The 2008 Campaign Forever Changed How People Will Run For Office

Mike Allen thinks the 2012 election is more historic than the 2008 election when Barack Obama became the first African-American elected president.

“I believe it changed forever how people will run for office, nationally, statewide and in legislative districts,” Allen, Politico’s chief political correspondent, said during Saturday’s keynote luncheon address.

After the 2008 election, people thought the turnout of Obama voters was a once-in-a-lifetime occurrence. That’s evidenced in the thinking of Republican pollsters, “which is why they were so wrong in their polls. The Obama campaign came shockingly close to replicating that once-in-a-lifetime event,” Allen said.

The campaign was successful in doing so, he said, because it adopted a strategy early on and stuck with it. The team decided to aim the campaign at women and minorities—especially registering minorities—and talk about jobs and the auto bailout, shoving it “up Mitt Romney’s tailpipe in Ohio.”

A year later, that’s how the Obama team ran the campaign and won the election, Allen said.

Allen acknowledged that part of the success came from factors put in place years before the 2012 election. In 2008, a New York Times headline—Let Detroit Go Bankrupt—on a piece Romney had written about the auto bailout basically put him on the defensive on that issue, which turned out to be very decisive in the November election.

In addition, the Obama campaign decided years ago to run a much different campaign from the one it ran in 2008. While 2008 was one of the most optimistic, broad and inclusive campaigns, the 2012 campaign was one of the most narrow, surgical and cynical campaigns, Allen said.

“You can’t run on change when you have the big house, the big car and the big plane,” he said.

What the campaign was able to do, Allen said, was make the election more personal in a number of ways.

First, it identified potential Obama voters and worked to get them to the polls. They recognized, Allen said, that “99 percent of people had their minds made up about Barack Obama.” Their objective, then, was to change who turned out to vote. “This is why this election changed how campaigns will be run,” Allen said.

Secondly, the campaign used technology to target voters and then used those voters to target other voters.

The Obama campaign in 2008 was the first to be scientific about collecting contact information like email addresses so the campaign could connect with them.

“You could go see Senator Obama and Oprah, but the price of admission was giving up their data,” Allen said.

Allen recalled Obama campaign manager Jim Messina’s comments regarding the 2012 campaign: “What we did in 2008 is going to look like Jurassic Park this time around.”

The campaign took it a step further this year. One of its big innovations was the use of existing supporters’ social networks. The campaign would email supporters, suggesting they reach out to specific friends who are likely be supportive of Obama.

“In this new world, the personal connection, what everyone in this room specializes in, will be more important,” Allen said.

People start to tune out the volumes of information they are receiving, but respond to the personal contacts.

“The key is efficiently optimizing those personal contacts,” he said. — Mary Branham
Education Change is Happening, but It’s Going to Take Some Patience

The U.S. is at a rare moment in history when the window for changing how education works is wide open—and state legislators can be key players in how that transformation takes place, said Barbara Chow, education program director for The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

Chow was the featured speaker Friday to kick off CSG’s Education Legislative Briefing.

Chow said the workplace has changed and, along with it, the skills students need to be successful once they graduate.

“Jobs on the ascendancy (involve) complex communication, … expert analytical thinking, those are the jobs computers cannot replicate,” she said. “The way we see this, this is very much the equity divide of the 21st century. It’s along skills. … The jobs on top, those that require higher-level, expert skills, are the ones that are going to continue to grow.”

But as a whole, the country does not do a good job of instilling those types of skills in students. In math, for instance, an international test called the Program for International Student Assessment — or PISA — ranked the U.S. next to last in math in 2009.

Chow said college and the workplace require the “ability to think critically and creatively, solve complex problems, to communicate effectively, to work collaboratively, … We would add to learn how to learn. Kids are going to be in many jobs over their lifetime. They’re going to have to go back to the well and figure out how to retrain themselves. … We call that deeper learning.”

Now is the time to act, Chow said.

Most states have signed on to the Common Core State Standards in English and math, which stress more in-depth knowledge and critical thinking skills. States also have had to commit to deeper learning skills in order to get waivers from the federal government to not be tied to some of the more onerous provisions of No Child Left Behind.

The states that have adopted common core also will begin new testing programs aligned to the standards soon. While the costs might be cheaper in the long run than every state having its own individualized test, there could be some problems, Chow warned.

“When kids take these tests, they will not do as well,” she said. “When that happens, that’s going to be a tough political moment. … That’s hard for politicians. The way we see it play out sometimes, they just lower the standards. That doesn’t help any on achievement.”

