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## **The Day after Election Day**

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The countdown continues, with just thirty-five days left until we cast our votes for president. I, however, am most looking forward to the thirty-sixth day, when this uninspiring campaign will blessedly be over and the governing might finally begin. Perhaps then our politicians will face up to the long-festering problems that plague our nation.

In these most partisan of times, our elected officials have been entirely bi-partisan in their inability to confront the nation's most serious challenges. Democrats and Republicans have come together to do nearly nothing to crack the debt crisis, save our schools, and put the country on the road to energy independence. As a result, our national debt has soared past \$16 trillion; our public schools barely eke out a "C" compared to schools in other developed nations; and more than one-third of the oil we consume comes from the petro-dictators of Saudi Arabia, Venezuela, and Nigeria.

How have we arrived at this sorry state of affairs? In the past two decades, our society has grown increasingly nearsighted. Too many CEOs can't seem to see past the next quarter. Our elected officials seem incapable of imagining anything beyond the next election cycle. And our political campaigns are forever locked in minute-by-minute, tit-for-tat responses to the opposition. In business and politics alike, short-termism has triumphed. Myopia has eclipsed vision; reaction has replaced action in Washington.

Many of us had hoped that the battle for the presidency would force both sides to display real leadership by advancing policy proposals that would require sacrifices not only from each

candidate's opponents, but also from his supporters. We can't build a better future for our kids if *all* of us aren't prepared to endure some short-term pain.

Unfortunately, the candidates are having none of that. President Obama and Governor Romney are running polarizing campaigns with the same overriding message: "I am not my opponent." It's difficult to see how the next president will rally bipartisan majorities, given this campaign season's dearth of intellectual daring.

Nevertheless, on the day after Election Day, the president will confront hard realities that require both sides to focus on long-term results at the expense of their short-term interests. When Democrats and Republicans finally pivot from the comparatively easy work of campaigning to the far harder challenge of governing, I hope they'll consider some unsolicited advice: make a deposit before a withdrawal.

Think about the forthcoming negotiation to cut the deficit. Most Americans agree a solution close to the one outlined in the Simpson-Bowles proposal makes sense. Yet Republicans refuse to allow a tax increase of any kind and Democrats, in turn, won't permit adjustments to entitlements. Such one-sidedness by both sides leaves us without a resolution that rallies the nation's fiscal health and serves the desires of most of the people.

Four forces have pushed us into this political cul-de-sac. First, the leaders of our duopolistic political parties are more interested in holding their base than solving problems. Second, our leaders have carved the country into gerrymandered election districts, which enables those with the most extreme positions to win office by drawing the support of small percentages of the overall population. Third, if they expect to be rewarded with coveted committee assignments, Representatives must always dine on their leadership's dogma. And finally, our system of checks and balances has balanced itself out, so that each extreme of the policy divide is indulged as elected officials "self-righteously" dig in and ignore the other side's perspective.

If I, as a business leader, were to follow the example of Congress and fail to deliver a budget for nearly four years, it would only be appropriate that I be fired and replaced by someone who can get the job done. But who, in fact, could successfully bridge the ideological divide, as long as we are unwilling to challenge a political system that abets our collective short-sightedness? It's high time we the people demand that our elected officials serve the country's long-term needs.

In his Farewell Address, George Washington urged our young nation's citizenry to look beyond their identities as members of a state and especially of a political party and identify themselves as American above all else. He warned that if we let factions take control of our government, we fail as a nation. That challenge is never more relevant than it is today.