

# The Big Picture

Issue 24  
24<sup>th</sup> January 2009

“News to use & amuse”



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## Leadership

I'm sure I'm not alone in being more stimulated by Obama's talk about a country that's thousands of miles distant than by listening to our politicians talk about ours?

The structure and style of Obama's speeches differentiate him from most other self-proclaimed 'leaders'. In reading his speech (presented in full at the end of this newsletter) I was struck by how totally different his words were to those of our Australian political 'leaders' – some have described his language as '[poetry](#)'.

Good leaders inspire followers to act together to achieve stated ends. Real leaders work from the front – they show the way – they show how – they encourage and provide succour – they support – they make change desirable and possible.

Good leaders can do this because they clearly understand the need for change. They use language that appeals to a wide variety of preferences and they balance universal appeals with enough detail to show where they stand.

Barack Obama has certainly made a good start in exhibiting these qualities. He ties together the needs of the day with the efforts of others in US history. He uses visual, kinesthetic, abstract and [synesthetic](#) language to appeal to the broadest audience. He paints a future of hope to help motivate followers to work in a useful direction.

**History** - For us, they fought and died, in places like Concord and Gettysburg; Normandy and Khe Sahn.

**Kinesthetic** - Time and again these men and women struggled and sacrificed and worked till their hands were raw so that we might live a better life.

**Visual** - They saw America as bigger than the sum of our individual ambitions; greater than all the differences of birth or wealth or faction.

**Future** - We will restore science to its rightful place, and wield technology's wonders to raise health care's quality and lower its cost. We will harness the sun and the winds and the soil to fuel our cars and run our factories.

Many of Obama's speeches display these same characteristics – the characteristics of multiple synesthesias and synthesis of ideas. (see [TED video on neuroscience](#))

**Synesthesia** - We are shaped by every language and culture, drawn from every end of this Earth; and because we have tasted the bitter swill of civil war and segregation, and emerged from that dark chapter stronger and more united...

Focussing on the positive even when describing negatives...

Now, there are some who question the scale of our ambitions - who suggest that our system cannot tolerate too many big plans. Their memories are short. For they have forgotten what this country has already done; what free men and women can achieve when imagination is joined to common purpose, and necessity to courage.

He also establishes rapport early with the audience, by naming and recognising the problems that they face.

Our nation is at war, against a far-reaching network of violence and hatred. Our economy is badly weakened, a consequence of greed and irresponsibility on the part of some, but also our collective failure to make hard choices and prepare the nation for a new age. Homes have been lost; jobs shed; businesses shuttered. Our health care is too costly; our schools fail too many; and each day brings further evidence that the ways we use energy strengthen our adversaries and threaten our planet.

Define the roles and attitudes of followers...

What is required of us now is a new era of responsibility - a recognition, on the part of every American, that we have duties to ourselves, our nation, and the world, duties that we do not grudgingly accept but rather seize gladly, firm in the knowledge that there is nothing so satisfying to the spirit, so defining of our character, than giving our all to a difficult task

Obama has set himself a mammoth task – but he shows no fear or hesitation in taking it on because it's worthwhile.

Some argue that he'll never deliver but that is not his role – his role remains to lead his followers to create the changes necessary to create a better America.

We will restore science to its rightful place, and wield technology's wonders to raise health care's quality and lower its cost. We will harness the sun and the winds and the soil to fuel our cars and run our factories. And we will transform our schools and colleges and universities to meet the demands of a new age.

It seems as though Obama said more in 40 minutes than I've heard from our politicians in years.

I still don't know what the vision for Australia is, or the vision for any of its states. Where are our politicians taking us? Why? What is our role? Are we just consumers here to swap our resources and lives for plasma TVs and big 4 x 4s?

As far as I can see, Australia's future is a blank slate.

As community members, writers and activists, it may serve us to study how Obama articulates the ideas of change and apply those lessons to our own situation. If Obama can generate such energy in the US after a period of Bushism, surely that same energy can be generated here.

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## Do we need a new coalition?