Another potential challenge for educators, Chow said, is the move to tie student test scores to teacher performance in new evaluation systems.

“The biggest thing I worry about there is sort of the timing. I think the timing is lousy,” she said. “You’re asking teachers to take courageous new steps outside of their comfort zone, trying to do things they haven’t done before and evaluating them on something (a test) they haven’t seen before. It’s tough.

“More and more states all the time are adding test scores as part of teacher evaluation. It’s a train that’s out of the station. Given that, let’s make those tests as strong as possible, a test where we can measure the skills that are important so teachers will pay attention to them.”

Change is possible, Chow reminded the policymakers, but patience will be needed.

“I think this is a moment when change is occurring,” she said, “but we need to kind of stay with it then for a long period of time for us to realize the fruits of this.”

—Jennifer Ginn

Houston, We’ve Had a Problem: Apollo 13—A Successful Failure

Sunday, Dec. 2 | Noon-2 p.m. | Salon AB

Capt. James Lovell Jr. was chosen in September 1962 for the space program following his extensive experience as a naval aviator and test pilot. He held various commands in the Gemini Mission Program, including serving as backup pilot for the Gemini 4 flight and pilot on the history-making Gemini 7 flight, which saw the first rendezvous of two manned spacecraft in 1965. He also was the backup commander for the Gemini 9 flight, and in 1966 he commanded the Gemini 12 spacecraft to successfully conclude the Gemini Program.

At the close of the Gemini Program, Lovell became command module pilot and navigator for the epic six-day journey on Apollo 8, humanity’s maiden voyage to the moon, during which he and his fellow crew were the first humans to leave the earth’s gravitational influence. He was backup commander to Neil Armstrong for the Apollo 11 lunar landing mission.

Lovell’s fourth and final flight was on the perilous Apollo 13 mission in 1970. As spacecraft commander, he and his crew successfully modified their lunar module into an effective lifeboat when their oxygen system failed. Their emergency activation and operation of the lunar module systems conserved enough electrical power and water to ensure their safe return to Earth. Today, he is president of Lovell Communications, a business devoted to disseminating information about the U.S. space program.

In 1994, Lovell and Jeff Kluger wrote Lost Moon, the story of the courageous mission of Apollo 13. In 2000, the book was re-released as Apollo 13: Anniversary Edition to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Apollo 13 mission. In 1995, the film version of the best seller was released to rave reviews. Lovell also appeared in several segments of Tom Hanks’s “From the Earth to the Moon,” the acclaimed HBO documentary miniseries that aired in the spring of 1998.
Deeper Learning Through the Eyes of Students

There’s a world of difference between a traditional school and one that uses project-based learning. Those differences have helped two teenagers succeed in school.

Those students gave legislators a glimpse of their school experiences in the final Education Legislative Briefing session Saturday.

Elena Fulton, 16, is a sophomore at a traditional high school in Denver. She attended Odyssey, a K-8 school that bases part of its teaching on projects completed by groups of students. The projects—such as investigating the health of a local river—stress collaborating, self-motivated learning and in-depth investigating.

Fulton was in seventh grade when she and her crew, the group of students working on a project, took a trip to Israel and Palestine.

“This was a place I had to go,” she said. “I’d been seeing it in pictures and reading about it in books for a semester in the classroom. I wanted to understand what is going on from the people themselves.

“I was so excited to learn and to understand. That’s the kind of thinking Odyssey fosters. … The teachers really want students to be so involved in their learning and why and how it matters.”

Marcia Fulton, executive director of Odyssey and Elena’s mother, said project-based learning could work as well in a rural area as in a city.

“When we think about project-based learning and how we want kids to experience their education, wherever you’re setting it, there’s a story,” she said. “There’s a compelling issue. There’s something for kids to be trusted to wrestle with. … It’s about what we believe and how we choose to approach learning.”

Liza Unger, 18, is a student at Avalon School in Minneapolis. Avalon students do a lot of project-based learning, but teachers and students work together to design a project that meets state standards.

Unger had been in a traditional high school, a charter school and an online school, but had a hard time finding one that fit her learning style. Avalon proved to be a good match.

“At my school, the best way to describe it is structured independence,” Unger said. “You still have to get standards done, but you do it in your own time and however you want to do it. You can enroll in as many classes or seminars as you want (which are more like traditional classes). Whatever seminars you are not taking, you do a project on it.

“I think project-based learning, overall, is a fantastic way to educate the youth of America. It lets kids be themselves, but still gets what they need to learn. It’s where passion and necessity meet each other.”

