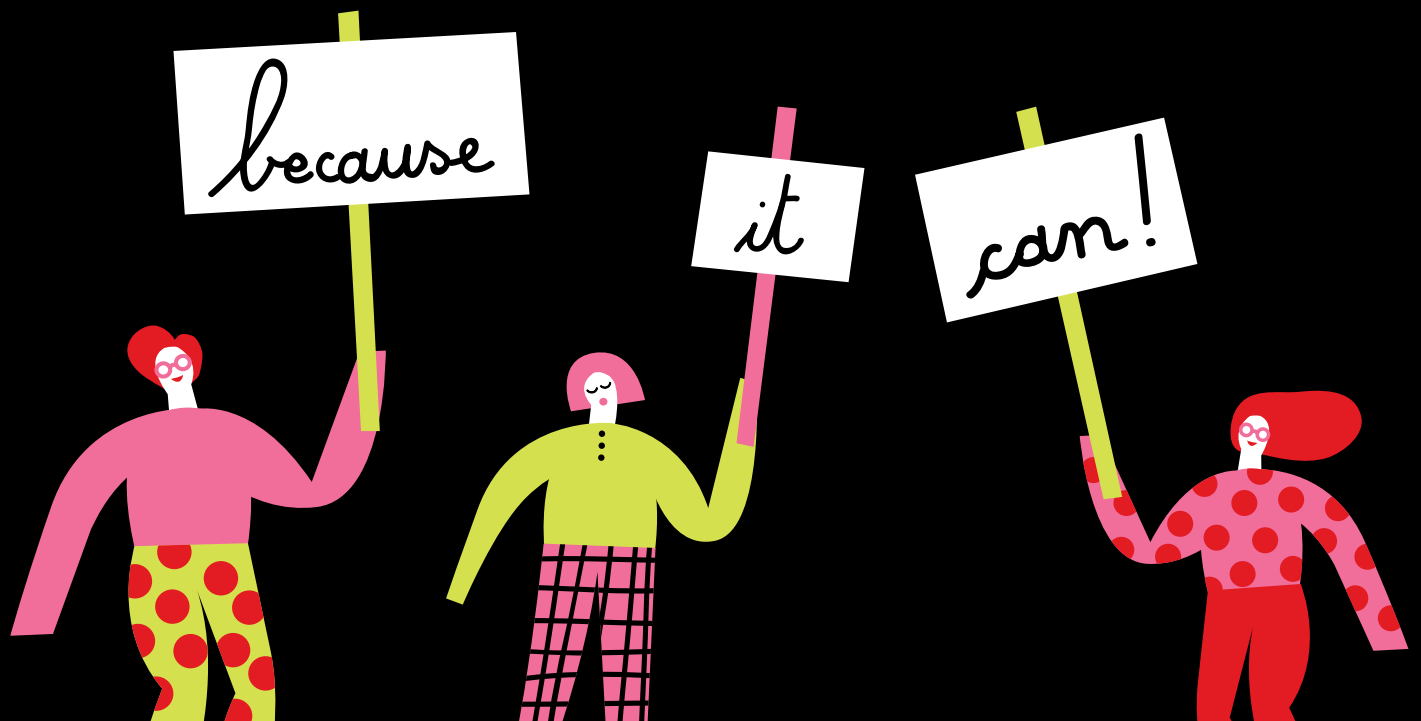


MAKE THE PRESIDENCY WORK!



AMERICAN PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES ALWAYS MAKE MORE PROMISES THAN THEY CAN KEEP.

This frustrates voters, but it might delight America’s Founders.

They designed a system of government where presidents can’t deliver on every promise because they have to share power with Congress and the Supreme Court.

But Americans still expect a lot from our president.

“The Buck Stops Here” wasn’t just a sign on Harry Truman’s desk. The phrase distilled how Americans think about the office of the presidency. We expect our presidents to make tough decisions and to solve big problems.

Unfortunately, modern presidents increasingly don’t have the necessary tools to deliver what the American people demand.