One characteristic of human conflict is that it almost always involves 2 groups – from 2 teams in sport to 2 sides in war.

This characteristic may be hard wired into our neurology, it may be learned, purely pragmatic or some combination, but 2 groups usually seem to result.

In our past, the power of money was represented by the conservative parties. In response to various deprivations in the factories of the industrial revolution, workers sought to gain power via Labor and Socialist type parties and we developed a 2 party system.

In recent times those 2 parties have begun to appear self similar, both supporting capital and using the role of government to support corporate interests. They are becoming a monopoly with the main difference being the more open role of unions in Labor.

Green parties emerged in response to the need to protect the environment. Despite the obvious validity of Green messages, their portion of the vote does not seem to increase significantly. My best explanation of this is that Green politicians spend very little time including capital and labor interests in their vision for the future so their audience remains fairly constant.

In fact, to make sustainable decisions, all 3 areas (capital, labor and environment) need to be considered carefully. It is how these areas are balanced that produces sustainable futures - it is imbalance that produces disastrous futures.

Australia's external debt in 2007 was over \$825 billion while our current account (what we bought minus what we sold) was over \$55 billion in the red. It's pretty obvious that we cannot continue to borrow from the rest of the world without penalty so one imperative would be for us to become more self sufficient so that we can supply more of our own needs and start to pay off our debts, first stopping it growing by \$55 bn each year.

Such a goal would create many jobs, create new demands on our education systems and help us to find new ways to add value to our lives – it would provide a national sense of purpose along with generating new wealth and probably be exciting.

Creating such a vision is a great opportunity to engage communities by finding out what they need and building a vision that is as inclusive as possible and is probably a better approach than leaving it up to our current crop of politicians and vested interests.

The opportunities presented by climate change, the financial collapse and a Republic could all be brought together to define a more diverse and involved Australia, particularly to the extent that it could set us free from the concept of the 'Crown' controlling everything.

It's an opportunity to slash regulation and costs, redesign government and its services and bring communities back into decision making.

Australia's real future may well be decided by how well a coalition of interest can mount its case and how well it can devise a practical future (vision) that speaks to wider groups of supporters than Lib/Lab alone.

After all, how hard can it be to define something more attractive than 'more of the same'?

## In case you missed it

### Financial mess

German banks face billions more in losses [DailyTelegraph](#)

Investors dump \$89 bn in US securities [USAToday](#)

A warning we cannot afford to ignore [TheAge](#)

Shares dive to 5 year low [HeraldSun](#)

Economists defy govt – Vic in recessions [TheAge](#)

### Governance

Rudd's war on the middle class [SMH](#)

Rudd gives his advisers a raise [HeraldSun](#)

Secret police lists lost [TheAge](#)

Asking why we need taxes [SMH](#)

### Environment/food/water/forestry

Hundreds storm logging site [Mercury](#)

Thin trees to save MDB [WeeklyTimesNow](#)

Coal River dam fails [Mercury](#)

Rebel MDB irrigators defy Canberra [TheAustralian](#)

Vic water rebates flow to wealthy [TheAge](#)

### Climate

Turnbull goes harder on emissions [TheAge](#) [TheAustralian](#)

Coal industry at risk from ETS [TheAustralian](#)

Antarctic ice sheet into the red [SMH](#)

Clean coal plan dirtied by ETS [TheAustralian](#)

### Social/shelter

Queueing for work [SMH](#)

### Health & education revolution

Tougher rules for drug companies [TheAge](#)

Overseas students pull out of Australia [TheAustralian](#)

### Communications/transport/energy

Energy sector could be starved of funds [TheAustralian](#)

Melbourne rail network meltdown [TheAge](#)

Air transport chaos in prospect [TheAge](#)

### World

Obama - Aid to Gaza, shut Gitmo, renounce torture [SMH](#)

## Stuff

This gem from [MDS Financial's newsletter](#)

The best performing Australian Equities manager for 2008 was the BT Imputation Fund, which returned negative 34.60%.

