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OBAMA AND GATES

LEADERSHIP & WORLD CHANGE

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I'm sorry guys that's not going to work. If you want to get done what you're talking about you will have to combine effective philanthropy and technical know-how and smart policy engineering with getting your hands dirty trying to change public opinion and trying to ensure that the people who are in charge of the levers of power are responsive.

Melinda Gates: Talk to us a little bit about how you think of movements around the world and the power of those now and what leaders can learn from them?

Barack Obama: Well, I'd make a couple of observations. Number one is that... most big change, most human progress is driven by young people who don't know any better and figure why can't we do something different.

Old people get comfortable or cranky or protective of their status or set in their ways. There is a reason why if you look at, for example, here in the United States, the civil rights movement. The leaders of those movements were in their 20s. Doctor King was 26 when he started, 39 when he was killed and if you, if you canvas the world oftentimes that is the impetus. People asking in ways that I think are familiar to many. Not, why not but or not why but why not. Why do things have to be the way they are? So that's point number one that young people I think can make an enormous difference. Number two is that because most of us now, either live in democracies or countries that purport to be democracies, because we have won the battle of ideas that says governments and our common efforts have to be rooted in the legitimacy of people. There is more power than ever in people being able to band together and collectively push for initiatives that are going to make change in their lives.

That's something that for most of human history was unimaginable. That is one of the amazing transitions that has taken place and you will notice that even in autocracies today there is at least the pretense of democracy because people believe that governments that are rooted in people are more legitimate. And we... that's a battle we won and now have to make real, wherever we can. That's point number two.

Point number three is simple math. In most places if you want to get something done, whether it's a smarter climate change policy or health care for people or more funding for girls education, you've got to have a majority of people supporting it. You got to have votes. You have to have the allocation of resources and that requires mobilization and a game of addition rather than subtraction. So, and the fourth point I would make would be the internet now has turbocharged the capacity for us to develop movements in ways that we had not imagined before.

Now, the last thing I'll say so that I don't sound like I'm in the still in US Senate and filibustering... is... I guess a smaller point but a profound one that I tried to reinforce with my staff at every level of my public work and continue to do to this day. I actually think, organizing, mobilizing, starting movements, starts with a story. And you can't create a story that moves large numbers of people unless you are able to listen and hear to the story of the person next to you. The story of your neighbors, the stories of your co-workers, the stories of your community, the story of people who are not like you. And so, one of the things that I think is important is for us to learn how to listen to each other and learn how it is that we came to be who we are, think the way we do, because that understanding of other people stories is how you end up ultimately forging bonds and creating the glue that creates movements. Every great movement... you think about Gandhi and in India. It started with his understanding of India's story and his own story and seeing Indians in South Africa discriminated against and recognizing that there were traditions and myths and a power in those stories that ended up driving out the most powerful empire on earth. It wasn't guns and increasingly that will be the case, and certainly that will be the case, if we're able... if we want to move forward the sustainable development goals that we're talking about is we've got to be able to tell a story of not only to big donors or politicians, but also to for example, people here in the United States who may feel, like look I've got my own problems why should I be worrying about somebody on the other side of the world?

Bill Gates: You have to say when we got in the philanthropy and particularly study global health. We were stunned at the progress. We had, we'd had no idea

and it's kind of amazing if you ask even very well-educated people, you know, what's happened with vaccination? What's happened with HIV? They don't know the positive story and a little bit the news is always going to focus on the setbacks because that's what happened that day the gradual progress doesn't fit that paradigm and even people who raise money for these causes I have to say, you know, sometimes even some of the material we create is talking about the piece that remains as though it's never improved. Do you have any thoughts on how we get this more positive sense of progress going? And what... how we would get that word out?

Barack Obama: Well look, you're talking to somebody who for seven years tried to get the word out and nobody... at least about 40% of the country didn't believe me until I was gone and then suddenly they believed it they said things were great. So, with that caveat I make a couple observations. One, you're right Bill. There is... the nature of the media and maybe just the human brain is to fasten on what's wrong not on what's right. And I'm not sure we're gonna be able to change that, right? Visual displays of a fire are much more interesting than just a building sitting there and so the fire is gonna make the news, the building sitting there nicely and people are walking their dogs in front of it and stuff that will not make the news. So, I don't think that we can count on conventional media necessarily to spread the word. This is though where the power of the internet has not, I think, been harnessed the way it needs to be. Particularly when we think about young people and young audiences.