Almost 40 years after Congress began the post-Watergate roll-back of the “Imperial Presidency,” America’s chief

executive now arguably faces too many impediments to enacting his or her agenda.

Some impediments are political—the rise of partisan polarization that makes it harder for a president to gain bipartisan support for legislation. Some of the impediments are institutional—obsolete rules and procedures that make it harder for presidents to act. And some are informal—White House norms and habits that diminish public trust.

It all adds up to an office of the presidency that has become too insular, too political, and less effective.

These are the problems that No Labels’ *Make the Presidency Work!* action plan is designed to address.

To understand why the office of the presidency so badly needs reform, we need to hold two competing ideas in



[B] BILL

Proposals with this symbol require a new law to be passed by the House and Senate

[CC] CODES OF CONDUCT

Proposals with this symbol simply require members of Congress to individually change their behavior

[L] LEADERSHIP

Proposals with this symbol can be imposed by House or Senate leadership

[RC] RULES CHANGE

Proposals with this symbol require a change of House and Senate rules, which can be made effective when the new Congress is seated in 2013

our head: that the president can be both very powerful and almost powerless at the same time.

The president is the chief executive of the biggest organization in the world, but often can’t hire the people he wants to help run it.

The president can work with Congress to launch a new government agency to meet the needs of the early 21st century, but he can’t easily reform an old agency designed in the early 20th century.

The president can pass historic legislation, but those bills are increasingly stuffed with unwanted, irrelevant provisions.

These are the types of problems that have bedeviled presidents of both parties for too long. And No Labels is committed to fixing them.

The *Make the Presidency Work!* action plan is part of No Labels’ ongoing effort to conquer the gridlock and hyper-partisanship that afflict American government and prevent us from dealing with our profound national challenges. This plan comes on the heels of our *Make Congress Work!* action plan, which featured a dozen common sense proposals to reform the outdated rules, procedures and traditions in the House and the Senate.

As with everything No Labels does, our *Make the Presidency Work!* action plan is not designed to advance the interests of any party or person. It is instead designed to help create a new politics of problem-solving in America.

We’re on our way. Will you join us?



1

REGULAR NEWS CONFERENCES FOR THE PRESIDENT [CC]

THE PROBLEM President Eisenhower once began a news conference by saying: “I will mount the usual weekly cross and let you drive the nails.” He was probably only half-joking. Most presidents don’t like news conferences, and it isn’t hard to understand why.

Presidents are often uncomfortable being unscripted, and modern presidents in particular are painfully aware that every minor mistake will be blogged, tweeted and breathlessly repeated. That’s why recent presidents have given far fewer news conferences than their predecessors.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt averaged nearly seven news conferences a month. But over the last two decades, presidents have averaged only about two a month.

This isn’t good for our democracy. News conferences offer a rare opportunity for the media and the American people to break through the spin, speeches and press releases to force presidents to answer tough questions about pressing issues and to be accountable to the voters who put them in office.

THE NO LABELS SOLUTION Our solution is simple: presidential candidates should commit to holding at least one news conference per month. Recent presidents have averaged two news conferences a month, but they don’t come at regular intervals, and they too often come only on the White House’s terms. We want a regular news conference on the agenda—not just when it serves the president’s agenda.

And to help bring the voice of the voters to the presidency, news conferences should not just be the purview of the traditional press. With the proliferation of the Internet and social media, citizens are able to connect with their leaders like never before. That’s why No Labels also believes the president should participate in twice-a-year citizen news conferences, where citizens could ask questions via email, Twitter and other social media platforms. These citizen news conferences should be convened by a media outlet or other neutral third party organization.

2

FAST-TRACK LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY FOR THE PRESIDENT [B]

THE PROBLEM “If con is the opposite of pro, is Congress the opposite of progress?” It’s supposed to be a joke, but it’s an unfortunately accurate description of our current Congress.

Congress can hardly agree to name a post office, let alone fix our tax code, curb the deficit or reform our immigration system. Partisanship and legislative game-playing is allowing a small number of congressional members to block consideration of most legislation. Progress is being held hostage to political paralysis, and the joke is on us.

