

**Time for Change at Hand**

**By Sam Farr**

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The campaign to put President-Elect Barack Obama in the White House may have lasted nearly two years, but I have to say it was worth every second. The excitement is still palpable across the country (indeed, across the globe) and it's an exhilarating time to be serving in Washington.

But it's imperative that we quickly change gears. We've been planning for this day for so long, but now we need action. We can't squander this historic opportunity. We have so much work to do, both in repairing damage done over the past eight years and tackling issues that have been largely ignored.

I think there are four main areas where Washington will focus its attention in 2009: the economy, health care, the environment and foreign affairs.

Everyone knows the economy has imploded. It probably played a larger role in the presidential election than any other issue. Exit polls show 85 percent of voters are worried about economic conditions in the country. Of those who believe the economy is faring poorly, two-thirds voted for Obama. He is clearly the leader that Americans trust to turn our economic woes around.

Health care is another concern shared by many Americans, especially in an economy where jobs are seen as insecure. Millions of Americans get their health coverage through their employers, and many are worried that if they lose their job, their families lose access to health care.

Obama's plan to provide health coverage to the many millions of Americans who lack insurance is ambitious and will improve many lives. And while the economic problems we face may delay its full implementation, it's long past time that we see wholesale reform of our medical insurance system.

I am also hopeful that this will have direct effects on the Central Coast, where our doctors for years have received lower Medicare compensation than they are entitled to. I will continue my fight to correct this flaw and make sure our doctors receive the compensation they deserve and our neighbors maintain access to doctors who can provide them with the best care possible.

Another area where Central Coast values sync up so well with President-Elect Obama is on the environment. He is a strong supporter of green technology. He supports legislation that will address climate change. He's a proponent of alternative fuel sources. And he has vowed to work with Congress to put these changes into place.

I will be reintroducing my oceans legislation, Oceans-21, in January. We came very close to getting the bill passed this year, but it bogged down under the threat of offshore drilling amendments. As you may expect, I wasn't too keen on the GOP plan to open all waters to drilling. And I'm pretty sure most Central Coast residents aren't too keen on seeing an oil rig pop up in the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary.

With the drilling issue quieting down and oil prices plunging, we expect an easier time next year and we'll begin pushing that bill as soon as possible.

But it's not only domestic areas where Obama has an opportunity to bring about dramatic change. He also has the chance to re-define our nation in the eyes of the world.

Let's face it: our image is tarnished nearly beyond recognition. During the first Gulf War, President Bush's father crafted a coalition of nearly three dozen nations and had the support of the world. His son unilaterally attacked Iraq, and we've paying for that blunder ever since.

It's true that the economic meltdown has bumped the war in Iraq off the radar for many Americans. But it's still a top issue in Washington and one that must be addressed. Obama has promised to responsibly bring about an end to the war and place the rebuilding in the hands of Iraqis, where it rightfully belongs. Even Iraqi leaders agree that it's time to step up to the plate, and Obama is in a strong position to help Iraq finally achieve the peace it deserves.

The United States should strive to be an example for other nations, both developing countries and established powers. But we can't do that by shooting from the hip. We can only take our place in the world community by forging effective partnerships and engaging in broad diplomatic efforts.

The bottom line is that everyone expects a lot out of our new president. We must keep our expectations realistic (Rome wasn't built in a day, after all), but we also need to maintain the momentum created during the election. Only together can we truly bring about the revolution that so many of us long for.