

Remarks of Senator Barack Obama

Primary Night

Tuesday, May 6th, 2008

Raleigh, North Carolina

As Prepared for Delivery

You know, some were saying that North Carolina would be a game-changer in this election. But today, what North Carolina decided is that the only game that needs changing is the one in Washington, DC.

I want to start by congratulating Senator Clinton on her victory in the state of Indiana. And I want to thank the people of North Carolina for giving us a victory in a big state, a swing state, and a state where we will compete to win if I am the Democratic nominee for President of the United States.

When this campaign began, Washington didn't give us much of a chance. But because you came out in the bitter cold, and knocked on doors, and enlisted your friends and neighbors in this cause; because you stood up to the cynics, and the doubters, and the nay-sayers when we were up and when we were down; because you still believe that this is our moment, and our time, for change - tonight we stand less than two hundred delegates away from securing the Democratic nomination for President of the United States.

More importantly, because of you, we have seen that it's possible to overcome the politics of division and distraction; that it's possible to overcome the same old negative attacks that are always about scoring points and never about solving our problems. We've seen that the American people aren't looking for more spin or more gimmicks, but honest answers about the challenges we face. That's what you've accomplished in this campaign, and that's how we'll change this country together.

This has been one of the longest, most closely fought contests in history. And that's partly because we have such a formidable opponent in Senator Hillary Clinton. Tonight, many of the pundits have suggested that this party is inalterably divided - that Senator

Clinton's supporters will not support me, and that my supporters will not support her.

Well I'm here tonight to tell you that I don't believe it. Yes, there have been bruised feelings on both sides. Yes, each side desperately wants their candidate to win. But ultimately, this race is not about Hillary Clinton or Barack Obama or John McCain. This election is about you - the American people - and whether we will have a president and a party that can lead us toward a brighter future.

This primary season may not be over, but when it is, we will have to remember who we are as Democrats - that we are the party of Jefferson and Jackson; of Roosevelt and Kennedy; and that we are at our best when we lead with principle; when we lead with conviction; when we summon an entire nation around a common purpose - a higher purpose. This fall, we intend to march forward as one Democratic Party, united by a common vision for this country. Because we all agree that at this defining moment in history - a moment when we're facing two wars, an economy in turmoil, a planet in peril - we can't afford to give John McCain the chance to serve out George Bush's third term. We need change in America.

The woman I met in Indiana who just lost her job, and her pension, and her insurance when the plant where she worked at her entire life closed down - she can't afford four more years of tax breaks for corporations like the one that shipped her job overseas. She needs us to give tax breaks to companies that create good jobs here in America. She can't afford four more years of tax breaks for CEOs like the one who walked away from her company with a multi-million dollar bonus. She needs middle-class tax relief that will help her pay the skyrocketing price of groceries, and gas, and college tuition. That's why I'm running for President.

The college student I met in Iowa who works the night shift after a full day of class and still can't pay the medical bills for a sister who's ill - she can't afford four more years of a health care plan that only takes care of the healthy and the wealthy; that allows insurance companies to discriminate and deny coverage to those Americans who need it most. She needs us to stand up to those insurance companies and pass a plan that lowers every family's premiums and gives every uninsured American the same kind of coverage that Members of Congress give themselves. That's why I'm running for President.

The mother in Wisconsin who gave me a bracelet inscribed with the name of the son she lost in Iraq; the families who pray for their loved ones to come home; the heroes on their third and fourth and fifth tour of duty - they can't afford four more years of a war that should've never

been authorized and never been waged. They can't afford four more years of our veterans returning to broken-down barracks and substandard care. They need us to end a war that isn't making us safer. They need us to treat them with the care and respect they deserve. That's why I'm running for President.

The man I met in Pennsylvania who lost his job but can't even afford the gas to drive around and look for a new one - he can't afford four more years of an energy policy written by the oil companies and for the oil companies; a policy that's not only keeping gas at record prices, but funding both sides of the war on terror and destroying our planet in the process. He doesn't need four more years of Washington policies that sound good, but don't solve the problem. He needs us to take a permanent holiday from our oil addiction by making the automakers raise their fuel standards, corporations pay for their pollution, and oil companies invest their record profits in a clean energy future. That's the change we need. And that's why I'm running for President.

The people I've met in small towns and big cities across this country understand that government can't solve all our problems - and we don't expect it to. We believe in hard work. We believe in personal responsibility and self-reliance.

But we also believe that we have a larger responsibility to one another as Americans - that America is a place - that America is the place - where you can make it if you try. That no matter how much money you start with or where you come from or who your parents are, opportunity is yours if you're willing to reach for it and work for it. It's the idea that while there are few guarantees in life, you should be able to count on a job that pays the bills; health care for when you need it; a pension for when you retire; an education for your children that will allow them to fulfill their God-given potential. That's the America we believe in. That's the America I know.

