

 OFFICERS of the  
**PROGRESSIVE CAUCUS**  
of the CALIFORNIA DEMOCRATIC PARTY

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President Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue  
Washington, D.C. 20500

August 14, 2010

Dear Mr. President:

Your Press Secretary has recently been quoted as strongly criticizing those of us Democratic Party activists who feel that you have failed in some of the most important promises you made, stated or implied, during your campaign and that you are not steering our country in the right direction. He dismisses us as the "professional left" as if we were the ones making a living from politics. We worked very hard for your election as we do for all candidates who seem able and willing to work for progressive social change, and to make a better life for our citizens and for the world. Your rhetoric often suggests that you share this goal, but your actions frequently prove otherwise. We do not simply disagree with you on a single small issue. Unfortunately our unhappiness and disappointment has a broad scope. To name a few examples:

You promised to work for meaningful health care reform – we got a woeful compromise. You committed to seek to rein in an out-of-control financial sector – we got third best. You seemed to be in favor of winding down unnecessary and increasingly inept and unwinnable foreign adventures – we got an escalation of an untenable and unending war. You promised to close Guantanamo and end don't ask, don't tell – neither has seen much of your efforts. You campaigned against the Bush imperial presidency, and then you expanded it. We could go on.

In our opinion you have failed, in whole or in part, to deliver on many of your commitments. Instead, you have continued and supported some of the Bush policies that many hoped and believed, based on your utterances, you would quickly terminate. At best, the many who supported you and believed that you were going to bring about great change are confused and disappointed; at worst, they find themselves less motivated to continue their support for you.

The Republican policy of lock-step unthinking resistance to any meaningful change is, of course, in large measure to blame for our disappointment. But when we see you capitulate in advance of negotiations by submitting far less than the public needs and deserves (health care, financial regulation, public education, women's reproductive rights) or affirmatively go in the other direction (civil liberties, the war in Afghanistan, to name a few instances), we are deeply offended. Then, to add insult to injury, your Press Secretary, Mr. Gibbs, publicly castigates and belittles us as the "professional left", whatever that means, and suggests that we need to be "drug tested".

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But we are not a "professional left." On the contrary, we are among those volunteers from around the country who campaigned, raised and contributed money, and voted for you. We were, and are, active in your Democratic Party; indeed, many of us were active in it long before you arrived on the scene.

We take issue with the fact that apparently Mr. Gibbs has no qualms about insulting us and diminishing our hard work and years of faithful support. We resent being vilified and dismissed by your Press Secretary as if our opinions were not representative of a large number of your voters and supporters and as if we were as truly hostile to your program as the "just say no" Republicans.

We don't, however, make the mistake of seeking to shoot the messenger. Mr. Gibbs (and even Emanuel) is not the real problem, Mr. President. We fear you are. We demand that you do a better job of exercising your powers as President; that you represent us better; that you cleave to your promises to us with more fidelity; and that you refrain from sending forth your minions to attack our right to disagree. Our country is in grave danger on many fronts and we respectfully reserve the right to continue to insist that you adhere to your promises to the American people, and your supporters without being told that we are your real problem.

Indeed Mr. President, you have enemies that wish to see you fail but we would hope that your administration has the clarity of vision to recognize that we are not the enemy.

Respectfully,

The Officers of the Progressive Caucus of the California Democratic Party:

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