I am pleased to be a part of this extended trustee's meeting. But when you asked me to do this, Dennis, my first reaction was: "This is one helluva time to ask a political scientist to talk about the election—19 days before the vote? Give me a break!" Nineteen days after the vote, no problem. I have marvelous 20-20 hindsight. Now, it turns out to be even worse than I first thought. Now I find I'm not only competing with the pundits, but with the candidates themselves!

So I had better make it clear at the outset that I am not now, nor have I ever been, in the prediction business. I can read, watch and follow the polls; but so can you. I can't speak with any more confidence about the likely outcome than you can. What we can all know from reading and watching is that Bill Clinton is winning. Still, experience tells us that "it's not over till it's over," or "till the fat lady sings." [Maybe this cartoon captures the moment best: it shows President Bush at the podium in]
the center of a stage saying, "I don't care about the polls; it's not over yet," while the Wagnerian fat lady stands, behind the curtain, just off-stage, spraying her throat. So much for the audio-visual part of my talk!

All I can do, at this juncture, is to add something by way of perspective—one person's perspective. And that is what I shall try to do. The question I shall tackle is not, therefore, "Who is going to win?" but rather, "What's happening here?"

For the last six months, the comment I've heard most often about this election has been: "It's going to be—or, it's getting to be or it is—a very interesting election." I think what most people have meant by the word "interesting" is: "It's going to be—or it's getting to be or it is—a lot different than I ever thought it would be."

[Our situation has been a little like the one political satirist, Mark Russell, tells on himself. As you know, he is a regular performer now on PBS—from Buffalo. But he began and for a long time worked obscurely in a
tiny cabaret in the Shoreham Hotel in Washington. So the elevation to PBS was a very heady thing; he was amazed, he says, to find that all of a sudden, his program was being carried to every corner of the U.S.—even, he would always add, to Minot, N.D.! As luck would have it, he actually met a woman from Minot. "Is it true that you get my show in Minot?" Lady thought for a long while and said, "We see it, but we don't get it!"

And so it is for this roller coaster year. In the spring of 1991, after Desert Storm, George Bush was thought to be so overwhelmingly popular that his reelection was a virtual certainty. And the only remaining question was whether he might pull in a Republican Congress with him. In April, my favorite political journalist, David Broder wrote a Washington Post column Headlined "The White House Is Almost A Lock, So What About Congress?" In September, a front page article in the Wall Street Journal carried the same headline: "Bush's Dominance Going Into '92 Has Strategists Advising He Play Hardball for GOP in Congress." Faced with this foregone conclusion, most of the Democratic presidential front-runners headed for the hills. Everybody looked forward to a pretty dull rerun of Eisenhower's easy

But beginning with the stunning Republican defeat in the Pennsylvania Senate election in November of 1991, and continuing into mid 1992, George Bush's reelection became increasingly less of a certainty and, therefore, increasingly more interesting to observers. To put it bluntly, in the past 11 months we have witnessed a colossal collapse in citizen evaluations of, and citizen support for, an incumbent President of the United States. And the idea that he might help Republicans to win House and Senate seats is now pure fantasy.

That astonishing downward spiral is our best clue as to what's happening here. An incumbent president is in terminal trouble. In the eight cases in the 20th century in which an elected incumbent ran for reelection, five of them won—Wilson, Roosevelt, Eisenhower, Nixon and Reagan. The other three—Taft, Hoover and Carter—lost. George Bush would make the fourth.

Incumbents lose because of a combination of misfortunes and mistakes—
misfortunes that could not have been avoided and mistakes that could have been. In such cases, the challenger does not win; the incumbent loses. A good challenger can take advantage of the incumbent's misfortunes and mistakes—as Bill Clinton has skillfully done—and in that sense, the challenger can win. But while November's story may well be Bill Clinton, October's story is still George Bush. Whenever an incumbent is running, the election starts out as his to lose. The main electoral story is always about the incumbent. And the election is always a referendum on the perceived performance of the incumbent.

For all the later glory of Franklin D. Roosevelt, the story of the 1932 election was voter disapproval of the incumbent—Herbert Hoover; indeed, for the next seven elections, the Democrats followed their winning formula of 1932 by campaigning over and over against Hoover and his Depression. And we can hear Bill Clinton nearly every day charge George Bush with "the worst economic performance since the Great Depression."

