

President Obama's First Year: Gridlock, Compromise, Special Interests

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TRANSITIONS AND THE HUNDRED DAYS

Last year at this conference we talked about presidential transitions and the legendary first hundred days. Scholars point to a “cycle of decreasing influence.” The transition provides a window of opportunity that will not occur again. When a president takes office his approval rating is high, Congress is open to new leadership, and tough decisions have not yet been made that will alienate some. “Ironically the president’s greatest opportunity to make changes may occur when the new president has the least ability to be effective.”

APPROVAL RATINGS

- Approval ratings. At six months in office Obama’s approval rating was at 55%.
- This put his rank at 10 of 12 of presidents since WWII.
- Both Jimmy Carter and G.H.W. Bush had higher ratings at this point then lost re-election bids. Both Bill Clinton and G.W. Bush had lower ratings and would go on to a second term.
- At 10 months Obama’s approval rating was 50%, disapproval was 44%.
- For interactive graphic on presidential approval Google: “Presidential Approval Tracker” USA Today”
- Ratings can affect the success of the president’s agenda. Samuel Kernell’s *Going Public* and Jeffrey Tulis’ *The Rhetorical Presidency* explore aspects of this phenomenon.

PRESIDENTIAL APPOINTMENTS

- For interactive graphics on presidential appointments Google “Presidential Approval Tracker” USA Today”

ISSUES “ON THE TABLE”

- Recession and Economy. The economy was stoked by a nearly \$800 billion stimulus bill. The stimulus and Fed policy likely prevented a depression. In the 3rd Quarter GDP grew suggesting that the worst is over. However, unemployed is high(10.2%) and likely to lag behind other indicators.
- Health Care. A work in progress...
- Afghanistan. In February Obama kept a promise to send additional troops to Afghanistan. This week he committed to sending an additional 30,000 troops and to “begin the end” by July 2011.
- Iran
- Guantanamo Bay. In January he promised to close Guantanamo Bay. Congress refused to appropriate money to close the facility. Where to move the prisoners is unclear.
- Climate Change
- Immigration reform has been delayed.
- Financial issues. Obama unveiled a plan to overhaul financial regulations. Congress has not acted.
- Politifact.com is tracking 515 campaign promises and has designated 25 as the most significant.

GRIDLOCK

- Gridlock is a natural consequence of our system of separation of powers.

COMPROMISE

- Many of Obama’s actions thus far, Afghanistan, Health Care, the Stimulus have resulted from compromises and please few.

SPECIAL INTERESTS

- Obama promised that no former lobbyists would be allowed to work on issues that they had dealt with for at least two years. This is one promise he has broken.