Imagine the fund manager's marketing people telling you about the fantastic return and the market outperformance of the index, if you had 100k invested in this best performing fund, you only lose over 34k in 12 months. The other catch phrase that gets played a lot in the managed fund and financial planning industries is that you should look at your returns over the longer term - in this case the before mentioned fund returned 3.82% per annum over three years. Wow!

## New directions in fitness

January 22, 2009 [DailyTelegraph](#)

A GYM in London has replaced its dumbbells with human weights - including dwarves who shout encouragement to motivate exercise.

Gymbox at Bank - in the centre of the capital's financial district - introduced its bizarre fitness regime with human weights ranging from a 155kg man to a 30kg female...

## Fortune Frowns on Lying CEOs

Source: Fortune, January 6, 2009

"An angry mob of investors and taxpayers is assembling, and they want to see some executives' heads on pikes," reports *Fortune* magazine's Roger Parloff. "The question for the courts will be, Who was just foolish with our money - and who was lying, cheating, and stealing?" Under the law, corporate executives are guilty of securities fraud if they misrepresent the truth about their companies' financial condition. When times are tough, Parloff notes, CEOs are tempted to "willfully paint a disingenuously rosy picture featuring lots of gilded lilies. The problem with this tack is that, while it might get the company through a rough patch, the executive is certainly committing civil fraud, and if the company crashes and burns anyway, he may also go to prison." Some of the companies he thinks may help populate prison include:

- [Bear Stearns](#), where the founder and portfolio manager of two hedge funds have been charged with making false statements in the final months of the funds' demise, and whose CEO declared "Our liquidity and balance sheet are strong" just 36 hours before seeking emergency funding.
- [AIG's](#) Joseph Cassano, who said he was "highly confident that we will have no realized losses" on the company's [credit default swaps](#) portfolios less than three months before they posted more than \$11 billion in losses.
- [Lehman Brothers](#) CEO Dick Fuld Jr., who assured investors that the company had \$42 billion in liquidity just five days before the company filed for bankruptcy. "How does \$42 billion vanish in five days," Parloff writes, "and did Lehman officers know then of any harbingers of doom that they weren't sharing?"
- The former CEOs of [Fannie Mae](#) and [Freddie Mac](#), who made reassuring statements about their companies' capitalization levels two months before it turned out they were \$75 billion short.

## Obama's inauguration speech

My fellow citizens,

I stand here today humbled by the task before us, grateful for the trust you have bestowed, mindful of the sacrifices borne by our ancestors. I thank President Bush for his service to our nation, as well as the generosity and co-operation he has shown throughout this transition.

Forty-four Americans have now taken the presidential oath. The words have been spoken during rising tides of prosperity and the still waters of peace. Yet, every so often the oath is taken amidst gathering clouds and raging storms. At these moments, America has carried on not simply because of the skill or vision of those in high office, but because we the people have remained faithful to the ideals of our forbearers, and true to our founding documents.

So it has been. So it must be with this generation of Americans.

That we are in the midst of crisis is now well understood. Our nation is at war, against a far-reaching network of violence and hatred. Our economy is badly weakened, a consequence of greed and irresponsibility on the part of some, but also our collective failure to make hard choices and prepare the nation for a new age. Homes have been lost; jobs shed; businesses shuttered. Our health care is too costly; our schools fail too many; and each day brings further evidence that the ways we use energy strengthen our adversaries and threaten our planet.

These are the indicators of crisis, subject to data and statistics. Less measurable but no less profound is a sapping of confidence across our land - a nagging fear that America's decline is inevitable, and that the next generation must lower its sights.

Today I say to you that the challenges we face are real. They are serious and they are many. They will not be met easily or in a short span of time. But know this, America - they will be met.

On this day, we gather because we have chosen hope over fear, unity of purpose over conflict and discord.

On this day, we come to proclaim an end to the petty grievances and false promises, the recriminations and worn out dogmas, that for far too long have strangled our politics.

We remain a young nation, but in the words of scripture, the time has come to set aside childish things. The time has come to reaffirm our enduring spirit; to choose our better history; to carry forward that precious gift, that noble idea, passed on from generation to generation: the God-given promise that all are equal, all are free, and all deserve a chance to pursue their full measure of happiness.

