



Dear Mr.

What would you say
if you could talk
to Barack Obama?
Board members weigh in with
words of advice and wisdom

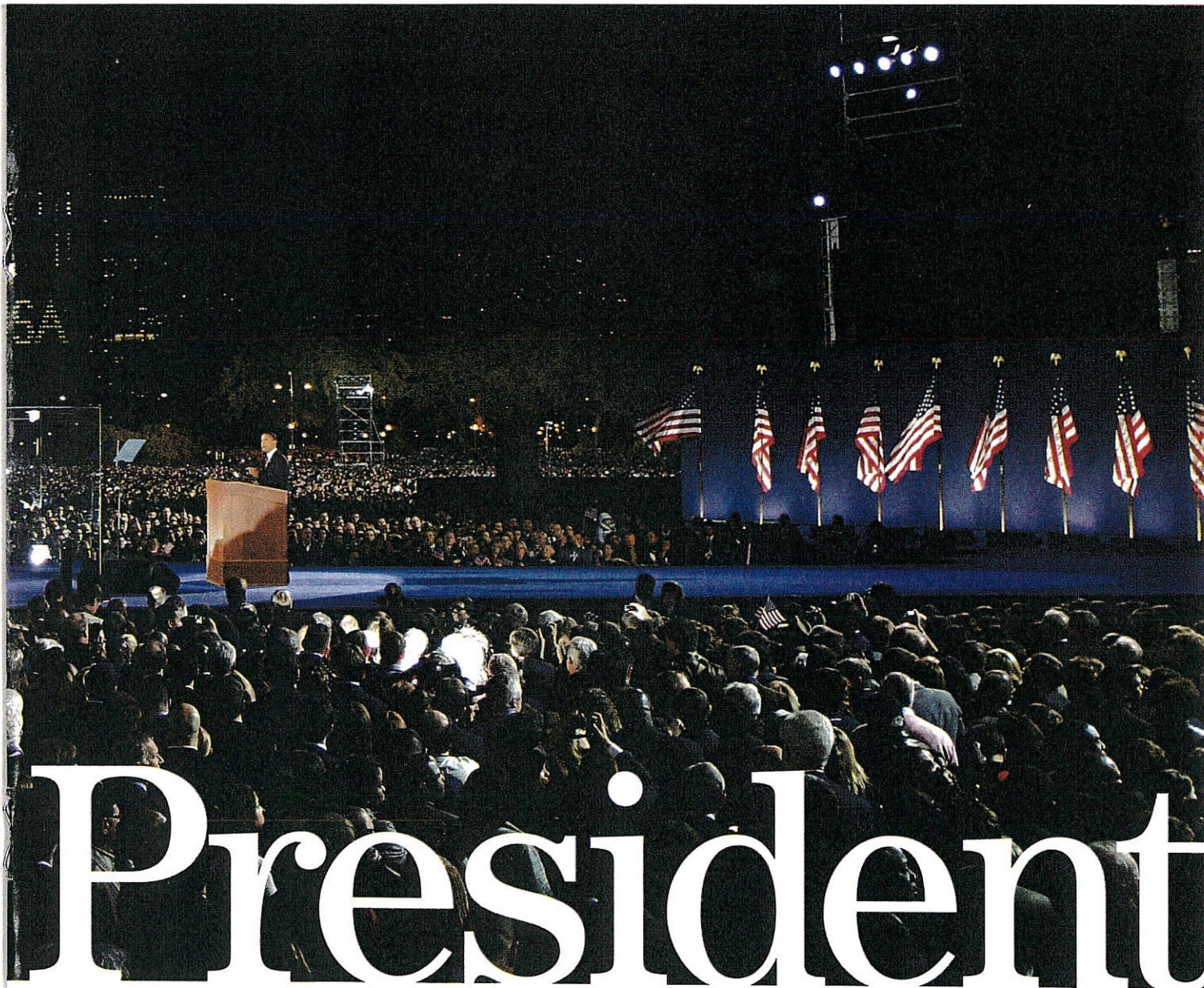
Dan Schlafer

If I could sit down and talk with the President of the United States, here's what I would say about school boards and K-12 public education: "Mr. President, fix the flaws and change the law!"

But first, I would say to President Barack Obama, congratulations on your election. Clearly, you are cognizant that our nation's hopes and dreams are securely tied to your coattails. Not since the days of Kennedy's Camelot have our expectations been this lofty. Never have so many required so much of one man. Without question, our nation is in a time of transition with a yearning for change and a need for transformation.

As the federal programs director in one school district and a board member in another, I appreciate this opportunity to discuss the state of public education with you. Clearly, our current economic woes and the ongoing war on terror have taken center stage in the campaign conversation during the past two years. As a result, this vitally important issue—public education—was notably absent from the discussion.

We cannot afford to wait longer to begin the education conversation. Our children's future is hanging in the balance. If left unchanged, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 will ensure



that no child's behind will be left in a public school by 2014, that magical, mystical year when all students in our public schools meet adequate yearly progress goals and graduate on time. What looks like, to many of us, the privatization of public education will have been completed, assisted by vouchers and charter schools unless fundamental, positive change is made.

The need for funding

Let's talk funding first, shall we? Allow me to promulgate an example to which you will surely relate.

The just-concluded campaign saw your camp generate the largest cash flow in any presidential race in our nation's history. Well-documented by friend and foe alike is the fact that you outspent your opponent by a 3-to-1 margin. Do you think those deep pockets made a difference? Could you better perform the duties as your party's nominee because of that monetary advantage? Did campaign funding provide you with the tools you needed to get out your message? Would someone who just five short years ago was an unknown Illinois state senator have been able to pull off the upset of the century without that cash?

You'd agree, wouldn't you, that not having to worry about funding emancipated you and your organization from financial concerns and freed you to do everything necessary to ensure your election to the most powerful post in the world?

Please step over to our world, Mr. President. Place yourself in an educator's shoes for a moment. Teachers, administrators, support staff, and school board members have a huge mountain to climb every year. All of us welcome the challenge. We show up each morning trained, ready, and eager to charge that hill, but our hiking boots are tattered and torn—if we have boots at all. Our ropes are frayed and worn—if we have ropes at all. A look in our half-empty equipment and supplies toolbox reveals a note from the federal government.

The note says: "We don't have enough money to help you make it all the way to the top, but you'd better get there anyway. Oh, and another thing—if your school fails to make adequate yearly progress, we'll pull you off the mountain, make an example out of you, and let everyone in the world know you failed, no matter how hard you tried. Feel free to spend your own money on equipment and supplies. The data show you'll need