THE NO LABELS SOLUTION Twice a year, the president should be able to introduce legislation directly to Congress for a fast-track vote, which would allow the legislation to pass

with a majority vote and without amendments. To qualify for fast-track status, legislation would require 10 sponsors from each party in the House and five sponsors in each party in the Senate. Bipartisan presidential commissions would have similar fast-track authority for their final report if it is in legislative form.

Congress has granted the president similar authority to negotiate trade deals in the past, and some states allow their governors to submit their budgets as fast-track bills. It’s time to grant the president this limited fast-track authority to bypass partisan obstruction and make progress on our nation’s most pressing challenges.





3

MAKE THE PARTIES PAY FOR PRESIDENTIAL FUNDRAISING [CC]

THE PROBLEM When presidents crisscross the country on fundraising trips, they typically net millions of dollars for their campaigns or those of other elected officials. But they cost the American taxpayer millions, too—to the tune of \$180,000 every hour Air Force One is in the air.

Although Federal Election Commission rules require presidential campaigns to reimburse the cost of political travel, campaigns often game these rules by padding political trips with official business. For example, a visit to California featuring multiple fundraisers and a brief official event at a local high school could get chalked up as official travel. Although costs on these mixed trips are supposed to be proportionally shared by the government and the campaign, the law is murky and experts say reimbursement essentially depends on “the honor system.”

With presidential fundraising travel increasing exponentially in recent administrations, taxpayers are footing a bigger and bigger bill every year.

THE NO LABELS SOLUTION Presidents have always been political figures and party leaders, and we don’t expect that to end anytime soon. Nor do we begrudge any president the right to travel with the full capabilities of the office.

But we need a bright line between the president’s official and political roles. Any trip with any fundraising activity at all should be classified as political travel, and the necessary air travel, lodging and other trip expenses should be paid in full by the president’s party or campaign.



4

A LINE ITEM VETO WITH A TWIST [B]

THE PROBLEM What if you wanted to buy a house, but the owner would only sell it if you bought a boat, too? Or you wanted a car, but couldn't get it without also buying a lifetime supply of laundry detergent? That's basically the situation presidents find themselves in whenever spending legislation crosses their desk.

There is no requirement that all parts of a spending bill relate to the same issue, which often allows senators and members of Congress to tack on provisions that have nothing to do with the substance of a bill. The president then has to choose, veto pen in hand, whether to throw the baby out with the bathwater, or accept some really unappealing bathwater.

The result is lots of irrelevant provisions that hijack the legislative process, reduce the chance that important bills will pass, and often lock our government into unwanted and unnecessary spending.

THE NO LABELS SOLUTION Cut it out—literally. Let's give presidents expedited rescission authority, which would give them similar power to the line-item veto authority that enables 44 state governors to remove provisions from spending legislation.

A straight line-item veto—which would allow the president to eliminate specific spending provisions passed by Congress—is unconstitutional. But rescission—in which the president has to send each elimination request back to Congress for an expedited, up or down vote—is legal. Expanded presidential rescission authority already has broad bipartisan support in Congress from members who want more transparency and accountability in the legislative process. No Labels wants the same thing.



5-6-7

FIX THE PRESIDENTIAL APPOINTMENT PROCESS

THE PROBLEM More than a year after the 2008 financial crisis, the Treasury Department still didn't have an assistant secretary for financial markets. In the middle of fighting wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, there was no Secretary of the Army. And on 9/11, the Bush administration still didn't have a full national security team in place.

These are the consequences of a broken presidential appointments process. In recent years, the Senate is taking more time to confirm more people, and the problem is especially glaring at the beginning of new administrations. The number of positions requiring Senate confirmation has grown from 280 to 1,400 over the past 50 years, while the average length of time for confirmation has grown from two-and-a-half months to more than 10.

The confirmation process has developed into an embarrassing charade, with highly qualified nominees held up for petty or purely partisan reasons. In one case, a nominee was confirmed by a Senate committee in three months while a different committee held up his wife's confirmation for more than a year with questions about her taxes—despite the fact they had both filed the same joint tax returns.

