

Dear Senators:

It is after considerable thought over a long period of time that I have reached the difficult and genuinely painful decision to tender my resignation to the Senate Democratic Caucus. I had, in fact, let Berta know about my intention to resign more than a week ago, but after meeting with her I decided to try to reset and give it a go. It seems to me that the challenges will remain consistent, and that the relationship won't be beneficial to anyone.

I think those challenges boil down to the simple fact that I am *the wrong fit for this job*. I think at least some of you will agree. My frustration over that revelation is that during the interview process I spoke almost entirely from my proposed communications plan, and almost exclusively about my philosophy and approach regarding communications. Having done that, and then having been subsequently hired, I assumed that was a path the caucus was interested in pursuing. It turns out that is not the case.

There's nothing wrong with that, of course. It's your call. It seems the group is more comfortable maintaining what has become the status quo for the past several years. Unfortunately, my own experience and beliefs about what constitutes a strong and effective communications plan do not coincide with that status quo. It's not a question of someone being right and someone wrong; it's just an awkward fit.

With that in mind, I would recommend hiring someone much younger or less experienced than I. If you hire an experienced, professional communicator I suspect, sooner or later, you'll run into the same challenges. The kinds of things you're asking for are more in line with an entry-level person. At the end of this letter I'll add some information I genuinely believe could benefit all Democrats. Read it if you want.

For now I'll say I'm sorry things didn't work out. I know some of you were unhappy with my work, or what was seen as a lack of work. I sincerely apologize for that and for any frustration my hiring has caused. I can only add that I thought you were hiring me to do a different job. I would ask that you give me the courtesy and consideration of allowing me to stay in the job until the end of December. That'll give me time to find something else, and will give you time to find someone you can all agree upon. I am happy to help with that hunt, and I am, of course, happy to help bring the new person up to speed. It's uncharacteristic for me to leave before finding a landing place, but I think it's better for you to find someone before the session starts. That said, in all honesty, I think one person could easily handle the current demands from both minority caucuses.

Thank you all for the opportunity. I wish you all the best.

Following are some thoughts about how communications could better serve all Democrats. These are purely my own thoughts and recommendations. Again, for whatever it's worth.

- Ideally I'd recommend hiring a professional for the job.
 - Tell that person what your actual goals, values and convictions are and then ask them to develop a professional communications plan to pursue those things.
 - Go into a closed room and work on that plan until you have consensus and everyone can come out calling the plan their own.
 - Do not "punt." Do not settle for the least controversial slogan you can concoct and then call that a communications plan. It's not.
 - The "vision statement" the group agreed upon in Juneau is not a vision statement, and it's most definitely not a communications plan. It's a slogan, and a pretty weak one at that. Last year's vision statement was much better, but you never developed it into a plan.
 - For that reason, it became worthless. If everyone acts unilaterally whenever it suits them, the vision statement springs leaks and eventually sinks into hypocrisy. Sorry, but that's a fact.
 - Put the communications person to work carrying out the group's plan.
 - If you have only one communications person, it has to be incumbent upon staff to do things like take photos, do individual facebook posts, tweets and the like. If those posts and tweets do not fit within the caucus plan, they should remain on individual pages. If they do fit within the plan the comm person should put them on the caucus page.
 - Once you've wrestled it out in a room and settled on a message and plan, THAT is your consensus. The group's narrative comes from that original consensus, and the communications person should be free to work within those parameters. If the group can't agree on a set of principles and values, why be a group?
 - The future belongs to the bold.
 - That's something Johnny said in a caucus meeting in Juneau.
 - He was referring to Bill's plan to speak about the offshore drilling resolution introduced by the majorities.
 - In the same meeting I was not allowed to get through even the first page of my communications proposal, and the group agreed that it didn't want to talk about revenues at all.
 - The future belongs to the bold.
 - Do not put your seats before your principles.
 - If you have decided upon a position because you're afraid to lose your seat, it almost has to mean you've decided to be like someone who might run against you.
 - Think about that.
 - The key to messaging is not to think of the blandest thing you can say and hope you don't get an opponent. The key is to find a powerful way to talk about things you actually believe in and use it to kick the asses of all comers. Short of that you're just a shadow of the people you don't like. Where's the fun in that?

