments 10 or 12 years from now." -- Robert Reischauer, former chief, Congressional Budget Office**

**Most policy experts agree with the highly respected Reischauer, now at the Brookings Institution, that few priorities are more important than reducing skyrocketing health care costs for seniors and adjusting Social Security prior to the retirement of the first baby boomers in 2011. It is difficult to overestimate the consequences of this issue, including how long and how well our parents and ourselves will live, when we can retire, whether working-age people will have to devote increasing portions of their incomes and/or inheritances to care for aging parents, and the extent to which rising retirement costs will force drastic cuts in the rest of government.**

**Reischauer suggests that the key to cutting Medicare costs is to change the present fee-for-service system, in which seniors are entitled to medical procedures regardless of cost, to the kind of managed care that most working-age adults today receive. Such a change would be historic, and will be bitterly fought. It could mean that longevity will be determined, in part, by managed care administrators rather than the quality of our medical technology. Still, Reischauer and others argue, the present system is unviable and is leading to chaos.**

**"Global warming needs to be the President's top historical priority because it has already hit. If we continue this way, there will be a major crisis in the next 10-20 years. Lives will be lost, 3-6 percent of world GNP will be lost, whole communities will be flooded." -- High-ranking Clinton environmental official**

**As reported in Salon, your administration took an important step forward in Geneva by agreeing to set national carbon emission levels. To reach them requires raising energy prices -- which will itself require**

**a massive selling job on Congress and the American people. "The rubber hits the road on energy prices," says this official. "The only way to end global warming is to raise prices and then recycle the money back into the economy rather than giving it to government."**

**Space does not permit listing the other global environmental challenges we face -- from ozone layer depletion to toxic chemicals threatening our ability to reproduce, to gene therapy affecting the process of life itself. Suffice it to say here, however, that we are in the midst of a fundamental historic shift. For tens of millions of years we have been the products of natural selection. Now we are its progenitors. Educating the public about our need to govern evolution could be one of the single greatest achievements of your second term.\***

**In the end, of course, you cannot choose to make history. You can only choose to try. I am reminded of the anti-nuclear activist who was dragged away by police after a long sit-in in front of a nuclear weapons plant. How did he feel about his failure to shut down the plant, he was asked? "I may have failed, but I did not fail to try," he responded.**

**We are told that you have worked your entire life to be President, tirelessly collecting names and keeping in touch with thousands of people around the country since you were 15. Now you face the most fundamental challenge of all: What has this lifelong effort been for?**

**With all due respect, Mr. President, I suggest that this is the fundamental question before you on this celebration day. History will forgive you for failing. But it will be remorseless should you fail even to try.**