Malia and Sasha consume information differently than I do and I think that those of us who've been involved with policy work are still putting out these reports with pie charts and this and that and that's not interesting to them but stories and visual representations of progress can go viral. There's a hunger for it. It's just that we don't systematically think about it and so I think when the three of us were talking a while back I mentioned that one of the one of the areas that I'm deeply interested in is how do we build a digital platform whereby people can go to find out what's happening that is moving the progress on issues and then activates them. Because I heard somebody, I think maybe Trevor, saying an important point what... I'm very interested in how online communities can move offline. How this incredible power to convene through hashtags and tweets and this and that and the other eventually leads to people meeting each other and talking to each other.

And I think that we have not fully tapped that as a way of spreading the word about progress that has been made. I also think it is important for us to put some friendly

pressure on leaders to tell good stories and to make sure that we don't... that we aren't so rigid in our partisanship or ideologies that we are not willing to acknowledge and share when somebody who might be of a different political persuasion has done something really good even if it runs contrary to our short-term political interests, I mean, I always used to say as big as the differences were between me and my present predecessor George W. Bush, that what his administration initiated with PEPFAR was a singularly important achievement that we needed to sustain and build on. And I didn't think that somehow detracted for me to say that somebody from another political party did something really smart and really good and deserve credit for it. And I feel as if these days with... within our political circles, that's a hard thing for people to bring themselves to do.

Melinda Gates: One of the things that Bill and I had the great privilege of doing when you were in The White House late in your presidency was spending a little bit of casual time on a Saturday night and your daughters were in and out of your home, Malia and Sasha, and you've been to our house earlier this summer and saw Rory and Phoebe, two of our three in and out of our house. Our daughter Jen is here in the front row. Tell me about...

Barack Obama: Jen's like, thanks, mom.

Melinda Gates: Yeah, sorry.

Barack Obama: That's our job to embarrass you. That's what we do.

Melinda Gates: But you know, Jen's about the age of your girls a little bit older but how have you and Michelle thought about talking to your children about being leaders in the world and taking up this mantle of what needs to be done in the world?

Barack Obama: Well, what we've tried to communicate their entire lives is that each of us has responsibilities. When they were small the responsibilities were small like say when you want to go potty, and then... As you get older your responsibilities grow, and but part of what I think to try to communicate is that being responsible is an enormous privilege. That's what marks you as a fully grown human is that you that other people rely on you that you have influence that you can make your mark that if you do something well that will improve other people's lives. That... the kinds of values that we've tried to instill many of them your basic homespun values like kindness and consideration and empathy and hard work.

That those are tools by which you can shape the world around you in a way that feels good. And... so what we've tried to encourage is that the sense that it's not somebody else's job, it's your job. And I think that is that's a ethic that they've embraced. Now they will choose to participate in different ways because they have different temperaments different strengths. I think one of the mistakes that we sometimes make is to think that there's just one way of making a difference or being involved. If you are a brilliant engineer you don't have to make a speech you can create an app that allows an amplification or the scaling up of some something that is really powerful. If you are somebody who likes to care for people you don't have to go out and lead the protest march you can mentor some kids or work at a local health clinic that is going to make a difference. So there are a lot of different ways in which to make a contribution and we try to emphasize that... that to them as well, and then the third thing that we try to encourage is what I mentioned in my earlier remarks, which is that you have to be persistent.

I always tell people that my early work as a community organizer in Chicago taught me an incredible amount, but I didn't set the world on fire. You know, I got some public parks for communities that needed them I started some after-school programs. We helped set up a job training program for people who had been laid off work, but those communities weren't suddenly transformed.

They still had huge problems but I took that experience, and then I was able to build on it and I think so often we get impatient because change does not look as if... sometimes it's not as discernible or immediate or impactful as we had imagined in our minds, and we get disappointed and we get frustrated.

Melinda Gates: Bill did you have one last question?

Bill Gates: Yeah, so this week... part of the reason we're all in New York is the United Nations is meeting and some of these global institutions were created right after World War II, World Bank, World Health Organization, UNICEF. They've been key partners for many of these causes and yet there is definitely cynicism about their bureaucracy their efficiency and their ability to change in fact very few exceptions like Global Fund and Gavi, we haven't had any new ones. So, over the next 10 or 20 years, do you think these global institutions in terms of reform or creating new ones... for pandemics and climate change, can they step up to play the role we need them to play?