- The seat doesn't belong to you. People gave it to you so you could lead. If you're doing something other than lead with it ... well ...
 - Think about that.
- I know some of you are bristling at this right now. I know you're not used to a staffer speaking this bluntly. Staffers should speak bluntly. You should seek out people who will tell you the truth. I'm sorry if it's uncomfortable, but it's important.
- Get value for your efforts, and insist that your staff produce value for their efforts, too.
 - Analyze everything through the filter of your goals.
 - If something is taking up a good deal of time but not contributing to the goals, change it or kill it.
 - Your staff are talented and they work hard, but are their efforts continuing to the overall goals? Are there redundancies between offices? Do the staff have clear ideas about what exactly they're working toward in the big picture?
 - In general that's none of my business, but it's worth exploring.
- Here are some thoughts about value from your communications person/people.
 - Lose or significantly change the newsclips.
 - Mike spends at least half his time on them. Sorry, but that's insane. How does it contribute to winning more seats, passing legislation or ... anything?
 - Much of the information in that version of the clips is not even relevant to the group as a whole.
 - What else could your press people be doing with that time?
 - Figure out what you actually want to accomplish with social media before you tell your press people they need to be facebooking and tweeting more.
 - I put together some metrics on our Facebook page going back about a year.
 - It's dismal.
 - The good news is every other caucus sucks as bad as we do – so there's opportunity!
 - Unfortunately, the tendency toward blandness and the lack of other effective external communications tools mean we're going to keep sucking at it until we get ... well ... bold.
 - Just doing things because everyone else does them, and because someone told you it's important is insane unless you have a coherent plan (complete with measurement) to make it work well.
 - Trust me, when you guys put stuff on Facebook and Twitter you're pretty much talking to yourselves – and you're already voting for you so ... you know.

- I've spent a lot of time studying how to make it work better, but because you can't actually agree to have a communications plan, that work is useless.
- As a side note, here's a bunch of other things I've done: I drafted the communications plan back in August but we still haven't actually talked about it; I also put together a proposal for the new VIP News, complete with a dummy edition, but we haven't talked about that either. I put together a fiscal roadmap that could have been an important part of our communications plan ... nothing. I put together a presentation about the roadmap that I was going to deliver at the Jim Ayers meeting, but that didn't happen. I just wanted you to know that I have been working, but it's been on things nobody is interested in. You should be interested in those things.
- Reduce the busy work.
 - Apparently everybody thinks the press secretary should primarily be focused on taking pictures of people at microphones.
 - You already have enough of those. You could use old ones and nobody would know the difference. Plus, you'd look YOUNGER!
 - As for the photos the process is also a mess. When I do photos I come back and sort through them, weeding out the bad ones and formatting the few good ones in Photoshop. That way we have quality, high-rez photos, but not a ton of them. The other day I noticed a staffer brought in a bunch of photos to Mike. They were ALL blurry because the staffer, through no fault of his own, did not realize he should have adjusted the ISO setting to get faster shutter speeds and clearer photos. Mike downloaded all the photos into a file and sent out an e-mail that they were there – help yourselves.
 - Way inefficient. The blurriness could be reduced with Photoshop. The photos should be sorted to get the crappy ones out and to fix the good ones to be actually useable.
 - But, hey, the clips must go on. The innocuous facebooking must continue so we can get two likes and a comment from an insane person.
 - Our press releases are bad and largely a waste of time.

- You'd be much better served trusting your press people to interact with the press and to provide them with material that makes them better at reporting.
- Stop worrying about whose name is on top of the form. Nobody EVER puts an image of our press release form in the newspaper, and reporters and editors genuinely don't care. No, really. I was one of them. They don't care.
- We tend to write about "safe" topics in the safest of ways. The future belongs to the bold.
- We don't always tell the truth. I'm sorry, but you didn't actually propose saving \$700M more than the Republicans did last year. You proposed switching \$632M from the FY16 budget to the FY17 budget – or worse, to a FY16 supplemental. The rest was mostly one-time cuts that won't actually reduce the budget. That's not honest, and it's hugely dangerous. I would have recommended not doing that – and I would have gotten in trouble for saying that. In my opinion, you got lucky the press decided not to blast you for it. One reporter told me he thought about it, but didn't do it.
- Press releases are for when you do things. If you didn't do something, don't tell the world you didn't do it. Even worse, don't tell the world the Republicans aren't doing what you want. It only makes you look weak and whiny.
- Think about the follow up question. Much of our shtick the past few years revolves around griping about the Republicans. On the bright side most reporters actually like you, so they don't often call you on it. It still sounds whiny, and sooner or later your luck's going to run out. Every time someone asks a D, "What would YOU do?" I cringe, because that's when the mealy mouthing starts. If I was your professional communications director I'd tell you to figure out real answers to that question.

- And, I'm sorry, but it can't be, "We'd fix the oil tax credits and oil taxes." That doesn't get you there, and you all know it. The future belongs to the bold. And if that's not true, at least your seats should belong to the bold.

I could go on, but I'm betting I've lost most of you by now. These points are intended as constructive criticism and as heartfelt recommendations from someone who wants you to succeed. I suspect at least some of you are angry by now, and that's unfortunate. I think if you continue to do things the way you have you'll continue to be in the minority, and people like me will continue to be disappointed with the kind of government I have.

Thanks for your time and consideration. I sincerely wish you all the best.

Frank Ameduri