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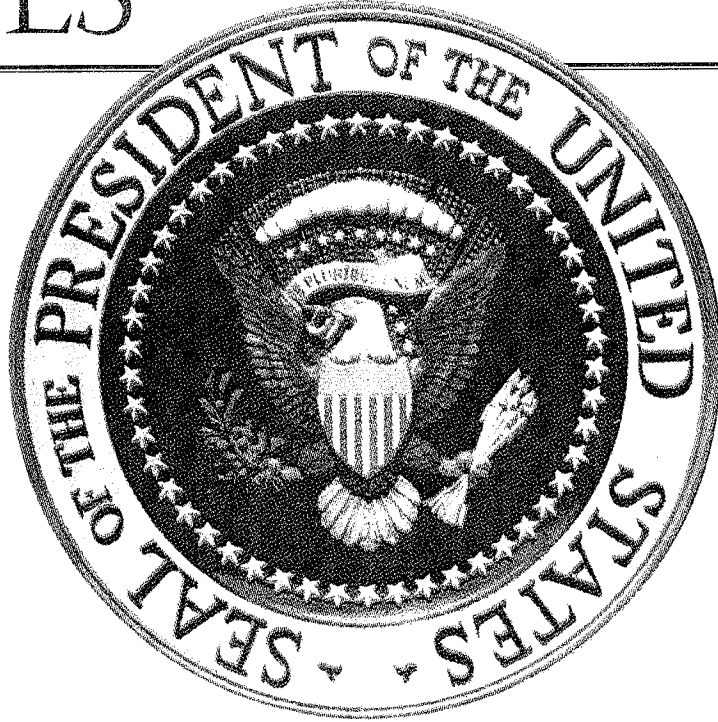
# JOURNAL SENTINEL

2008 PULITZER PRIZE WINNER FOR LOCAL REPORTING

## PERSPECTIVES

44TH PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

### To-do list ✓



## Make government more efficient

By MAX STIER

When it comes to our long-term budgetary outlook, the most immediate and important concern the new president will face is not deciding which campaign promises to put on hold; it's figuring out how to make government run more efficiently and effectively so that it can do the work of the people with increasingly limited means.

In this regard, the new president has his work cut out for him. The federal bureaucracy he will inherit is not even close to operating on all cylinders. It's struggling to keep pace in our increasingly complicated world. Our failure to adequately regulate new financial products like derivatives and credit default swaps contributed to our economic crisis. We import more products from abroad but struggle to keep tainted toys and food out of U.S. homes.

Defense Secretary Robert Gates has talked about how our enemies abroad are better at using new media to get out their message than our government is.

Many of government's operational problems come from a tendency of federal leaders to talk policy and to forget operations. The emphasis on policy is understandable, but it is also a recipe for failure.

There are two fundamental reasons operational issues are prone to be overlooked.

First, it's hard to change what you don't measure, and our government operates in an environment with very few meaningful measurements for performance and operational health. Second, government is run by short-term political leadership that has little incentive to focus on long-term issues.

Here are six things our new president should do as a starting point to improve government effectiveness:

- Get the people piece right. Congress usually tries to fix government by reshuffling the organizational charts. As the 9-11 commission said, "The quality of the people is more important than the quality of the wiring diagrams."

The president should focus on getting the right talent into government, both in civil service and in the 4,000 political appointments he will make. He should start by issuing a call to service during his inauguration. The key to an engaged work force is strong leadership, and he should invest in training and developing the managerial skills of senior government leaders.

- Pick professionals, not politicians. Some of the most important posts the president will fill are senior management posts such as chief financial officers, chief information officers and chief human capital officers. These are non-ideological positions that should be filled with management experts.

- Engage the civilian work force early. The 1.9 million members of our civil service will be the president's greatest asset. He needs to use them. That starts with having his appointed leaders reach out immediately to career employees to let them know that they are integral to achieving his plans.

- Don't throw the baby out with bath water. It's become standard operating procedure for every president to propose his own, new and improved government reform plan. Nothing ever really gets fixed because it's also common practice to wipe out all the work the previous guy did. As a result of starting from scratch every four or eight years, everyone involved — from employees to Congress — has change fatigue and grows skeptical. The new president's early wins should come from an assessment of what is working and building and improving on those efforts.

- Develop measurements to promote accountability. To be effective, the new president must develop metrics to identify what's working and what isn't. Best practices can be replicated across government, and exposed trouble spots can be confronted before they become public problems of Katrina proportion.

- Take ownership of the management issue. Federal managers will not see reform as a priority unless it is a priority for the new president. He must make it clear that management issues are integral to achieving his goals.

Rather than worrying about how to keep a particular campaign promise that requires spending increases, the new president should be focusing on his broader and more important commitment to revitalize our federal government. Improving the way government functions won't be easy, and it isn't likely to grab headlines. But it is essential to achieving the goals of the new administration.

*Max Stier is president and CEO of the Partnership for Public Service, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization working to revitalize the federal government.*