Similarly, whatever the later glory of Ronald Reagan, the story of the 1980
election was voter disapproval of the incumbent—Jimmy Carter; and in every 
election since, the Republicans have repeated their successful 1980 attack 
on Carter and his high interest rate, high inflation economy. Thus, we 
hear George Bush arguing that: "A Clinton administration would be a repeat 
of the Jimmy Carter years... (in which) the 'misery index' would go right 
through the roof and into outer space." (BG 8/9/92)

The big story of the 1992 presidential election to date, has been growing 
voter disapproval of the current incumbent. The upcoming referendum on the 
performance of George Bush has not been going well for him. Nothing else 
seems to be going well for him either. Now he is even being told that 
broccoli is better for him than milk. The story we are involved in for now 
is mostly the George Bush story; and that is the one I shall try to put in 
some perspective.

First, let me talk about the misfortunes of the incumbent—two conditions 
he has had to cope with, but for which he is not to blame. The first is 
the sluggish economy; the second is the public anger at the political
system.

Most important is the economy. To quote Newsweek, "It is Bush's misfortune to preside over an economy undergoing gut-wrenching structural change."

(9/21/92) When the president was riding high in the polls, observers usually hedged their predictions about his reelection with warnings that only a poor economic performance could defeat him. David Broder wrote, in his April column, that the president could campaign any way he wished "if the forecasts of a short and shallow recession prove to be correct." Most observers—including George Bush and his advisors—did not believe the recession would last so long or the recovery be so slow—or that it would so broadly afflict the white collar middle class.

You know the numbers. Slow economic growth, persistent joblessness, the decline of good paying jobs, stagnating personal income, rising costs for health and education—these are the very kinds of economic numbers that ordinarily spell trouble for the incumbent president. And they surely have for George Bush.

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More than that, these economic numbers have contributed heavily to a general down-turn in the public mood—a widely held pessimism and uncertainty about the future of the country and about the survival of the American dream for its middle class citizens. Our voting studies tell us that when people vote on economic issues, they are influenced more by the way they perceive the national economy than by their personal economic circumstances. And today, eighty percent of Americans hold the view that "the country is on the wrong track" and are "dissatisfied with the way things are going in the U.S." (NJ 7/14/92).

So, one thing that is happening here is that both candidates have been trying to respond to this downbeat national mood. And incumbent George Bush—because he has been in power throughout the recession and because he was slow to acknowledge and confront it—is having more trouble than his opponent in doing this. The challenger, Bill Clinton, has been able to respond directly to the prevailing pessimism by making change the central theme of his campaign, and by arguing that he is the only credible agent of...
To get some perspective on this notion of change, let's go back for a moment and take a look at Harry Truman's campaign in 1948. Indeed, by frequently comparing himself to Truman, President Bush has invited us to do so. When the voters elected Harry Truman that year, they did not vote for him so much as they voted, one more time, for Franklin D. Roosevelt and his policies. Truman asserted that the country was on the right track; and he promised to continue the interventionist policies of the New Deal. In 1948, 77% of the electorate agreed that FDR's policies had alleviated the depression. (Roper N/J '92) And by electing Truman, the voters agreed to extend the Roosevelt policy era for four more years.

Four years after that, however, the voters refused the Democrats a second extension. Dwight Eisenhower campaigned on the theme of change, and the Democrats were turned out of power, ending the Roosevelt policy era. While President Bush may prefer the Truman comeback story of 1948, the Roosevelt-to-Truman extension story of 1948 may be more helpful to the rest of us.
And that is because the 1988 election--four years ago--bears a strong family resemblance to the election of 1948. In 1988, the voters did not vote for George Bush so much as they voted, one more time, for Ronald Reagan and his policies. In 1988, Reagan's job approval stood at a very high 66%. And of those who approved of Reagan, 83% voted for Bush. (Schneider IAT) Like Harry Truman, George Bush argued that his very popular predecessor had pointed the country in the right direction. Bush asked the voters for a four-year extension of the Reagan policy era--of Reagan's brand of conservatism, both economic and cultural. He asked for a caretaker presidency. And the voters gave it to him.

Thinking about 1988 as an extension of the Reagan policy era gives us some perspective on the 1992 election. As it approached, the question was: Would 1988 turn out like 1948, to have marked the beginning of the end of a distinctive policy era? And, would the election of 1992, like 1952, confirm that end? Better still, what would George Bush do to affect this outcome? Would he present himself once more as a caretaker president and
ask the voters for a second four-year extension of the Reagan policy era?

