

September 17, 2011

Dear Colleague,

We write to you in light of recent deteriorating events in Washington, D.C. Misguided negotiations by the Obama Administration over increasing the debt ceiling willingly put our nation's vital social services on the chopping block while Bush-era tax cuts remain untouched. Clearly the situation has reached crisis proportions. In response, an innovative plan has been developed to reintroduce a progressive agenda back into the political discussion during the 2012 election season.

Consider for a moment two very different scenarios for the 2012 Democratic presidential primaries.

The *First* scenario, President Obama advances without contest to a unanimous nomination. There is no recognizable Democratic challenger, no meaningful debate on key progressive issues or past broken promises, just a seamless, self-contained operation on its way to raising one billion dollars in campaign funds.

This scenario is what most observers expect. Mr. Obama will face neither opposition nor debate. He will have no need to clarify or defend his own policies or address the promises, kept and unkept, of his 2008 campaign. The president will not have to explain to his supporters why he directly escalated the war in Afghanistan and broadened America's covert war in Pakistan, why he chose to engage in a military intervention in Libya, or why he has maintained the Bush Administration's national security apparatus that allows for the suspension and abuse of constitutionally protected civil liberties--dismissing Congress all the way.

In an uncontested Democratic primary, President Obama will never have to justify his decision to bail out Wall Street's most profitable firms while failing to push for effective prosecution of the criminal behavior that triggered the recession, or his failure to push for real financial reform. He will not have to defend his decision to extend the Bush era tax cuts nor justify his acquiescence to Republican extortion during the debt ceiling negotiations. He will not have to answer questions on how his Administration completely failed to protect homeowner's losing their homes to predatory banks, or even mention the word "poverty," as he failed to do in his most recent State of the Union Address, even as more and more Americas sink into financial despair.

He will never be challenged to fulfill his pledge to actively pursue a Labor-supported card check, or his promise to increase the federal minimum wage or why he took single payer *off the table* after he said he believes in it. The American labor movement, facing an unprecedented onslaught by the Right will not have the opportunity to voice its concerns and rally around a supportive candidate.

The president will not be pressed to answer how he spent four years in office without addressing the ongoing destabilization of our climate or advocating a coherent and ecologically sound energy policy including defending his position on nuclear power and so called clean coal. Nor will he discuss regulatory agency deficiencies in enforcing corporate law and order in an era marked by a corporate crime wave having devastating economic consequences on

workers and taxpayers and their savings and pensions. There will be no opportunity for the Hispanic and other relevant communities to speak out on immigration reform even as the Republicans continue to use it as a weapon of political demagoguery.

Add your own concerns, disappointments, and frustrated hopes to this list of what will surely be left off the table during an express-lane primary. The valid disagreements within the Democratic Party, let alone the goals of progressives, will be completely overlooked. The media will gleefully cover the media circus that is sure to be the Republican primaries, magnifying every minor gaffe and carefully cataloguing every iteration and argument of the radical right. The cameras will cover the Democratic side only for orchestrated events, the whiff of scandal, and to offer commentary on how the campaign is positioning itself for the general election.

The summation of this process will be a tediously scripted National Convention, deprived of robust exchange and well-wrought policy. And here the danger is clear: not only will progressive principles past and present be betrayed but large sections of voters will feel bored with and alienated from the democratic candidate. This would not serve the president's campaign, our goals, or the nation's needs.

Thankfully, there is another option. This *second* scenario would allow for robust and exciting discussion and debate during the primary season while posing little risk to the president other than to encourage him take more progressive stands. It would also accomplish the critical task of energizing the Progressive base to turn out on Election Day.

*Imagine:* A slate of six candidates announces its decision to run in the Democratic primaries. Each of the candidates is recognizable, articulate, and a person of acknowledged achievement. These contenders would each represent a field in which Obama has never clearly staked a progressive claim or where he has drifted toward the corporatist right. These fields would include: labor, poverty, military and foreign policy, health insurance and care, the environment, financial regulation, civil and political rights/empowerment, and consumer protection.

Without primary challengers, President Obama will never have to seriously articulate and defend his beliefs to his own party. Given the dangers our nation faces, that option is unacceptable. The slate is the best method for challenging the president for a number of reasons:

- The slate can indicate that its intention is not to defeat the president (a credible assertion given their number of voting columns) but to rigorously debate his policy stands.
- The slate will collectively give voice to the fundamental principles and agendas that represent the soul of the Democratic Party, which has increasingly been deeply tarnished by corporate influence.
- The slate will force Mr. Obama to pay attention to many more issues affecting many more Americans. He will be compelled to develop powerful, organic, and fresh language as opposed to stale poll-driven "themes."

- The slate will exercise a pull on Obama toward his liberal/progressive base (in the face of the countervailing pressure from “centrists” and corporatists) and leave that base with a feeling of positive empowerment.
- The slate will excite the Democratic Party faithful and essential small-scale donors, who (despite the assertions of cable punditry) are essentially liberal and progressive.
- A slate that is serious, experienced, and well-versed in policy will display a sobering contrast with the alarmingly weak, hysterical, and untested field taking shape on the right.
- The slate will command more media attention for the Democratic primaries and the positive progressive discussions within the party as opposed to what will certainly be an increasingly extremist display on the right.
- The slate makes it more difficult for party professionals to induce challengers to drop out of the race and more difficult for Mr. Obama to refuse or sidestep debates in early primaries.

