



Blueprint for America

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CLOSING NOTE

THE ART AND PRACTICE OF GOVERNANCE

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Earlier I remarked on the importance of being a “good gardener” in managing foreign affairs. But the analogy holds in our domestic processes too. Two things stand out as I survey the ideas within this American “blueprint” against the longer arc of our country’s history.

First, it is tempting to think that the problems we face today are somehow of a different nature than the ones that came before. But for all the day-to-day noise in Washington, our government’s most important priorities remain much the same as ever:

- Managing our spending so as to achieve public aims without putting a drag on the wider economy.
- Usefully guiding private enterprise through regulation that does not snuff out its spark.
- Responsibly handling the monetary lever across economic cycles.
- Confronting the trade-offs in the affordability of our social safety net.
- Asserting our country’s global alliances and security objectives.
- Educating the next generation and dealing with the fact that the United States continues to be the most desirable place in the world to make home.

All would be familiar to the founding fathers. And none are directly soluble problems. We cannot declare victory through one Congress, or one president, or one treaty; instead, they must be continually worked at.

This leads me to the second observation, which was also remarked on by many of our *Blueprint* authors: our government continues to suffer from a lack of long-term thinking. It is hard to keep working at our most important priorities in a sincere way if we do not have a basic vision to support that. Our energies and attention get drawn up into the next crisis served up atop the political agenda. Instead, the political environment should make room for competent individuals to work in good faith toward matters that will be good for the country, even if they do not offer immediate rewards.

Common to both these observations is the role of good governance. Governance is a process, not an end in itself. But none of the policy goals in this “blueprint” can be sustained without it. In that spirit, I’d like to conclude our efforts here with some simple observations from my own experience on things that could help.

THE ROLE OF TRUST IN GOVERNANCE

Right now, our country faces a crisis of competence in area after area. We see a government that does not seem to work well. An essential element in government, and in any good negotiation, is trust. You need to be confident that your counterpart will deliver on promises made.

Campaigning is an act of division—the exact opposite of governance, which is an act of inclusion and the finding of common ground. Our political system right now has too much campaigning, and that complicates governance and the establishment of trust.

So, for governance to have the high quality we need, we must remember that trust is the coin of the realm.

**THE ROLE OF INDIVIDUAL COMPETENCY
AND RESPONSIBILITY IN GOVERNANCE**

More prosaically, the operation of government can also be sharply improved if more A-list players are brought into government service, arranging the structure of government so that they have real responsibility. Right now, a trend that has been in evidence for some time has reached an extreme. The White House and the people working there with the president (including the now much-too-large staff of the National Security Council) dominate policymaking and, more and more, the execution of policy.

At the same time, someone who is nominated to a presidential post faces a grueling prospect. First, there is a lengthy questionnaire that must be filled out, requiring the employment of a lawyer and an accountant. Then the nomination is forwarded to the Senate, which takes its time. At the end of December 2014, there were 133 people who had been nominated and reported out favorably by their Senate committees, but they had yet to receive a confirmation vote in the Senate. They were kept in limbo, awaiting re-nomination in the new Congress. That is an unattractive prospect for anyone, especially A-list players. And when they are finally in office, they find the White House-centric process of governance means that their capacities are not fully used. So, many alpha players who would normally be ready to serve simply bail out.

This could be easily remedied if the president announced that he will govern through the people who are nominated and confirmed in their positions. The nomination process can be changed dramatically. Do an FBI and IRS check, followed by the statement, "If you have skeletons in your closet, don't come." The president will announce that cabinet officers will be regarded as his staff for developing policy in various areas. These are also constitutionally accountable people who, unlike White House aides, can be called to testify at any time. This will give the policymaking process access to career people who have lots of experience and

can contribute in important ways to the development of policies. Also, in the end, these are the people who will take a big part in the execution of policy.

With this approach, the president can go to the Senate and say, “I expect a prompt up-or-down vote on my nominees, and I expect them to be given the benefit of the doubt since these are people with whom I have chosen to work.”

BUDGETING AS A STRUCTURAL FRAMEWORK

Congress also needs to continue to shape up. The Constitution gives the legislative branch the power of the purse. Let’s stay on track the old-fashioned way where hearings are held with subunits of each department and a budget is developed from the bottom up. This requires members of Congress to work hard, so they can know well the units of government whose funding they oversee. Earlier votes on gigantic sums of money and continuing resolutions are a cop-out by Congress. They mean that Congress has not responsibly carried out the power of the purse given to it by the Constitution.

In 2012 and 2014, the Senate failed to approve any one of the twelve appropriations bills. In 2015, at last, the House and Senate agreed to a budget resolution; the House Appropriations Committee reported out nine of twelve appropriations bills and the full House approved six of them. Similarly on schedule, the Senate Appropriations Committee reported out five bills.

If these changes are made, the quality of policy and execution will improve. The revised processes will put more emphasis on the very large nonpartisan element in the process of governance, so the atmosphere will change for the better.

GOVERNING OVER DIVERSITY IN AN AGE OF TRANSPARENCY

Such changes are essential now since the very process of governance is changing rapidly and the developments bringing this about will only intensify as time goes by. The availability of in-

formation and the ability of people to communicate with each other, including across international boundaries, seem limitless. People everywhere, with only minimum effort, can find out almost anything. Cell phones are widespread and widely used, so people can communicate with each other and organize. Their diverse interests must somehow be dealt with. All of this is relatively new. But for governance in this age to come to be successful, these developments need to be recognized since they are permanent and will not disappear.

Diversity expresses itself in many ways: religion, ethnicity, color, and economic well-being. Diversity has always existed, and has had an impact on governance; and while some have recognized diversity, it has also been possible to ignore or suppress it. No more. Taken as a whole, new information and communication technologies enhance the freedom of individuals to think for themselves, to believe whatever they believe, and to question whatever is taking place. A new freedom emerges to question and even to replace ruling authorities. The ability to challenge authority, even legitimate authority, can easily extend to actions that may be good for the populace as a whole but less beneficial for part of it. That part now demands to be heard.

From the standpoint of anyone charged with the responsibility of governance, the fragmentation and the power of dissident groups can easily swamp the coherence needed for effective governance. We as a country have faced similar problems in earlier times and have prevailed.

Despite real tensions—which could also be resolved by better governance—we have the most successful diverse culture and population of any major economy. Indeed, we should work on making this more of a comparative advantage in a fiercely competitive global economy. And we have a military of remarkable diversity and capability too, which will remain so for as long as support is strong and enduring and its objectives are clear and manageable.

These advantages are not immutable, and in recent years nothing has worked so effectively to our disadvantage as the irresponsibility and short-sightedness of many in the American political class. Yet we remain optimistic.

We can make progress on all of the issues that trouble us. With sensible policies—such as those outlined in this *Blueprint*—combined with a renewed effort to restore to America the highest standards of governance, we can renew our nation’s economic strength and provide broadly rising standards of living to all our citizens. President Reagan often said, “Democracy is not a spectator sport.” We all need to join the effort to restore America to its optimal strength. Our economic well-being and that of our children is at stake. So, too, is America’s global influence and, with it, the security and well-being of vast swaths of the world, whose people rely upon us to promote peace and progress for all.