And would he decide, therefore, to run once again the same kind of campaign he ran in 1988? Or would the incumbent deliberately chart a different policy course; and would he, therefore, run a different kind of election campaign?

A preponderance of the evidence to date would indicate that the President never made a timely or firm decision on any of those questions—that he never planted his feet on any large set of policies or any clear campaign strategy, and that his indecision severely diminished his leadership quotient. Just what there might be about George Bush, the person, that contributes to this lack of decisiveness is a matter of much psychological speculation. I shall leave that to others.

But from a political and a strategic standpoint, his major problem has been this: that the bad economy has put a terrific internal strain on the voting coalition that he inherited from Ronald Reagan, that he cultivated in the campaign of 1988, and that elected him four years ago. In 1988, the
economy was a submerged issue. It is hard to imagine now, but four years ago only 18% of the electorate called it our most important problem. This year, the economy overwhelms the rest of the agenda. Now, 80% of the electorate calls it our most important problem. And that puts Bush's winning 1988 coalition under enormous stress.

Specifically, the economic issue threatens to pull the so-called Reagan Democrats out of the Reagan/Bush voting coalition. I speak particularly of those traditional middle-class Democrats, both blue collar and white collar, mostly suburbanites, all of them white, many in the south, who have been attracted, in recent presidential elections, to the Republican party--by its tough anti-communist foreign policy and by its traditional cultural conservatism. With the Cold War over, and with their families taking the brunt of the current economic misery, cultural conservatism--or family values--may not be enough to hold the Reagan Democrats.

This time, they are tending to vote, as one observer put it: "As if they were hiring a plumber to fix a leaky pipe. They want the guy who can get
the job done. The plumber they have now has been working on the pipe for two years. The basement is still flooded. When people are looking for a new plumber, they don't ask too many questions about values. "Do you believe in God? Good. Now fix the pipe." This time, the Reagan Democrats want a policy and a campaign that addresses their immediate worries—jobs, health care, education—with a plan of action. They want something different from 1988.

This call for action, however, puts the Reagan Democrats at odds with the two largest and loudest elements of the Reagan-Bush coalition—with the cultural fundamentalists for whom family values does command their loyalty and with the economic conservatives who want smaller government, reduced spending and tax cuts. These hard-core Reagan Republicans retain their devotion to the Reagan policy era. They want a campaign replay of George Bush's liberal bashing/no new taxes 1988 campaign. And they control the party.

That is what we saw at the Republican National Convention. George Bush
does not control his party. The heart of the Republican coalition he
inherited from Reagan never was his and he has not made it his. They do
not trust him—one group on abortion, the other on taxes. And so, at every
political turn in the road, he must spend a damaging amount of his time
securing the temporary allegiance of this Republican hard core.

If a presidential candidate has not secured a reliable partisan base by
convention time, and has to spend the convention doing that, he is in
trouble. For he cannot use the convention to reach the country. Thus, we
saw an inward-looking courtship process dominating the Houston convention,
and putting an exclusionary gloss on all its proceedings—a gloss which did
not reflect well out in the country. At Houston, Bush apparently believed
that he could reach out and touch the Reagan Democrats and thus rebuild the
rest of his broad 1988 coalition after the convention. That belief
probably compounded his economic misfortunes with a political misjudgment.
I shall return to the President's sense of political timing in a moment.

The second major misfortune affecting George Bush has been the unusual
Public confidence in our political institutions (like Congress) and the politicians who run them is at an all time low. The major complaints are that the government is in gridlock and cannot get done what needs to be done, while at the same time, government has become too remote from the citizenry to be held accountable for its' actions. Last June, an astonishing 85% of the American citizenry said they wanted either "fundamental changes" (62%) or a "completely rebuilt" (23%) American political system. The list of complaints runs from the arrogance of careerist politicians for which term limits is seen as an answer, to financial scandals like the Keating Five for which campaign finance reform is seen as an answer, to the Senate's treatment of Anita Hill to which the election of more women to public office is seen as an answer.

Of course, these various complaints have not been directed at George Bush alone. But like the bad economy which will not go away, this anti-political dissatisfaction carries a strong anti-status quo message and, hence, a strong anti-incumbent message. Moreover, as a career-long member
of the governing establishment, George Bush has difficulty divorcing himself from the political system. Not that he isn't trying hard to do so, by leading the critics of the unpopular Congress, by holding Congress responsible for governmental deadlock and by advocating popular Congress-bashing reforms such as term limits. George Bush is not to blame for this system-wide discontent. Nonetheless, as the incumbent, it has come to focus on him.

