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Taking that first step

Senator Barack Obama is now President-Elect Obama. In a few weeks he will be President Obama, the 44th President of the United States of America.

For those of us who have been following the election campaign over the past twelve months the wait is finally over. It has been an incredibly long campaign that has cost a great deal of money; so different to elections in the United Kingdom, Australia and other Western countries. The focus of the American election is very much on the candidate with the party that they represent often relegated to second place.

There is only one winner in an election campaign. The loser must return to the sidelines and consider his or her position. For Senator McCain, this was his last attempt at the Presidency. Others will already be preparing for the next election campaign in 2012, when President Obama has completed his first 4 years in office.

What will President Obama actually do once he takes over from George Bush on the 20th January 2009? The task facing Barack Obama and the Democratic Party is daunting to say the least. The eyes of the world are upon him with so much expectation and anticipation that the new government will bring change. But where does he start?

The United States is deep in debt. For many years the country has been spending beyond its means and the only way it can bring in more income quickly is by increasing taxes. But with the country heading into recession, increasing taxes is not a realistic option. The United States is also involved in two very expensive and unpopular wars: in Iraq and Afghanistan. In addition, the US still has a significant military presence in other parts of the world, particularly Japan and Germany. Another major task for the new President is to improve the image of the United States, an image that some would say has been seriously tarnished in recent times. Russia and the countries in the Middle East in particular will be looking to President Obama for signs of a new direction in foreign policy.

The United States and all other Western democracies still face the threat of terrorism. Although there have been no acts of terrorism on US soil since the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Centre, other countries have been targeted including the United Kingdom, Spain, Indonesia and Kenya. The United States must also decide how it will tackle the problems it sees in Iran and North Korea. But the greatest threat may lie in a country to which the USA has been closely aligned since the 11 September 2001: Pakistan. There is no question that the current instability in Pakistan poses a great danger to world peace. Should the political crisis in Pakistan reach the point of civil war, military dictatorship or religious extremism then the security of the United States and nations will be in danger given that Pakistan has a fully operational nuclear capability.

We might forgive Barack Obama if he decided to decline his new position as President-Elect. We might also wonder why anybody would even want to take on the job given the apparently insurmountable problems. So where does he start? What will he do when he sits at his desk in the Oval Office in the White House?

The first thing he should do is remain absolutely positive and confident that whatever he does will be for the good of the people he serves at home and for those overseas whose futures depend on his actions. This is the first rule of leadership. He should then prioritise the problems facing the United States. There is little doubt that his first priority will be the state of the US economy, followed by Iraq and Afghanistan. He will then need to tackle many of the items he highlighted during the election campaign, particularly health care and education.

This is a daunting task indeed for one individual. But start he must. He needs to select his number one priority and take that all important first step. He will not move forward until that first step is taken.

I wonder if you can see any parallels between Barack Obama's predicament and your own lives. All of us face problems and challenges each day. The Form 5, 6 and 7 students probably encounter the most challenging hurdles as they prepare for the public examinations. They will be thinking: so much to do yet so little time. Where do I start? But such dilemmas are not restricted to those preparing for examinations. All of you have similar experiences. Tests, assignments, homework, music practice, sport training, Prefect duties, SA responsibilities and so forth. The list appears to be endless. All are important; all take time; all need to be accomplished.

Where do I start? How do I move forward?

As with Barack Obama, the answer lies in identifying what must be accomplished followed by establishing a list of priorities. Once that has been done, it is then a matter of taking that first step. It would be too easy for President Obama to say "it's all too difficult; I'm giving up". It would also be all too easy for you to say the same. Barack Obama has a vision but will need to take one step at a time toward his goal. You must tackle each problem as it arises and be prepared for the successes and failures that lie ahead. Yes, Barack Obama will make mistakes and so will you. Taking that first step is the most difficult challenge but one that we must all face at various times in our lives.