Barack Obama: Well, let me first of all say that the biggest problems we confront no one nation is going to be able to solve on its own. Not even a nation as powerful as the United States of America. There are times during my presidency where I was attacked for not claiming that we could go on our own as if that was an expression of weakness. No, I believe that the United States is in fact an indispensable nation and that many of the initiatives and much of the progress that we've made could not have been done unless we underwrote those efforts. And I'll use as an example of our handling of Ebola, which in retrospect, I think a lot of historians would argue was one of the if not the most effective emergency public health intervention in history. We had to create the architecture and the infrastructure and send our military in to create runways where the Chinese could then land planes to deliver goods. We had to provide guarantees to the Europeans so that if they sent health workers they could feel some assurance that they could be medevaced out if they got infected.

So, I take great pride in what the United States can do, but if we're talking about climate change or global migration spurred on by drought or famine or, you know, ethnic conflicts, we're not gonna be able to solve those things by ourselves and as you as you indicated Bill some... if we get an airborne pandemic unlike a slow-moving, slow disease that's difficult to transmit like Ebola, if we haven't built ahead of time some some structures to deal with this millions of people could be adversely impacted. So, number one you have to start with the premise and believe that multilateral institutions and efforts are important. And you don't have to cede all your sovereignty or it doesn't make you less patriotic to believe that. You just have to have some sense and read. So, that's point number one. Point number two is that in fact there are problems with existing multilateral institutions. Not surprisingly. They were designed post World War II for the most part and they couldn't have anticipated everything that's happened. There is bureaucracy and inertia and resistance to reform. So, it is important for every country, every leader, to be honest about the need for reform and not simply think narrowly about well I want to keep certain numbers of slots or votes or this or that. At least on many of the issues where there shouldn't be a big ideological controversy. Look, reforming the security council that's something that goes to core geopolitical interests and is a huge difficult and perhaps of unachievable goal anytime soon. On the other hand making sure that the WHO works well. And that we have a sufficient security trigger when a pandemic or something else happens. That is achievable, and it shouldn't be controversial. It's just a matter of digging in and getting the work done.

When it comes to girls education there may be cultural resistance in some places to actually getting it done but generally speaking. There's not a... there aren't that many folks who will explicitly say I'm sorry, we don't want to educate our girls and women. As a practical matter they may... you may see that in certain countries but at the level of our multilateral institutions there should be a broad consensus and so what I would hope for is that we come up with concrete plans in those areas oftentimes with respect to the sustainable development goals are areas where there is a consensus on at least the aims if not always the means and think about how can we improve delivery systems, how can we improve their operations on a day-to-day basis, but ultimately, the last point I will make that requires leaders to feel as if it matters and is important. That in turn requires the public, think that it matters and is important because unfortunately what you discover is that most politicians and elected leaders are followers and not leaders.

They see what do their constituencies care about and they respond. And one of the biggest challenges that we've had is that, and I speak most intimately about the United States, the general public responds with enormous generosity when they see a specific story of a child who's hungry or somebody who's been stricken by, you know, a flood but when it comes to just a general knowledge or interest in development funding not only do they not know much but they oftentimes have a negative reaction because their view is we've got a lot of needs here at home. Why are we sending money overseas?

Sadly, it is one of the area the only areas where democrats and republicans agree in this in the United States is on foreign aid and repeatedly you've seen public opinion surveys where people wildly overestimate what we spend on foreign aid they think 25% of the federal budget is going to foreign aid and helping people other than folks in their towns and their communities. So, the need for public education in the ways we talked about that promote... that tell a good story that point out that this is actually a bargain. That connect what we do with respect to development to security not in a perfect correlation, but to say that look if you've got failed states then generally some of that's going to spill over on us. If you have economies that are failing, ironically if you are concerned about immigration and mass migration it's really a good investment to make countries work so that people can eat because then... it's not like they're dying to get on a dinghy and float across an ocean if the place, the country where they were born and they loved was functioning. So, thinking about ways in which we describe this both as an economic imperative, a environmental imperative, a security imperative, the more we can influence public opinion the more you'll see politicians respond. That doesn't mean that there is not an enormous role to play for NGOs, philanthropy, and so forth, but and I've said

this to both, Bill and Melinda, even with the incredible generosity and enormous skill with which they've deployed their resources over the years the US budget still bigger.

Melinda Gates: A lot bigger, a lot.

Barack Obama: This notion that you can... that I hear sometimes from young people that you can work around government and work around politics because it's too messy or it's corrupt or it's, you know, I just don't like those folks or what-have-you. I'm sorry guys that's not going to work. If you want to get done what you're talking about you will have to combine effective philanthropy and technical know-how and smart policy engineering with getting your hands dirty trying to change public opinion and trying to ensure that the people who are in charge of the levers of power are responsive. And that will require work and I guarantee you will be disappointed at points. But what a glorious thing it is to be responsible for saving the world. That's your responsibility and ours. Thanks.

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