Legislators Are the Key

Christopher Shearer, education program officer for The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, said Fulton and Unger are the rule—not the exception—of what students are like at schools that use deeper learning practices, such as project-based learning.

“I visited a lot of these schools over the past two and a half years at Hewlett,” he said. “I began to be convinced they were creaming the top of students that were presented to me. … I finally started stopping kids in the hallway. It didn’t matter what age I stopped.

“They are not unusual spokespeople for schools fully committed to deeper learning.”

Shearer said the U.S. has a window of opportunity to fundamentally change how education works. But since the federal government’s iron grip on education is waning, the responsibility for making those changes will fall to state leaders.

“I think it’s important you ask about deeper learning in all venues you work in,” he said. “If you allocate money for testing, … ask them if they measure this stuff. Can they show you they measure these higher-order skills? Teacher professional development, you authorize a huge amount for professional development. … Ask the questions; make people accountable.

“You are the only audience that can really make this work at the state level.”

—Jennifer Ginn

“I think project-based learning, overall, is a fantastic way to educate the youth of America. It lets kids be themselves, but still gets what they need to learn. It’s where passion and necessity meet each other.”

—Liza Unger
Saving Money on Medicaid, Health Care

The Affordable Care Act was a disruptive act—not necessarily good or bad, but it put a lot of people on notice that things were going to change.

“What we’re doing with the change is going to determine what our future is like,” said Arkansas Surgeon General Dr. Joseph Thompson.

That includes the decision by states on whether to expand Medicaid programs as prescribed in the Affordable Care Act.

Arkansas, Thompson said, sees the benefit in doing so. While the state might spend $25 million in new money the first year, it would realize savings in other budget line items that now go to pay for the care of those without insurance coverage, he said.

“We have systematically gone through every program in the state to say if we could expand coverage, what could we get rid of,” he said.

And, he said, the state would alter the way its health care system is run. Instead of a fee-for-service payment plan, Arkansas is looking at how well providers handle episodic care and basing payment on that. Providers that are doing well, he said, will share in the savings. That change is critical to the state’s Medicaid program.

“We don’t believe we should expand Medicaid unless we are changing the payment system concurrently to be able to have an affordable system over time,” he said.

Texas believes it can garner those savings through special waivers from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, said Dr. Kyle Janek, executive commissioner of Texas Health and Human Services.

Medicaid represents one-fourth of Texas’ state budget, Janek said. The state has 3.7 million clients on Medicaid, and that is expected to grow with the implementation of the Affordable Care Act.

Janek said while Texas has one of the highest rates of uninsured populations, it has an important safety net offered at the local level to provide care to people in need. That’s covered through local property taxes under the Texas Indigent Health Care Act of 1985.

Texas has sought a waiver to serve people who need health care through locally organized and locally driven projects.

“The beauty of the system is we didn’t tell them what they had to do, but it had to be innovative,” Janek said of the localities. About 900 local projects are on the drawing board, he said.

Thompson stressed that every state Medicaid program is different.

“I would encourage you to understand your Medicaid program,” he said.

—Mary Branham

Saving Money on Medicaid, Health Care

With regard to health care exchanges, states “have a long way to go and a short time to get there,” said health consultant Paula Flowers, a former Tennessee state insurance commissioner.

“There’s a lot of heavy lifting to do in some of the states,” Flowers said during the session, “What’s Next for Health Exchanges?” sponsored by the CSG Health Policy Task Force.

But Brett Graham, who directs Leavitt Partners’ health insurance exchange practice, said most states have researched exchanges and conducted adequate analysis to make decisions on them.

Exchanges are not a product of the Affordable Care Act, Graham said. They have been around for decades.

They’re a tool, he said, on which policymakers get to make decisions on how to deploy. They also can decide whether to allow the federal government to make those decisions.

He said there’s an even split among states choosing to operate their own exchange and those that will either work jointly with the federal government or allow it to operate the exchange itself.

About a third of the states are in a position to do state-based exchanges.

“These are states that clearly know what they want and are driving toward it,” he said.

Five to 10 states plan to partner with the federal government, while 15 to 20 states will default to the federal plan.

“Ironically, many of these states are the states that least want that option,” he said. “These are states that most want the state-based route because of the control they are able to retain.”

Chiquita Brooks-LaSure, director of coverage policy for the U.S. Office of Health Reform, said states that go the federal route the first year can decide to operate a state-based exchange later.

But Graham said that is not as easy as it sounds. He said states should make the decision on exchange operation based on a few factors, such as control of the exchange and administrative and operational costs associated with the exchange model.