Presidents, meanwhile, have a harder time finding qualified nominees willing to brave the lengthy and highly intrusive vetting process. At a time when our government needs the best people we can find, we often make it too hard for them to serve.

THE NO LABELS SOLUTION We propose a three-part solution to empower both the president and the Senate to improve their respective parts of the process:

5. REDUCE THE NUMBER OF APPOINTEES SUBJECT TO SENATE CONFIRMATION ^[B]

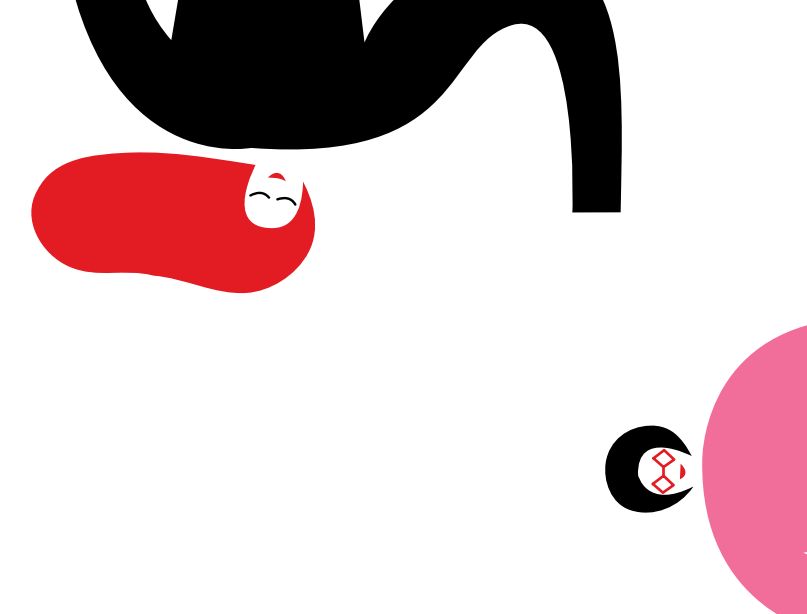
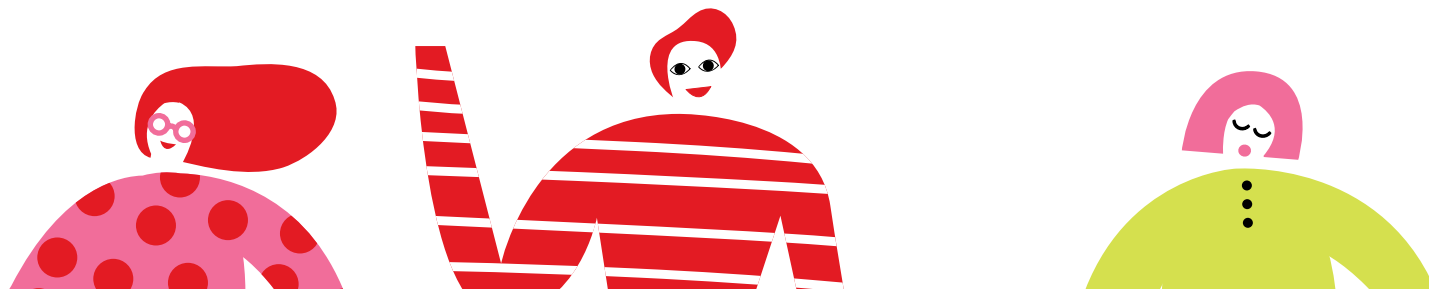
The Senate's "Advice and Consent" on nominations is an important check on presidential power, but it's not needed for every mid-level official and presidential commission. We should give new presidents more authority to fill less-urgent positions and let the Senate focus on the most important nominees who deal with more pressing matters. Encouragingly, a bipartisan bill to do just that has passed the Senate and awaits action in the House.

6. IDENTIFY A "SLATE THAT CAN'T WAIT" OF CRITICAL NOMINEES FOR EXPEDITED CONFIRMATION ^[B] ^[CC]

Within a few days of the election, the president should be prepared to name a group of nominees for especially crucial positions, who would be subject to both speedier background checks and Senate review and confirmation.

