

American voters' call for change with the election of Barack Obama as the 44th President of the United States raises a serious question: what is our vision for the nation and its place in the world?

The electorates' demand for something new...even different from the eight years of President George W. Bush... is not a clear prescription for a precise design of what "the people" really want. In fact, the high expectations placed on the newly elected President Obama make whatever he does more onerous.

The need for change was roundly sounded from almost every sector of American society and many corners of the world, including echoes within the ranks of the rival Republican Party. The country's economic downturn escalated the urgency for something new to emerge.

As global markets also continue to tumble, the financial crisis has rapidly moved up the scale becoming the top priority for Mr. Obama to do something to turn things around. But the list of critical needs requiring his immediate attention is long and vital. Panicking is not an option. Perhaps it was his seemingly unflappable manner that added to his wide public appeal.

A rush to find quick solutions could very well make matters worse if the results do little to correct the causes and depths of the myriad of problems threatening the security and tranquility of American lifestyles. Finding sufficient funds to fuel the gears of change in America creates a particular challenge for the new president and his advisors.

Already we have begun to witness a scramble for undesignated money sitting in the \$700 billion bailout trough approved by Congress. The fight over who should get a chunk of change is divided between crippled banks that hold bad loans and mortgages and automobile manufacturers trying to save their American-bred industry.

The automobile industry is cutting out its annual frills and luxury thrills at this year's Auto Shows in an attempt to save money and push a public image of the deep fiscal crisis now facing the nation's once bedrock economic engine. Auto makers say they need \$25 billion to weather the storm of huge losses before they run out of money as early as next year.

Solutions to the nation's woes are trampled and refigured even before they have been tested. For example, Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson announced he was changing strategies and distributing funds away from the purchase of toxic debts as promised to Congress when he argued for the bailout; instead he has decided to target sound banks and lenders to beef them up.

That may not be the kind of change voters had in mind when they rallied behind Mr. Obama's chant for "change." Mr. Paulson's maneuver signals just how treacherous the mine field is through which President-elect Obama now must make his way.

Voters have heard cries wail from Wall Street and whimper from Main Street. But, there are many others now wondering who is listening to the cries on My Street.

President-elect Obama says he has been reading about Franklin Delano Roosevelt's first term during the Great Depression. He is searching for clues to give him guidance as he takes the reins of a troubled economy spinning out of control.

Meanwhile, in American homes parents are juggling precarious budgets to pay mortgages, education debts, utility bills, and trying to keep gasoline in their tanks. They are struggling to manage their lives amid catastrophic health conditions that could render some of them bankrupt if any member of their families ends up in the hospital.

At the same time, prices for food, household goods, and basic needs are

skyrocketing at a pace that outstrips their pay checks. Unemployment rolls are getting longer as the nation's biggest corporations are laying off employees adding devastated rippling effects on related businesses. As the auto industry threatens to shutdown plants, an estimated one out of ten workers in America will be affected.

But, money shortages are not the only issue President-elect Obama has to address. Coming up with alternative energy sources also is placed high on his list of things he must attend to immediately.

Balancing the nation's thirst for fuel with cleaning up the environment offers a unique challenge for the "change-agent." However, it is quite possible the key to Mr. Obama's answers rests in the areas of energy efficiency and the environment.

Creating new jobs, advancing scientific and medical research and development, and discovering new sources for clean fuels may provide a combination that forges a new frontier which will allow the president-elect to foster true change.

Then, there is the matter of the nation's infrastructure embarrassment. The new president has a potential treasure trove of opportunities to put more people back to work and make the country's roads, bridges, and buildings safer, stronger, and more secure.

Major capital projects could place Mr. Obama on the road to actually follow FDR's path to economic recovery.

Crumbling bridges and deteriorating schools and structures could give Americans full employment for years. Repairing antiquated railways, paving potholes in streets, and securing unprotected water reservoirs are on the short list of the country's greatest needs that could lead to immediate changes to provide much desired benefits for people on My Street.

Rehabilitating houses that have fallen into disrepair and stain the landscape of neighborhoods as eye-sores and dens for illicit activities also belong on the list of high priorities for communities long neglected and where citizens feel left out and left behind. A determination to make the streets of America safer for children and elders is a good starting point to imagine a new vision for the nation.

Inviting youth and young adults to spend a couple of years serving their country by working with our allies and partners to improve the quality of life in developing countries will enlarge their world view and make them global citizens.

Today's reality demands healthy, strong economies in impoverished nations. That makes good sense because we all depend on each other. The domino-effect of failing markets and job losses is not in the best interest of America's future. A vision that includes cooperation among nations to bolster economies is what real change is all about. That really is a break from the past.

For President-elect Obama to be successful with his plans to bring about change, the people who put him in the White House now must do much more than stand back and watch to see what he will do. His election ignited a movement that requires the recruitment of every available, capable, and willing human being to pick up a piece of his and her share of the load. There is a job for everybody. There is plenty of work to do. A commitment to build a "more perfect union" means people in America must unite in a concerted campaign to be the change we hope to see.