Far and away the most consequential manifestation of this broad anti-system citizen protest has been the independent candidacy of Ross Perot. It has been fueled by citizen disillusionment with every aspect of politics as usual; and it has been directed at all politicians in both parties. But the politician it has hurt the most—perhaps fatally—was George Bush.

Perot's original five month firestorm sent the President's poll ratings plummeting. The CNN poll of vote intentions taken just before Perot got into the race showed Bush leading Clinton 46%-38%. The first CNN poll taken just after Perot dropped out showed Clinton leading Bush 49%-29%—
17 point drop for Bush. During that same five month period the number of people holding an unfavorable opinion of the President grew from a minority of 38% to a majority 52%. That's an even more worrisome increase of 14 points. For it is nearly impossible for a well-known incumbent to reverse a set of unfavorable opinions--his "unfavorables" as they say in the trade—once they get established. In terms of his poll numbers, these were the worst five months of George Bush's presidency; and his evaluation numbers have never returned to their pre-Perot levels.

The first Perot candidacy—coming as it did on the heels of Pat Buchanan's insurgency—crystallized a lot of anti-incumbent, anti-president sentiment. And it cost the President another element of his 1988 coalition. Many independent-minded 1988 Bush voters—unhappy with their President, but not yet disposed to leave him—were suddenly presented with an attractive alternative. And the issue here was leadership—a can-do, no-nonsense change-oriented businessman with a plan to turn things around, contrasted with an indecisive, gridlocked incumbent politician, articulating no clear alternative to the status quo. Finally and reluctantly, the Bush people
decided they had to attack Perot head-on. And their attacks drove Perot--
temporarily—from the race.

But the big beneficiary was Bill Clinton—who remained on the sidelines 
quietly repairing his crippled candidacy and preparing to unify his own 
party. He was then doubly rewarded by the friendly timing and the friendly 
words with which Perot left the race. Soon, by more than two-to-one, 
Perot's supporters declared themselves to be Clinton supporters. Many of 
them—and many non-Perot supporters, too—had been loosened by the Perot 
phenomenon from their 1988 allegiance to candidate Bush; and, once having 
given voice to their dissatisfactions with their President, they kept right 
on going to join his change-oriented challenger, Bill Clinton. In spirit 
and in effect, then, Ross Perot's initial political fling dealt another 
unexpected, unwanted and unplanned-for blow to the incumbent President. 
And, I might add, Perot's second fling was also hurting the President as 
recently as Sunday evening's debate.

[The largest lesson, I believe, to be learned from Ross Perot's two
political flings is this: that for better or worse, we will be governed by career politicians, by people who have a taste and a talent for politics plus the capacity for survival in that very specialized and very difficult line of work.] 

That's just what we've got in George Bush and Bill Clinton. And they have been hard at it—head to head—fighting as always over the votes of those citizens who are most movable by individual candidates and their appeals. Such swing voters are usually found near the middle of the road ideologically. They are moderate, centrist voters. In 1992, the two groups I have been discussing—the Reagan Democrats and the people cut from their moorings by Perot—are the most recognizable of these voters. They are the battleground of the election. 

As always, this fight over the movable, centrist voters has been, at the bottom line, a fight to define just what the election is all about. Each candidate struggles to make his definition prevail, so that the election will be framed and fought on his terms. In that struggle, timing is of the
In 1988, Bush was able to define the election, as he wished, in terms of conservative ideology and leadership. He did so because his timing was right. He got the jump on a very passive Mike Dukakis by tagging him immediately as an extreme liberal, and by hammering him hard on that description—thus pushing Dukakis away from the moderate, middle of the road voters. Bush successfully won the movable Reagan Democrats with his conservatism and the movable independents with his promise as a leader. Struggle though Dukakis might to establish a succession of alternative definitions of his own—competence, the middle class squeeze, "I am on your side"—Dukakis never succeeded, and he never was able to appeal to the swing voting centrists in the electorate.

This year, Bill Clinton moved early and aggressively to define the election as about change. He exploited the country's economic woes to attack a failed domestic presidency and to call for changed domestic policies and changed domestic leadership. And he had a clear plan for dealing with his
party's coalition. He would move the party's center of gravity closer to
the middle of the political spectrum, so as to increase its appeal beyond
the hard-core Democratic partisans to the movable centrist voters out in
the electorate. He distanced himself from the more extremist interest
groups that seemed to have captured the party, by developing more moderate
positions on matters such as national defense, law and order and individual
responsibility. He convinced his fellow partisans—who, after all, had
lost five of the last six elections—that his was a winning electoral
strategy; and he presided over the dullest—but most harmonious and
successful—Democratic convention in memory.