The slate, if announced, will receive free legal advice and adequate contributions for all prudent expenses in moving about the country. The paperwork is far simpler than what confronts ballot-access-blocked third party and independent candidates. For the slate will be composed of registered Democrats campaigning inside the Party Primaries.

This opportunity to revive and restore the progressive infrastructure of the Democratic Party must not be missed. A slate of Democratic candidates challenging the president's substance and record is an historic opportunity. Certainly, President Obama will not be pleased to face a list of primary challengers, but the comfort of the incumbent is far less important than the vitality and strength of his party's Progressive ideas and ideals. President Obama should emerge from the primary a stronger candidate as a result.

This letter is sent to several dozen accomplished persons known to identify with the Democratic Party voting line for a variety of reasons. **We ask that you join us in becoming an official endorsee of the slate proposal.** All endorsements are made as individuals and organizational or institutional affiliations are for identification purposes only. Your endorsement will be a vital signal of support and will help in compiling the strongest slate of candidates possible when we send out the letter to the candidate list, yet to be finalized.

Second, can you suggest accomplished people to contact who may be interested in joining the slate as a candidate in one of the following fields: labor, poverty, military and foreign policy, health insurance and care, the environment, financial regulation, civil and political rights/empowerment, and consumer protection. This can be yourself if you feel it would be appropriate.

Endorsements will be accepted on a rolling basis. All submissions of endorsement or additional questions and comments for the can be directed to Colin O'Neil at [colinoneil@gmail.com](mailto:colinoneil@gmail.com) or 703-599-3474. We appreciate your speedy reply.

Thank you.

## Partial List of Endorsees\*

### **James Abourezk**

Former U.S. Senator, South Dakota

### **Gar Alperovitz**

Professor University of Maryland

Co-Founder Democracy Collaborative

### **Norman Birnbaum**

Professor Emeritus, Georgetown University Law Center

### **Dr. Brent Blackwelder**

President Emeritus, Friends of the Earth

### **Ellen H. Brown**

Lawyer and Author of *Web of Debt*

### **Edgar Stuart Cahn**

Professor of Law, University of the District of Columbia

Co-founder Legal Services for the Poor

### **Pat Choate**

1996 Reform Party Vice President Candidate

### **Peter Coyote**

Actor, Author and Director

### **Ronnie Cummins**

Executive Director, Organic Consumers Association

### **Charles Derber**

Professor, Boston College

### **Ronnie Dugger**

Founder, Alliance for Democracy

### **John Fullerton**

President, Capital Institute

### **Rebecca and James Goodman**

Northwood Farm

### **Randy Hayes**

Director, Foundation Earth

Rainforest Action Network Founder

### **Chris Hedges**

Pulitzer Prize Winning Journalist of the New York Times and Author

**Hazel Henderson,**  
Author *Ethical Markets: Growing the Green Economy*  
President, Ethical Markets Media, LLC.

**Jean Houston**  
Psychologist, Anthropologist and Author of *The Possible Human* and *The Possible Society*

**Nicholas Johnson**  
Former Commissioner, Federal Communications Commission  
Former Administrator, Federal Maritime Commission

**Alan F. Kay**  
Author, *Spot the Spin* and *Locating Consensus for Democracy*

**Harry Kelber**  
The Labor Educator

**Andrew Kimbrell**  
Executive Director, Center for Food Safety &  
International Center for Technology Assessment (ICTA)

**Jonathan Kozol**  
Educator, Author of *Savage Inequalities*

**Lewis Lapham**  
Former Editor, Harper's Magazine

**Leland Lehrman**  
Partner, Fund Balance

**Rabbi Michael Lerner**  
Editor, Tikkun Magazine  
Chair, Network of Spiritual Progressives

**Samuel Metz, MD**  
Mad As Hell Doctors, founding member  
Physicians for a National Health Plan, member of Portland chapter

**Carol Miller**  
Community Activist, New Mexico

**E. Ethelbert Miller**  
Board Chair Institute for Policy Studies

**Ralph Nader**

**Michael Parenti**  
Author

**John Passacantando**

Former Executive Director, Greenpeace USA

**Vijay Prashad**

Author and Professor, Trinity College

**Nomi Prins**

Author and former Managing Director at Goldman Sachs

**Marcus Raskin**

**Andy Shallal**

“Democracy’s Restaurateur” and Owner of Bus Boys & Poets

**Michelle Shocked**

Musician

**David Swanson**

Author, *War is a Lie*

**Chris Townsend**

Political Action Director, United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE)

**Gore Vidal**

**Rabbi Arthur Waskow**

Chair, The Shalom Center

**Harvey Wasserman**

Author, *Solartopia! Our Green-Powered Earth*

**Cornel West**

**Quentin D. Young MD**

National Coordinator, Physicians for a National Health Program

*\* All endorsements are in alphabetical order are made as individuals, organizational/institutional affiliations are for identification purposes only.*