7. UP OR DOWN VOTE ON PRESIDENTIAL APPOINTMENTS ^[RC]

All presidential nominations should be confirmed or rejected within 90 days of the nomination being received by the Senate. This time frame includes both committee and floor action. If a nominee's name is not confirmed or rejected within 90 days, the nominee would be confirmed by default.





8

QUESTION TIME FOR THE PRESIDENT [L]

THE PROBLEM In January 2010, President Obama attended a House Republican retreat to publicly debate his proposed healthcare law. For a few hours at least, the American public got to see our leaders engage and truly debate with one another.

We haven't seen anything like it since. Today the president and members of Congress can more often be found talking past one another through the media. The issues facing our country are too important to be decided by a war of partisan talking points. Let's get the ideas on the table, debate them and let the American people decide.

THE NO LABELS SOLUTION We should take a cue from the British Parliament's regular questioning of the prime minister to create question time for the president and Congress. These meetings occasionally may be contentious, but at least they force leaders to actually debate one another, and defend their ideas.

Here's how it would work: On a rotating basis the House and Senate would issue monthly invitations to the president to appear in the respective chamber for questions and discussion. Each question period would last 90 minutes and would be televised. The majority and minority would alternate questions. The president could, at his discretion, bring one or more cabinet members to the question period and refer specific questions to them.

EXPANDED PRESIDENTIAL POWER TO REORGANIZE [B]

THE PROBLEM Call it the great paradox of presidential power: In the nuclear age, the president can reorganize the planet with the push of a button, but he cannot reorganize his own cabinet. Every new president comes into office promising to streamline government. Most fail, because eliminating or reorganizing government agencies involves turf battles with the congressional members and committees that fund them. It's much easier to just create new positions and programs, which often leads to overlapping or competing functions.

For instance, we care about improving teacher quality so much that we have 82 programs across 10 agencies focused on the issue. Three separate federal departments and agencies have jurisdiction over the eggs you eat for breakfast.

The last major executive reorganization merged nearly two dozen agencies to create the Department of Homeland Security—but the department still reports to over 100 congressional committees and subcommittees.

No wonder a review by the Government Accountability Office found 32 cases where different departments were essentially performing the same task, costing taxpayers billions of dollars.

THE NO LABELS SOLUTION Granting presidents the authority to reorganize their branch of government is straightforward—we just have to revive the authority given to every president from Franklin Roosevelt to Ronald Reagan.

In the 1930s, Congress passed reforms allowing presidents to consolidate departments while maintaining a measure of congressional oversight. Over the next 50 years, presidents submitted more than 100 reorganization plans to help the federal government adapt to changing times. But the Reorganization Act lapsed in 1984, and hasn't been renewed since.

There is a bill in Congress that would essentially revive the Reorganization Act by empowering presidents to reorganize—or even eliminate—redundant parts of the federal government, provided the president's proposal improves efficiency and reduces costs. No Labels believes this bill, or something like it, should be passed immediately.



Stop
fighting

Start
fixing



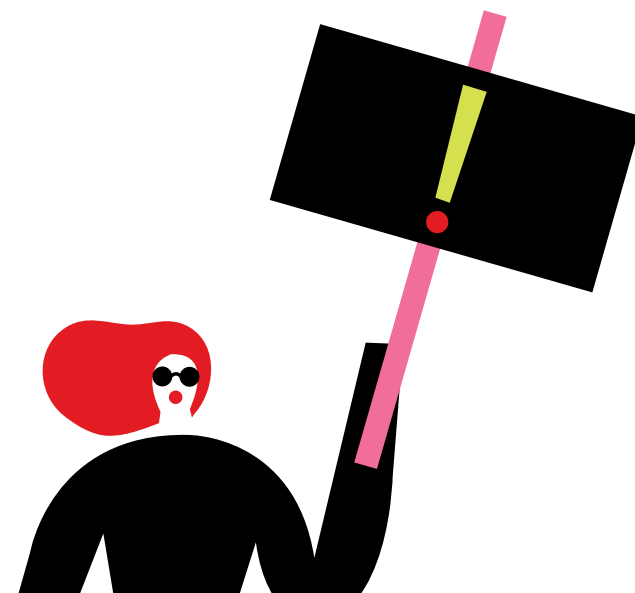
10

DIFFERENT OPINIONS, BUT THE SAME FACTS [L]