In reaffirming the greatness of our nation, we understand that greatness is never a given. It must be earned. Our journey has never been one of short-cuts or settling for less. It has not been the path for the faint-hearted - for those who prefer leisure over work, or seek only the pleasures of riches and fame. Rather, it has been the risk-takers, the doers, the makers of things - some celebrated but more often men and women obscure in their labor, who have carried us up the long, rugged path towards prosperity and freedom.

For us, they packed up their few worldly possessions and travelled across oceans in search of a new life.

For us, they toiled in sweatshops and settled the West; endured the lash of the whip and ploughed the hard earth.

For us, they fought and died, in places like Concord and Gettysburg; Normandy and Khe Sahn.

Time and again these men and women struggled and sacrificed and worked till their hands were raw so that we might live a better life. They saw America as bigger than the sum of our individual ambitions; greater than all the differences of birth or wealth or faction.

This is the journey we continue today. We remain the most prosperous, powerful nation on Earth. Our workers are no less productive than when this crisis began. Our minds are no less inventive, our goods and services no less needed than they were last week or last month or last year. Our capacity remains undiminished. But our time of standing pat, of protecting narrow interests and putting off unpleasant decisions - that time has surely passed. Starting today, we must pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off, and begin again the work of remaking America.

For everywhere we look, there is work to be done. The state of the economy calls for action, bold and swift, and we will act - not only to create new jobs, but to lay a new foundation for growth. We will build the roads and bridges, the electric grids and digital lines that feed our commerce and bind us together. We will restore science to its rightful place, and wield technology's wonders to raise health care's quality and lower its cost. We will harness the sun and the winds and the soil to fuel our cars and run our factories. And we will transform our schools and colleges and universities to meet the demands of a new age. All this we can do. And all this we will do.

Now, there are some who question the scale of our ambitions - who suggest that our system cannot tolerate too many big plans. Their memories are short. For they have forgotten what this country has already done; what free men and women can achieve when imagination is joined to common purpose, and necessity to courage.

What the cynics fail to understand is that the ground has shifted beneath them - that the stale political arguments that have consumed us for so long no longer apply. The question we ask today is not whether our government is too big or too small, but whether it works - whether it helps families find jobs at a decent wage, care they can afford, a retirement that is dignified. Where the answer is yes, we intend to move forward. Where the answer is no, programs will end. And those of us who manage the public's dollars will be held to account - to spend wisely, reform bad habits, and do our business in the light of day - because only then can we restore the vital trust between a people and their government.

Nor is the question before us whether the market is a force for good or ill. Its power to generate wealth and expand freedom is unmatched, but this crisis has reminded us that without a watchful eye, the market can spin out of control - and that a nation cannot prosper long when it favours only the prosperous. The success of our economy has always depended not just on the size of our Gross Domestic Product, but on the reach of our prosperity; on our ability to extend opportunity to every willing heart - not out of charity, but because it is the surest route to our common good.

As for our common defence, we reject as false the choice between our safety and our ideals. Our Founding Fathers, faced with perils we can scarcely imagine, drafted a charter to assure the rule of law and the rights of man, a charter expanded by the blood of generations. Those ideals still light the world, and we will not give them up for expedience's sake. And so to all other peoples and governments who are watching today, from the

grandest capitals to the small village where my father was born: know that America is a friend of each nation and every man, woman, and child who seeks a future of peace and dignity, and that we are ready to lead once more.

Recall that earlier generations faced down fascism and communism not just with missiles and tanks, but with sturdy alliances and enduring convictions. They understood that our power alone cannot protect us, nor does it entitle us to do as we please. Instead, they knew that our power grows through its prudent use; our security emanates from the justness of our cause, the force of our example, the tempering qualities of humility and restraint.

