

Moving On:

Out with the old and in with the new. Along with a new president we have a new attitude. Our bearing is full of promise and confidence. We may not have a book with all the answers but least we have a clean slate to write on. We have a place from which to start over. We can take a deep breath and move on.

There were times during the past few years that felt like one long trip to the dentist. Times when the morning news made it feel like we were in one of those slow motion car crashes in an action movie. You tumble and bounce and it seems like it will never end. But hey, we're still here. The world didn't end, it just got messed up. But we're still here.

I woke up this morning to read that the closing of the Guantanamo Prison has begun. The interrogation of war prisoners will return to military and Geneva standards. White House staff will make what they make for the next four years, no raises. Lobbyists will be severely limited in their pursuit of Government jobs. The CIA will have to close its own little prison system. And the United States will actually have to make decisions about the hundreds of people we've locked up, uncharged, for seven years. And that's just one morning's worth of news. Yup, it appears that the new man in town is starting out as he said he would.

That's not to say his ride will be smooth. Some of the most significant bumps will be thrown down by senior members of the president's own party. Chairman Obey of the Appropriations Committee is leading the charge to pass an 825 billion dollar stimulus bill which is full of projects and handouts that have nothing to do with stimulating the economy. David Obey is running the hearing on the bill by keeping republican reps in the dark and silencing his own subcommittee chairmen. The OMB has made it very clear that a great deal of this bill will not provide short term help for the U.S. economy.

Chairman Obey hates that report, says it's wrong but won't answer questions about it. Same old, same old. Essentially he's saying what the banks said about their own bailout. Give us the money and we'll spend it however we want.

Our new president should make it clear to representative Obey and other senior democrats that the old school way of running a Committee, as if it were some medieval fiefdom, won't cut it any more. This is not about the privilege of seniority. It's about saving a precariously balancing economy. Business as usual could very well push it over the edge. The change in Washington should not be about whose turn it is to spend money. To go through the years of tough campaigning just to have a different set of hacks acting on their own agenda is an awful prospect.

It will be really rough. There will blood. The good ole boys and girls are not used to having their hands slapped, not even when their hands are deep in the cookie jar. They consider it their role to pay off and pay back and take care of their own. And they will fight the president on this. It wouldn't take much for them to stall the whole business of recovery. They know that the prospect of a president fighting with his own party's leadership is the political kiss of death. They believe Obama will have to back off. And if Obama backs off and lets the chairmen go down the same old road, the game is over. Old Washington wins and we can look forward to a deepening recession, more financial wrecks, personal suffering on a huge scale and four more years of inertia in government.

But that's still a big "if". There is still time for the old guard to come to their senses. There is still time, albeit short, for the new president to use his fabled persuasive powers. There is still time for us citizens to remind our folks in Washington that we voted for change whether we voted for Obama, McCain or Nader.

There are moments in the history of a nation that are exactly suited for big change. They are very rare. We're in one of them. Now is precisely the time for us to get going. We have no idea when, or if, the next one will come along.