George Bush's convention played well inside the hall, but poorly in the
country; Bill Clinton's convention played poorly in the hall, but well in
the country. And he emerged from it with a lead that has hardly been
dented since then. Having recast his party in a more moderate,
inclusionary mold, Clinton was well positioned to reach out and advocate
change to the worried and receptive Reagan Democrats and to the frustrated
and receptive leadership-oriented independents. His only remaining
problem, as the new guy on the block, has been to make the electorate comfortable with him as a national leader—to capture their hearts and minds, we might say, as well as their hopes. He continues to work at that problem even as we speak.

Change is certainly not the way George Bush ever wanted to define the 1992 election. So his main task has been to present an alternative. He has tried some: trust, experience, leadership, "winning the peace," "entrepreneurial capitalism." But none so far has stuck with the voting public—or with Bush himself.

This lack of success is more Bush's mistake than his misfortune. He has not lacked for the opportunity to frame the election in his own terms. His best chance—and I believe his last chance—was in January, with his State of the Union Address. On that occasion, he could draw on the full prestige and power of his office to command a national audience before whom he could present his understanding of our economic predicament and lay out his plans for the future.
In January, he should have known—if he had talked to middle class citizens or understood his party's November defeat in Pennsylvania—that the domestic economy was the nation's pressing business. Any January speech that had called for a massive change of focus from Cold War problems to domestic problems and devoted itself entirely to that change would have put his stamp, his definition, his vision on the upcoming election. He could even have preempted the idea of change for his own use. He didn't do it. Indeed, he didn't try to do it until five weeks ago in Detroit. By then, it was too late—way too late. In the very first poll taken after his State of the Union Address in January, his job disapproval rating jumped ahead of his job approval rating for the first time in his presidency. From that moment to this, a majority of voters have disapproved of the job he is doing. All our political science models tell us that ratio is a huge burden.

At the time of his State of the Union Address, the President held all the political and moral advantages of his office. But with the onset of the
political season, he became just another politician down in the trenches, slinging mud and grubbing for votes. And the media have cast him in exactly that role. Not surprisingly, after his major economic speech in Detroit, voters—by a two-to-one margin—saw it as "a campaign document" rather than "a governing blueprint." (WFW 9/21-27) No one was listening.

So why didn't he seize the moment in January? Why didn't he call Jim Baker then, when it mattered? Perhaps he was loyal to the wrong advisors; perhaps he was just over-confident. His Plan A was to ride Desert Storm and an improving economy to victory. And he apparently felt no need for a Plan B. [Washington Post series.] The answer that intrigues me, as a political scientist, is that he didn't think it was time to do anything about defining the election.

George Bush makes a sharp distinction between the politics of campaigning and the politics of governing. (Novak) There is a time for one and a time for the other; the two should not be mixed; he turns one off and the other on like a light bulb. Campaign politics is hardball, do-whatever-it-takes-

This separation is both wrong and naive. It is wrong because campaigns are affected by how you have governed, and they affect how you will govern. You campaign in order to put yourself in a position to govern. A campaign is part of a continuing dialogue with the citizenry. George Bush seems not to grasp the importance of those connections or that dialogue.

He likes to govern; he does not like to campaign. So he delays shifting into what he calls "my campaign mode" as long as he can. In the summertime, before the Republican convention, he complained continually about "my being hounded and pounded for nine months." "When I'm unleashed," he said, "when we get out of this mode, this non-political mode we're in, I'll tell you I'll be ready for the fray. You're going to see some hard-hitting attacks...that will be fun." (NYT 8/10, WPW 7/13-19)
Why, we might ask, was he taking all that punishment? What was he waiting
for? Well, he was waiting for the "campaign" to begin. As one of his
advisors said in July, "Half of his team are saying 'go, go, go,' and the
other half are saying 'wait, wait, wait'. He wants to wait till August (at
the convention) like he did in 1988 or like he and Reagan did in 1980 and
1984." In Bush's view, the election campaign does not begin until he says
it does—until he decides to go into the trenches. It is a naive notion
which works only if everyone else plays by the same rules. Which, of
course, they don't, since they have their own ideas about timing.

