

“The American people are hungry for civility.”

Donna Brazile has worked in Democratic politics for 30 years. She managed Al Gore's 2000 presidential campaign, making her the first African-American woman to manage a national campaign for president. Brazile is an adjunct professor at

Georgetown University, a syndicated columnist for United Media, and a columnist for Ms. Magazine and O. She also is a contributor to CNN and regularly appears on ABC's "This Week With Christiane Amanpour."

State Legislatures: What are the most important issues in this presidential election?

Brazile: This is a make-or-break point for the middle class. It's important that the leading contenders focus on creating jobs. Jobs and the economy. Most Americans are still feeling the effects of the greatest national economic crisis since the Great Depression, and they are concerned about job creation. They are concerned about the overall health of the economy, and they are very concerned about their own personal employment status. Jobs and the economy will remain No. 1 throughout the rest of the campaign.

SL: How do you rate President Obama's success in dealing with jobs and the economy?

Brazile: When President Obama took office, the economy was hemorrhaging 700,000 jobs a month. In the last 34 months, we've seen job growth increase, but not enough to bring overall unemployment down to 6 percent or 7 percent. But what has occurred over the last few years is that President Obama has been able, through the American Recovery

Act and other initiatives, to help put the economy on a sound footing. The private sector has created more than 2.5 million jobs. We've seen an increase in domestic activity, manufacturing and retail. Again, it's not enough to pop the champagne bottle. The important thing is that President Obama has put forward policies that will help small businesses.



“I believe President Obama has provided great leadership to this country at a time when there is a lot of partisan gridlock.”

SL: What has the president done to help states?

Brazile: The American Recovery Act was responsible for helping to preserve jobs for more than 200,000 teachers, first responders and firefighters. I think it helped state and local governments, not just with these workers, but also with the overall economy, at a time when the country was still on the brink of a major financial disaster. There's no question that health care, states and local governments also shed hundreds of thousands of jobs. I think President Obama is trying—with some of the initiatives such as the American Jobs Act and other important things—to give state and local governments the foundation they need to rebuild their infrastructure and to help revitalize their local and state economies.

SL: Why do you think the president should be reelected?

Brazile: I believe President Obama has provided great leadership to this country at a time when there is a lot of partisan gridlock in Washington, D.C. He has extended more than an olive branch to the Republicans to assist him in rebuilding America's economy. There is no question President Obama is still faced with what I call partisan gridlock, especially in the House, now that it is controlled by the Republicans. The American people did not elect the president

“State and local governments ought to be freed from constraints.”

Karl Rove was deputy chief of staff and senior adviser to President George W. Bush. He is now a Fox News contributor, a columnist for the Wall Street Journal and author of “Courage and Consequence.”

SL: What are the most important issues in this presidential campaign?

Rove: Three issues. Jobs. Jobs. And jobs. It’s a little bit more complicated than that because it is also the state of the economy, the future of the country, the role of government, the size of our debt. It’s the amount of spending and, particularly, the Affordable Care Act—Obamacare as it is colloquially known. All of those will be part of that issue, which is going to be largely based on the economy.

SL: On jobs and the economy, how could a Republican do better than President Obama?

Rove: First, it will be important for the critique of the president to be based on what the president himself has said. There has to be a sensible critique that says, “He said this would happen and it hasn’t.” Republicans have to offer a proactive agenda that says, “Here is what we will do to confront these things.” We must put our fiscal house in order. We must cut unnecessary regulation. We must make our tax code competitive by washing out all the special privileges and lowering the rates. We must do things to encourage American companies to bring their foreign profits back to the United States and invest. We must focus on sustained economic growth and prosperity for the country. Republicans also must lay out an agenda and not simply to repeal Obamacare, but to replace it with sensible legislation—like allowing small businesses to pool their risks or

allowing people to purchase health insurance across state lines, reducing junk and frivolous lawsuits, getting more transparency in a price and outcomes, and allowing people to save more money tax free for their out-of-pocket medical expenses. And even going so far as—I believe this strongly—changing the tax codes so the

tax advantage of providing health insurance goes to the individual as well as to the company. This makes health insurance truly portable so people can take their benefits with them from job to job and not be stuck in a job they hate for fear of losing their health insurance coverage.

SL: If the next president is Republican, what can states look forward to?

