

IDEAS PRIMARY MISSION STATEMENT



On January 20, 2009, our next president will enter the Oval Office faced with enormous challenges – and incredible opportunities.

What will the new administration's top priorities be? What concrete policy proposals will define the White House's new agenda?

The IDEAS PRIMARY is about preparing for that moment, and answering those questions.

Today, the money and endorsement primaries dominate the political echo chamber in Washington. But it is each candidate's ideas that will determine whether or not they win – and where they will take the country.

Over the course of the next 18 months, the IDEAS PRIMARY will work to develop an agenda that the next occupant of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue can use as a policy blueprint for America's future.

By focusing attention on the central challenges facing the nation, we hope to ensure that the next president can hit the ground running.

THE BATTLE OF IDEAS

While the challenges facing the nation are different today, the nation's aspiring leaders must meet a burden similar to the one their predecessors faced in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Then, as now, America was faced with a series of challenges that traditional answers could not solve.

The economy was sluggish, squeezed by increased global competition and soaring health care costs.

Violent crime was rising and law enforcement nationwide seemed outnumbered.

The federal budget had run amok, and long-term fiscal crisis loomed on the horizon.

And a bloated government bureaucracy seemed more focused on sustaining itself than solving the nation's problems.

Fifteen years ago, a group called the Democratic Leadership Council, which is sponsoring the IDEAS PRIMARY, coined the term "New Democrat" to describe those committed to promoting progress, not partisanship.



The DLC's chairman at the time, then-Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton, took the lead, articulating an optimistic vision of the future grounded in a commitment to moving beyond partisan bickering to common sense solutions.

As president, Clinton governed on that credo. His administration proved that exacting fiscal discipline in Washington – turning the federal deficit into a surplus – could serve as the foundation for a healthy, growing economy.

That proactive strategy to combat crime – putting more than 100,000 more police on the street – could effectively stem a nationwide crime wave.

That reforming the welfare system – empowering those stuck in the system to begin to support themselves – could end the cycle of dependency.

That an initiative to make government more accountable could bring Washington's bloated bureaucracy into line.

Above all, that policy makers in Washington could reach beyond Washington, move beyond the special interests that had paralyzed our government, and face the nation's challenges head on.

PUTTING THE “NEW” BACK IN NEW DEMOCRAT

Today the American people are again looking for results-oriented leadership.

Unfortunately, the political debate has returned to the paralysis that has soured so many Americans on the promise of the future. In much the same way Washington seemed paralyzed by partisan differences in the early 1990s, it once again is struggling to make progress.

To face this new set of challenges, in the new landscape of the 21st century, it's crucial that we put the “New” back in New Democrat.

Danger abroad has made Americans question how we can fight terrorism, nuclear proliferation, genocide and helplessness around the globe.

The global economy has created enormous opportunities for growth, but has left some Americans without the tools to compete.

Failures in Iraq and along the Gulf Coast have exposed a federal bureaucracy riddled with cronyism and dysfunction.

The burden of combating global climate change leaves many Americans concerned that their children may be forced to choose between a healthy economy and a healthy planet.



Divisive rhetoric about difficult personal choices seems to overwhelm efforts to ensure that parents can raise their children to be responsible, productive adults.

And at the same time that the wealthiest Americans are benefiting from the Bush tax cuts, many hard-working Americans are still living in poverty.

The nation will only move forward if our leaders are prepared to tackle these challenges head on, with innovative solutions not borne of empty rhetoric or insider dealing – but of new ideas.

THE IDEAS PRIMARY

No matter how much money anyone raises, or how many endorsers stand behind them at a press conference, America will not support leaders who fail to articulate a vision of leadership for the future.

The IDEAS PRIMARY will strive to spark the battle of ideas and inject new solutions into the debate.

Some of the ideas will be good. Others may come up short.

But by the time our next president is elected, the IDEAS PRIMARY will have hosted a battle of ideas, and produced a blueprint for moving the country forward.

May the best ideas win.