The problem was that while the President dithered, Bill Clinton was setting
the agenda for the election—laying out the field on which the President
would have to play. By the time of the Republican convention and before
firing a shot, George Bush had effectively lost control of the election.
He had put himself in a defensive posture from which—despite some fierce
rhetoric—he has yet to extricate himself. By the mother of all ironies,
George Bush had transformed himself into the Mike Dukakis of the 1992
election. For nearly a year, his sense of timing has been abysmal—a story
of too little, too late. He has been a remarkably ineffective politician.

If George Bush is defeated by Bill Clinton, it will signal the end of the Reagan policy era. The voters will have agreed with Clinton—as they agreed with Eisenhower in 1952: "No more extensions of an old policy era. We want change." So how much change are we likely to get? Your guess is as good as mine. Surely, we will have replaced a President who believes that government cannot do much to alleviate our economic problems with a President who believes that government can do much to alleviate them.

The question is: How much? We know that Clinton and the Democrats have accepted a posture of policy moderation as a winning electoral strategy. ["We are not the old Democratic party," their TV tag line tells us.] But the question is: Have they accepted moderation as a governing philosophy as well? History answers it both ways. Reagan governed the country according to his campaign rhetoric. Roosevelt—who campaigned for a balanced budget and a 25% cut in the bureaucracy—did not. If Clinton governs according to his centrist campaign themes, we are not likely to
enter a distinctively new policy era, but rather a transition period of consolidation and incremental change—more like Eisenhower than Roosevelt or Reagan.

On the other hand, the possibilities for major post-election change could be enlarged by one final thing, that seems to be happening here. A quarter-century ago, the Nixon-Humphrey election of 1968 established a pattern of divided government that, with some exceptions, has existed ever since. For all but four of the last 24 years, Republicans have controlled the Presidency; and for all but six of the 24 years, the Democrats have controlled both houses of Congress. The Nixon-Reagan Democrats and the leadership-oriented independents, have mostly voted Republican for President since 1968. But they have continued to vote Democratic for Congress, thus helping to sustain divided government.

If Bill Clinton wins, he follows Jimmy Carter in cracking this quarter-century pattern of divided government. He is, of course, making exactly that argument—that control of both branches by the Democrats would end
partisan gridlock and bring both effectiveness and accountability to government. His argument is predicated on the notion—correct in my view—that the House and the Senate will remain in the hands of the Democrats no matter what. David Broder's question of April—about George Bush's coattails—has taken a 180 degree turn to the question of Bill Clinton's coattails. Can he affect enough Senate races to give him a veto proof Senate? Will the huge number of new House members be predisposed to follow his lead? Will he do better as a leader of Congress than Carter? Here again, I shall stay out of the prediction business.

Lest we think, however, that unified government will, by itself, bring us a new policy era, it must be noted that the voters have seemed to like the idea of divided government just fine. Which leads me to believe that the partisan institutional gridlock we see in Washington is reflective of a much more general policy gridlock in the country at large. Out in the country, that is, voters want government assistance in solving their problems, but they want someone else to pay for that assistance.
Hence, we have a massive federal deficit, bemoaned by many but confronted by few. Which means, for example, that the 50% of the federal budget now allocated to entitlements—$700 billion dollars and rising—remains untouched. George Bush's one serious effort to cope with the deficit—with a tax increase—turned out to be his biggest political mistake. It may even have cost him his presidency. There's a lesson in that. Or, two lessons. One, never make celestial promises like that. And two, there is at this moment in time no political reward for any politician anywhere in our system for tackling the deficit in a meaningful manner. In this light, government gridlock is, above all, a product of our collective unwillingness to confront powerful middle class pressure groups and our collective willingness to pass our problems on to our children. If and when we change that pattern—then and only then, will we have entered a distinctively new policy era. And unified control of government will not, by itself, bring about that change.

So, like all political scientists, I end up being able to say much more about the past than the future. My main answer to what's happening here
has been that we find an incumbent President in huge trouble, that his main troubles are not of his making, but that he has missed opportunities for leadership both in his party and in the country that might have alleviated them. As for the future, we are left with several questions, the broadest of which is: What changes are we going to get? And the subsidiary questions are: Will we get a new President? Will we get unified government? Will we get a new policy era? Campaigns don't always matter; but elections always do. There is, obviously, a lot at stake in the election. And that means a few things for us to chew on—for at least 19 days.