

Obama, please give us reasons to stay hopeful

Bill Church

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Dear Mr. President,

When you campaigned two years ago to work on our behalf, it was understandable why so many Americans believed in you.

You seemed likeable, sincere and determined to fix the problems that ailed our country. You masterfully brought together a coalition of diverse voters who shared in your hope.

Hope for change.

Hope for our future.

Hope for our country.

It's not my intent today to assess how you're doing, or even offer advice. But you have an obligation — just as I do — to listen.

Let me tell you a story from last week:

The phone call was polite. Would you have time to visit with us, the caller asked.

They showed up promptly for our appointment. I anticipated that the two gentlemen would talk about how to improve the Statesman Journal, but that wasn't their intent.

No, they had a bigger concern.

Said one, "I fear for our democracy."

Hmmm, a bit extreme perhaps.

It's easy in this fragmented climate, where everyone's opinion has an audience, to discount them as out-of-touchers.

But fringe thinkers, they're not. First impressions say they are the type of gentlemen you'd want as neighbors.

We didn't talk political affiliations, although it was clear enough that you weren't their choice in 2008.



The Associated Press

President Obama delivers a televised address Tuesday from the Oval Office of the White House.

Their conversation was less about rhetoric and more about genuine concern and frustration.

I've been in plenty of these innocent-enough conversations, and more often than not there is a turning point where rationality becomes a full-blown rant.

But that wasn't the tone of this discussion. They just wanted 20 minutes of my time, and they stuck to that promise.

They talked about your slow response to the oil spill and your administration's lack of accountability in possibly preventing this generational disaster.

They talked about cap and trade, and whether it affects homeowners. About the ever-changing costs tied to your health reform bill. And your inconsistent leadership.

They didn't say anything your poll watchers haven't heard or already know. But you should know what voters, like these two men, are thinking about.

They talked about the national media, particularly how journalists have given you a soft ride and misrepresented the rise of the Tea Party initiative.

Mention politics, particularly the Tea Party, and name-calling sometimes becomes the method of debate.

They chose, though, to be civil.

The two men have long links to the Salem area. They've raised families, built friendships in this community and worked hard to better themselves.

But they genuinely fear the direction you've taken the country. I felt it in their voices.

Granted, it's a well-worn ploy for a Sunday columnist to pen a seemingly sincere letter to some politico. I know the Sunday Statesman Journal doesn't show up on the front mat of the White House. And this column has to compete with 186 million Google searches involving you, Mr. President.

And, yes, there are millions of people in the U.S. who have faith in your leadership. They still have hope.

But these gentlemen aren't alone in their concerns and fear.

Can you give them reasons to believe they're wrong?

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