

# A Second Chance to Unite

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**O**N WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON, November 3, the day after the election, in front of an exhausted crowd of ardent supporters at the Ronald Reagan building, President Bush embraced victory, thanked those who had stood with him, and reaffirmed his commitment to reform the tax code, repair social security, strengthen public schools, sustain the family and faith, and promote democracy in Iraq and Afghanistan. He also made a particular point of addressing "every person who voted for my opponent." Rightly, he declared that he would need their support to make the nation "stronger and better." To earn that support he promised to "reach out to the whole nation." Much for the country will turn on whether these were just pretty conciliatory words crafted specially for the celebratory occasion, or whether the president means his promise and is skillful and wise enough to keep it.

It won't be easy. As the results of the election of settled in, Democrats remain filled with rage while Republicans are still

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giddy with the  
president's convincing  
victory and the pick-up

of four seats in the Senate. Consigned again to minority status in both chambers of Congress, and therefore lacking that stake in lawmaking that brings accountability, Democrats will be inclined to seethe, to snipe, and to obstruct from the sidelines. At the same time, intoxicated with larger majorities, Republicans will be tempted to throw their weight around and press for their programs in their purest and most uncompromising form.

So if he truly wishes to "reach out to the whole nation," President Bush will have his work cut out for him. Yet there are steps which are both consistent with his conservative principles and that in no way require a retreat from his essential agenda that the president can take to show Democrats and Republicans too that he is determined to govern as the president of all the people.

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First, the president could appoint a distinguished Democrat or two to the federal bench. Whereas Senator Kerry indicated in the debates that indeed he had a litmus test for judges--he would never appoint a judge who doubted the constitutional legitimacy of *Roe v. Wade*--Bush insisted that he had no test and instead would look for judges who respected and interpreted the Constitution rather than rewrote to accord with their policy predilections. This implies that judging differs from politics. Bush could now demonstrate the strength of that conviction by selecting a few Democrats with impeccable legal credentials--former Clinton Solicitors General Seth Waxman and Walter Dellinger spring to mind--to serve as Appeals Court judges. And when it comes to filling vacancies on the Supreme Court, Bush will no doubt and quite properly select conservatives, but he should do everything in his power to select jurists who, by virtue of their good character and established records, will command the respect of informed legal opinion.

Second, the president could appoint a "liberal hawk"--a Democrat who supported the war in Iraq and who believes that both American interests and ideals are served by promoting democracy abroad--to a high-level position on his national security or foreign policy team. Such an appointment would help to underscore the surprisingly progressive thrust of this conservative president's program to promote the spread of human freedom beyond America's borders.

Third, Bush could  
bring into his  
administration a

prominent Democrat to help craft policy for the improvement of the nation's public schools.

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Simultaneously, the

president could push for more support for voucher programs. And he could stress that voucher programs and strengthening our failing inner-city public schools are not conflicting policy choices but complementary means of achieving the same end-- quality education for all of America's children.

Fourth, the president could establish a regular process of consultation with the Democratic opposition on Capitol Hill. This could be done through regularly scheduled meetings, casual lunches, and formal and informal solicitation of opinions about possible Supreme Court nominees. Such gestures build trust and confidence, promote the free exchange of opinions, and will increase Democrats' sense of responsibility for governing.

Proceeding in these ways will enable Bush to ascend to the moral high ground, to show that his principles have an appeal that transcends his conservatism, and to keep his promise to reach out to the whole nation.

Many will not be mollified. Some will persist in wallowing in their anger and incredulity. Others will demand that in a country that is bitterly divided Bush should alter his agenda. But Bush is a conservative and it is foolish to demand that he not

govern like one. Nevertheless, there are good conservative reasons and excellent pragmatic reasons for governing as a conciliatory conservative.

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