Rove: First, I think there would be a roll-back of some federal mandates and regulations. There is a real sense, particularly in Congress today on the Republican side in the House, that the federal government is doing too much dictating to states and localities and that state and local governments ought to be freed from constraints. We would also, in all likelihood, see an end to the Obamacare requirement that states expand Medicaid, which is already drowning state budgets and would simply spike the economic fate of a lot of states if left unchanged.

SL: In a nutshell, why don’t you think the president should be re-elected?

Rove: The president led us to believe he would govern from the center and adopt centrist answers to the question of jobs and the economy and health care, and he has not. He has governed from the left. And it’s been demonstrated over the last three years that we can’t spend our way to prosperity. That turning over health care to the federal government is not going to resolve the problems we have. The president has failed. His policies have not



““We must focus on sustained economic growth and prosperity for the country.””

CONTINUED ON PAGE 32

BRAZILE

or members of Congress to stop progress or to halt job creation. They elected members of Congress and the president to work together to forge a compromise and to try to help the American people during this very terrible economic time. I believe President Obama will be re-elected because the American people voted for change in 2008, and he is delivering many of the items that he promised he would bring about real lasting change to the economy and to the American people overall.

SL: What do you think are the keys to presidential success?

Brazile: There is no question that at an hour when there is so much partisan gridlock, the American people look for and are hungry for civility. They want leaders who will work together, who will put aside their partisanship to figure out what is best for the country. They want fairness. They want balance. They want shared sacrifice. And I think they are looking for leaders who can force the kind of compromise that will ensure that their kids and their grandkids can have the same kind of life and lifestyle they have. They don't want leaders who are just out to win elections and keep progress from being made.

SL: In Congress, do you think ideology and politics are putting the nation at risk?

Brazile: I think the hyper partisanship we've witnessed over the last few years has had a debilitating impact on the ability of members of Congress to get things done. I think that's hurting the American economy. Congress has the lowest approval rating in the history of the institution. Congress is as popular as a root canal. The problem is that Washington is dysfunctional. We are not making much progress. Hopefully, the next election will resolve this partisanship, because I think the American people have sent three different messages in 2006, 2008 and 2010. But the bottom line, the connection I've seen in all of these election results, is that they want change. They want our political leaders to sit down and work together. They would like to see the economy return to fiscal health so everyone can share in the prosperity of this great country.

Editor's note: These interviews are part of a series of conversations with opinion leaders. They have been edited for length and clarity. The opinions expressed are those of the interviewees and not of NCSL.

ROVE

moved the country forward, and we cannot afford four more years of rapidly spiraling spending and an equally rapidly spiraling debt.

SL: What qualities do you think make a great leader?

Rove: A president has to have a clear vision of what he or she is willing to do and where to take the country. There has to be a willingness to get in and work to get things done, and a willingness to compromise, within reason, to bring people together.

SL: And what makes a great legislative leader?

Rove: Legislators must have the ability, like a president, to do their homework, not only on representing their constituents, but also on the subject matter of their committee assignments. They need to think creatively about the long-term needs of the state, and become experts in those areas. They need to fashion innovative answers to those challenges. They need to be constantly thinking about what the next thing coming along might be, so they can understand it better and be able to fashion policies to meet that challenge.

SL: Do you think ideology and politics in Congress are putting the nation at risk?

Rove: I think ideology is not. I think politics is. We've always had strongly ideological figures in Congress. Ted Kennedy and Barry Goldwater are just two examples. People in Congress have been willing to put politics aside for the moment and fashion some reasonable compromise. This happens a lot more than people are willing to give credit for. But particularly in the last three years, the tone the president has taken has made this more difficult. When the president in early 2009 received a delegation of Republicans in Congress who wanted to make recommendations about items to go in the stimulus bill, he cut them off by saying, "I won," basically, "shut up and sit down." This set a bad tone. A president has to be open to and legislators have to be open to reasonable compromises, recognizing the ideological constraints of their party and the nature of the system.

You can read previous interviews at www.ncsl.org/magazine with:



U.S. HOUSE SPEAKER
JOHN BOEHNER



FORMER
FLORIDA GOVERNOR
JEB BUSH



PLANNED PARENTHOOD
PRESIDENT
CECILE RICHARDS



AMERICANS FOR TAX REFORM
PRESIDENT
GROVER NORQUIST



RICHARD RAVITCH,
FORMER NEW YORK
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR