

December 22, 2014

President Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

The end of the year and the completion of an unproductive session of Congress is an appropriate time to suggest some important matters for your close attention for next year.

Your visit to the National Institutes of Health, regarding the Ebola peril (December 2<sup>nd</sup>) and your address to some 3,000 Senior Executive Service (SES) members (December 9<sup>th</sup>) are examples of effective uses of your time to highlight the importance of the civil service sector. You helped reverse a widespread feeling among federal employees that they are the focus of what you called a “political climate where folks too often talk down government for cheap applause.” Those who make such arguments against government workers are often politicians seeking or occupying public office. Stereotypical putdowns have a negative effect on morale and initiatives by the very federal employees these politicians expect to implement government policies.

While we have had our serious criticisms of government officials and staff, it is an inescapable fact that the quality of daily governance is significantly due to daily competence and diligence, not just to policy and budgets. A 2013 GAO report cites a lack of governmental employees with certain crucial skills, as well as noting that starting in 2011, about 30 percent of federal employees will be eligible for retirement by 2016.

What you can now do, free of time-consuming fundraising trips, is to schedule well-advanced presidential work days with federal departments and agencies, not just to build up morale and recognize excellence, but to delve into the depths of their missions. For example, procedural protections for conscientious whistle-blowers have improved over the past thirty years, but still have a long way to go. You recognized that point in 2008. There is a need for some hands-on presidential level management reviews and probes that shake agencies out of bad routines and bad practices that prevent improvement of such institutions.

I have spoken to many groups of civil servants and know that granular engagement by the President, which narrows the gap between promise and performance of agencies, together with follow-up by your staff, can lead to remarkable progress, savings and advancement of statutory missions. This is especially the case in the two major areas of federal regulatory enforcement and massive contract procurement. Moreover, Paul Volcker and the Partnership for Public Service

have valuable proposals in the more institutionalized regions of improved governance and recruitment especially from the younger generation of Americans.

As you demonstrated, with examples in your SES remarks, the public should be informed frequently of the heroics performed daily (outside the military sphere) by civil servants in the field. I've found that it is rare for an average American to be able to name even one such heroic person in the civilian federal government.

Politically beating up on an agency like the overwhelmed Internal Revenue Service, presently run by the accomplished John Koskinen, without high-level rebuttals can also lead to self-destructive results. While it is true that the agency needs many reforms including, of course, a fairer tax code, the congressional Republicans have succeeded in cutting the budget of the IRS once again, this time to under \$11 billion (to collect 90% of federal revenue). So tightly squeezed, the IRS simply cannot service taxpayer inquiries, without inordinate waiting, cannot effectively audit giant global companies, and cannot collect more of the over \$300 billion of uncollected taxes every year! So the vindictive GOP is increasing the federal deficit by its loutish behavior, as well as burdening complying taxpayers. Isn't there a role for the White House here?

Another upcoming issue – the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) – requires your personal attention. Coming off your criticism of NAFTA and the WTO during your 2008 campaign, you should be responsive to the brazenly autocratic provisions over-riding due process, openness and our legislative, executive and judicial branches of government, in addition to your earlier 2008 recognition of subordinating workers, environmental and consumer standards to commercial imperatives.

No doubt your advisors are informing you that any fast track shipment to Congress of this proposed trade agreement – really a treaty – will confront a formidable Left-Right alliance in the House of Representatives. The American people, increasingly informed by their local experience of hollowed out communities and lost jobs, as well as other adversities of NAFTA and the WTO, are turning against this relentlessly ongoing silent coup d'état by U.S. global corporations and their gross lack of patriotism (you have recently described corporate inversions as unpatriotic). As your Harvard Law professors always counsel – read the full text! See attached chapter from my book *The Good Fight: Declare Your Independence and Close the Democracy Gap* (2004).

Finally, why not have a White House Conference on the consumer/worker/retiree side of our economy. Listen to the experts on private pension looting or the sacrifices small savers are making due to a lower than ½ of 1% interest rate, compliments of the Federal Reserve, that is pressing for a 2% consumer index inflation rate, to the many-faceted epidemic of corporate crime – facilitated by the fine print contract peonage (that you and Senator Elizabeth Warren have alluded to, see faircontracts.org) to the sophisticated gouging and wrongful injuries of consumers and workers stripped of usable legal remedies and access to the courts. Special attention should be given to proposed easier facilities for consumer, in their varied roles,

workers, and small taxpayers for voluntarily banding together to defend and negotiate their rightful interests. A significant shift of power from the few to the many is long overdue.

With over two years to go and no electoral restraints from the plutocracy to be concerned about, you are free to call on the “better angels” of your presidential potential for the citizenry and posterity here and around the world. There is still a chance for *some* “hope and change,” is there not?

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ralph Nader". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Ralph" and last name "Nader" clearly distinguishable.

Ralph Nader

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Enclosure – 1