THE PROBLEM Perhaps the chief obstacle to fixing America's finances is that no one agrees what's really on our balance sheet. When leaders in Washington debate our budget, they routinely use different baselines, projections and assumptions, which often conveniently support whatever policy they are pushing at the moment. To quote an old Scottish writer, many Washington leaders "use statistics as a drunken man uses lampposts—for support rather than for illumination."

THE NO LABELS SOLUTION The American people deserve to know what's really happening with our nation's finances, and Congress should be able to work off the same set of numbers. That's why every year, a nonpartisan leader, such as the Comptroller General, should deliver a televised fiscal update in-person to a joint session of Congress. The president, vice president, all cabinet members, senators and members

of Congress must attend this fiscal update session. They must take individual responsibility for the accuracy and completeness of the fiscal report by signing it, just as CEOs are required to affirm the accuracy of their company's financial reporting.





11

REGULAR MEETINGS BETWEEN THE PRESIDENT AND CONGRESSIONAL LEADERSHIP [CC]

THE PROBLEM At the end of a long day of political wrangling, President Reagan would often call Democratic Speaker of the House Tip O'Neill, and ask, "Hello, Tip, is it after six o'clock?" "Absolutely, Mr. President," the Speaker would answer. "After six o'clock" meant work hours were over, and the two leaders of their respective parties could put away their swords and bring out their Irish whiskey and wit.

In American politics today, it's never after six o'clock. And that's the problem.

Leaders from opposing parties increasingly don't like each other, don't listen to each other and hardly know each other. It took nearly 20 months for President Obama and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell to meet one-on-one. And President Bush rarely met with Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid. Presidents regularly go months without speaking to congressional leaders of the opposing party, making delicate negotiations that require real trust and communication virtually impossible.

THE NO LABELS SOLUTION In the tradition of Reagan and O'Neill, presidential candidates should commit to meet with majority and minority party leaders in the House and Senate at least once a quarter. That's only four times a year. They can meet at the White House or on the Hill. Go golfing. Grab lunch. Just talk.

President Reagan once commented that O'Neill "can really like you personally and be a friend while politically trying to beat your head in."

But Reagan and O'Neill were also willing to put their heads together to pass historic tax reform and to keep Social Security solvent. That never would have happened if they weren't initially willing to sit in the same room together.

It's time for our current leaders in Congress and the White House to do the same.

HOW YOU CAN HELP MAKE THE PRESIDENCY WORK!

In the *Make Congress Work!* action plan that No Labels released in December 2011, we argued that fixing Congress would require more than just replacing the people in it. We said we needed to reform the outdated rules, procedures and traditions that govern the institution and make it impossible for anything to get done.

A similar commitment is needed to fix the presidency.

If we want different results, we have to change the office, not just the person who sits in it.

We need committed citizens ready to fight hard to fundamentally change how the presidency works—to make the presidency work.

We need you.

Our *Make the Presidency Work!* action plan features straightforward proposals that can make the presidency less insular, less political and more effective.



Our proposals are sensible. They're respectful of the Constitution and historical precedents. And they favor no particular party or interest—except the interests of the American people.

That doesn't mean that implementing them will be easy. It takes a lot to shake up decades of entrenched procedures and practices.

But it has to be done. This moment is too critical. And restoring energy to the executive branch will take energy in the citizenry.

So call your Congressman. Vote for presidential candidates who pledge to support these reforms. Talk to your friends and family. Write and blog about the need for an effective 21st century presidency.

Because we don't have to wait for a presidential election to make the presidency work.

This starts now. Please join us today at nolabels.org.

No Labels would like to thank the many former White House chiefs of staff from both political parties as well as the numerous presidential scholars who gave their valuable time and input to make this project possible.

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