Graham suggested it might be cheaper for states to operate the exchange than to have the federal government operate it. He said allowing the federal government to operate the exchange would lessen states’ ability to control other insurance reforms, which will have a greater long-term impact.

Flowers said the states that opt for a federal exchange should expect challenges. Many insurers prefer to have state regulators and local assistance.

“It’s going to end up on your door,” she said. “If you’re about to go into session, get ready for the hard court press for a partnership exchange if you didn’t do a state exchange.”

—Mary Branham
America’s transportation system is in trouble.

The American Society of Civil Engineers’ most recent report card gave the U.S. transportation infrastructure a D and estimated the five-year need of system upgrades will require $2.2 trillion. The current system of fuel excise taxes only meet a fraction of that need.

Brian Pullasch, managing director of government relations and infrastructure initiatives for the group, told the Transportation Task Force Saturday that even flat funding will deeply impact gross domestic product, decrease exports and lead to substantial job losses.

Federal uncertainty is adding to the transportation pain felt by the states.

James Bass, chief financial officer for the Texas Department of Transportation, said state agencies are having problems with planning, environmental studies and design work because the federal transportation laws are set to expire in less than two years. Texas is planning projects for 2015 and 2016, he said, but is unsure of federal funding.

Bass noted that nearly two-thirds of the state transportation budget is devoted to existing operations, maintenance and debt service, which doesn’t leave large pots of money to meet future needs. To meet that challenging budget situation, Texas has looked for different revenue sources. One tool that has proved successful, public-private partnerships, will help states chip away at much-needed infrastructure projects when combined with state bonding authority and toll roads, Bass said.

He said the expanded funding in the most recent federal transportation reauthorization bill for the Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act also is an innovative way to raise capital for projects. The program provides federal assistance with transportation projects of national and regional significance in the form of direct loans, loan guarantees and lines of credit. Traditionally, funding for the program was roughly $120 million per year, but the most recent reauthorization provided $1 billion in loan financing.

Trey Baker, associate transportation researcher with the Texas Transportation Institute, said more work is needed before many states will try shifting to a vehicle-miles-traveled tax that could potentially replace the current excise tax on fuel. This concept charges consumers for actual miles traveled rather than fuel consumption. Baker said federal policies—like increasing fuel economy standards—and high gasoline prices are discouraging drivers and starving the Highway Trust Fund of its traditional source of revenue.

Baker said the idea of charging drivers for the miles they travel faces some challenges.

Many opponents believe the policy discriminates against rural drivers, punishes consumers that drive hybrids or more fuel-efficient vehicles, and can be viewed as another tax by a spendthrift government. Others share concerns with the tracking and monitoring technology needed to ensure accuracy, which could potentially violate privacy rights.

Mileage-based user fees are not likely to be enacted soon, Baker said, but policymakers can start laying the groundwork. First, he said, the public needs to be educated about how the transportation system works and the inherent limitations in the current funding mechanism. States interested in imposing new user fees, he said, should approach it from a perspective of being a matter of fairness.

—Brydon Ross
The National Center for Interstate Compacts will unveil compact language intended to ease efforts among states to site interstate electricity transmission lines. The compact will be of particular importance with the country’s need to enhance and secure the energy infrastructure, expected growth in electricity demand and the growing desire to bring more renewables to market. Too often, national and state interests do not align and this discord has contributed to an underdeveloped and overstressed transmission system.

“I believe that this piece of legislation provides a real opportunity for states to actively engage in the process of siting interstate transmission lines,” said Rep. Tom Sloan, co-chair of the compact drafting team and former chair of CSG’s Energy and Environment Task Force. “If successful, it has the potential to standardize the siting process and reduce many of the inefficiencies that have previously prevented lines from being built.”

The compact is intended to improve efficiencies and create standardization during the siting process by establishing common applications, predetermined timelines and uniform public comment periods. Such an agreement, and its requirements, would be triggered on an ad hoc basis and pertain only to those states that are both members of the compact and impacted by the proposed line. “This piece of legislation, which was a member-supported effort, and the upcoming session in Austin represent a culmination of 18 months of hard work by a dedicated drafting team,” said Rep. Kim Koppelman, co-chair of the drafting team and past national chair of CSG. “I am pleased to have co-chaired such an important effort and look forward to what I know will be a robust discussion in Austin.”

The presentation is the beginning of an education effort designed to inform policymakers about the compact and the potential benefits it can offer states. In addition to Sloan and Koppelman, the session also will feature Washington Rep. Jeff Morris and Bill Smith, the executive director of the Organization of MISO States.