We are the keepers of this legacy. Guided by these principles once more, we can meet those new threats that demand even greater effort - even greater co-operation and understanding between nations. We will begin to responsibly leave Iraq to its people, and forge a hard-earned peace in Afghanistan. With old friends and former foes, we will work tirelessly to lessen the nuclear threat, and roll back the specter of a warming planet. We will not apologise for our way of life, nor will we waver in its defence, and for those who seek to advance their aims by inducing terror and slaughtering innocents, we say to you now that our spirit is stronger and cannot be broken; you cannot outlast us, and we will defeat you.

For we know that our patchwork heritage is a strength, not a weakness. We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus - and non-believers. We are shaped by every language and culture, drawn from every end of this Earth; and because we have tasted the bitter swill of civil war and segregation, and emerged from that dark chapter stronger and more united, we cannot help but believe that the old hatreds shall someday pass; that the lines of tribe shall soon dissolve; that as the world grows smaller, our common humanity shall reveal itself; and that America must play its role in ushering in a new era of peace.

To the Muslim world, we seek a new way forward, based on mutual interest and mutual respect. To those leaders around the globe who seek to sow conflict, or blame their society's ills on the West - know that your people will judge you on what you can build, not what you destroy. To those who cling to power through corruption and deceit and the silencing of dissent, know that you are on the wrong side of history; but that we will extend a hand if you are willing to unclench your fist.

To the people of poor nations, we pledge to work alongside you to make your farms flourish and let clean waters flow; to nourish starved bodies and feed hungry minds. And to those nations like ours that enjoy relative plenty, we say we can no longer afford indifference to suffering outside our borders; nor can we consume the world's resources without regard to effect. For the world has changed, and we must change with it.

As we consider the road that unfolds before us, we remember with humble gratitude those brave Americans who, at this very hour, patrol far-off deserts and distant mountains. They have something to tell us today, just as the fallen heroes who lie in Arlington whisper through the ages. We honour them not only because they are guardians of our liberty, but because they embody the spirit of service; a willingness to find meaning in something greater than themselves. And yet, at this moment - a moment that will define a generation - it is precisely this spirit that must inhabit us all.

For as much as government can do and must do, it is ultimately the faith and determination of the American people upon which this nation relies. It is the kindness to take in a stranger when the

levees break, the selflessness of workers who would rather cut their hours than see a friend lose their job which sees us through our darkest hours. It is the firefighter's courage to storm a stairway filled with smoke, but also a parent's willingness to nurture a child, that finally decides our fate.

Our challenges may be new. The instruments with which we meet them may be new. But those values upon which our success depends - hard work and honesty, courage and fair play, tolerance and curiosity, loyalty and patriotism - these things are old. These things are true. They have been the quiet force of progress throughout our history. What is demanded then is a return to these truths. What is required of us now is a new era of responsibility - a recognition, on the part of every American, that we have duties to ourselves, our nation, and the world, duties that we do not grudgingly accept but rather seize gladly, firm in the knowledge that there is nothing so satisfying to the spirit, so defining of our character, than giving our all to a difficult task

This is the price and the promise of citizenship.

This is the source of our confidence - the knowledge that God calls on us to shape an uncertain destiny.

This is the meaning of our liberty and our creed - why men and women and children of every race and every faith can join in celebration across this magnificent mall, and why a man whose father less than sixty years ago might not have been served at a local restaurant can now stand before you to take a most sacred oath.

So let us mark this day with remembrance, of who we are and how far we have travelled. In the year of America's birth, in the coldest of months, a small band of patriots huddled by dying campfires on the shores of an icy river. The capital was abandoned. The enemy was advancing. The snow was stained with blood. At a moment when the outcome of our revolution was most in doubt, the father of our nation ordered these words be read to the people:

"Let it be told to the future world ... that in the depth of winter, when nothing but hope and virtue could survive ... that the city and the country, alarmed at one common danger, came forth to meet (it)."

America. In the face of our common dangers, in this winter of our hardship, let us remember these timeless words. With hope and virtue, let us brave once more the icy currents, and endure what storms may come. Let it be said by our children's children that when we were tested we refused to let this journey end, that we did not turn back nor did we falter; and with eyes fixed on the horizon and God's grace upon us, we carried forth that great gift of freedom and delivered it safely to future generations.