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Obama's inaugural address reveals how he wants to move forward

Pat Perriello | Jan. 23, 2013 NCR Today

Both conservative [1] and liberal [2] pundits are proclaiming President Barack Obama's second inaugural as the most progressive or liberal speech of his career. They say he has finally shown himself to be who he really is. They are also saying he missed a critical opportunity to reach out to Republicans to get things done. He has added to the rancor and partisanship in Washington. In short, liberals love the speech and conservatives hate it.

It is true that Obama laid out a progressive vision of what he believes the world should look like. Clearly, he would like to see such a world come to be. Yet when he indicated that whatever we do will be imperfect, he was suggesting that he does not expect his vision to be enacted as-is.

I believe he is looking for a partner. Specifically, he seeks a legitimate Republican partner to achieve that grand bargain that will put the country on a sustainable course. Much as Newt Gingrich served as a partner for President Bill Clinton to achieve significant legislation in the 1990s, Obama recognizes that Democrats cannot govern alone. However, he needs Republicans who actually want to do something, not simply serve as an obstructive force.

For Obama, I believe governing is the real issue. His efforts to reach out to Republicans and be conciliatory in his first term have not been effective. I believe he therefore chose to make clear, if there was any doubt, exactly what his position is. He now needs Republicans in Congress to make clear their legitimate hopes so that a compromise, dreaded word that it is, can be reached. He doesn't need a chorus of no's, as has been the case for the better part of four years. He needs and wants real bipartisan legislative action. That means taking the best of Republican ideas and including them with a Democratic plan. What has been missing is a government that works. That is what Obama wants.

Historians are always looking for those memorable lines in inaugural addresses that we will always remember. Phrases like "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country." Or perhaps, "We have nothing to fear but fear itself." I believe Obama may have created such a phrase: "We cannot mistake absolutism for principle."

For too long, we have seen plenty of absolutism. There will be no tax increases, no matter what the circumstances may be. We will shut down the government or allow our country to default on its debts in order to make a point. We can only hope that real change in these attitudes may be about to occur. The Republicans' movement on the debt ceiling may be a meaningful first step.

Obama made clear his principles in his inaugural address. Republicans now need to bring their principles to the table, and begin together the process of governing the United States of America.

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