This is the country that gave my grandfather a chance to go to college on the GI Bill when he came home from World War II; a country that gave him and my grandmother the chance to buy their first home with a loan from the government.

This is the country that made it possible for my mother - a single parent who had to go on food stamps at one point - to send my sister and me to the best schools in the country on scholarships.

This is the country that allowed my father-in-law - a city worker at a South Side water filtration plant - to provide for his wife and two

children on a single salary. This is a man who was diagnosed at age thirty with multiple sclerosis - who relied on a walker to get himself to work. And yet, every day he went, and he labored, and he sent my wife and her brother to one of the best colleges in the nation. It was a job that didn't just give him a paycheck, but a sense of dignity and self-worth. It was an America that didn't just reward wealth, but the work and the workers who created it.

Somewhere along the way, between all the bickering and the influence-peddling and the game-playing of the last few decades, Washington and Wall Street have lost touch with these values. And while I honor John McCain's service to his country, his ideas for America are out of touch with these values. His plans for the future are nothing more than the failed policies of the past. And his plan to win in November appears to come from the very same playbook that his side has used time after time in election after election.

Yes, we know what's coming. We've seen it already. The same names and labels they always pin on everyone who doesn't agree with all their ideas. The same efforts to distract us from the issues that affect our lives by pouncing on every gaffe and association and fake controversy in the hope that the media will play along. The attempts to play on our fears and exploit our differences to turn us against each other for pure political gain - to slice and dice this country into Red States and Blue States; blue-collar and white-collar; white and black, and brown.

This is what they will do - no matter which one of us is the nominee. The question, then, is not what kind of campaign they'll run, it's what kind of campaign we will run. It's what we will do to make this year different. I didn't get into race thinking that I could avoid this kind of politics, but I am running for President because this is the time to end it.

We will end it this time not because I'm perfect - I think by now this campaign has reminded all of us of that. We will end it not by duplicating the same tactics and the same strategies as the other side, because that will just lead us down the same path of polarization and gridlock.

We will end it by telling the truth - forcefully, repeatedly, confidently - and by trusting that the American people will embrace the need for change.

Because that's how we've always changed this country - not from the top-down, but from the bottom-up; when you - the American people - decide that the stakes are too high and the challenges are too great.

The other side can label and name-call all they want, but I trust the American people to recognize that it's not surrender to end the war in Iraq so that we can rebuild our military and go after al Qaeda's leaders. I trust the American people to understand that it's not weakness, but wisdom to talk not just to our friends, but our enemies - like Roosevelt did, and Kennedy did, and Truman did.

I trust the American people to realize that while we don't need big government, we do need a government that stands up for families who are being tricked out of their homes by Wall Street predators; a government that stands up for the middle-class by giving them a tax break; a government that ensures that no American will ever lose their life savings just because their child gets sick. Security and opportunity; compassion and prosperity aren't liberal values or conservative values - they're American values.

Most of all, I trust the American people's desire to no longer be defined by our differences. Because no matter where I've been in this country - whether it was the corn fields of Iowa or the textile mills of the Carolinas; the streets of San Antonio or the foothills of Georgia - I've found that while we may have different stories, we hold common hopes. We may not look the same or come from the same place, but we want to move in the same direction - towards a better future for our children and our grandchildren.

That's why I'm in this race. I love this country too much to see it divided and distracted at this moment in history. I believe in our ability to perfect this union because it's the only reason I'm standing here today. And I know the promise of America because I have lived it.

It is the light of opportunity that led my father across an ocean.

It is the founding ideals that the flag draped over my grandfather's coffin stands for - it is life, and liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

It's the simple truth I learned all those years ago when I worked in the shadows of a shuttered steel mill on the South Side of Chicago - that in this country, justice can be won against the greatest of odds;

hope can find its way back to the darkest of corners; and when we are told that we cannot bring about the change that we seek, we answer with one voice - yes we can.

So don't ever forget that this election is not about me, or any candidate. Don't ever forget that this campaign is about you - about your hopes, about your dreams, about your struggles, about securing your portion of the American Dream.

Don't ever forget that we have a choice in this country - that we can choose not to be divided; that we can choose not to be afraid; that we can still choose this moment to finally come together and solve the problems we've talked about all those other years in all those other elections.

This time can be different than all the rest. This time we can face down those who say our road is too long; that our climb is too steep; that we can no longer achieve the change that we seek. This is our time to answer the call that so many generations of Americans have answered before - by insisting that by hard work, and by sacrifice, the American Dream will endure. Thank you, and may God Bless the United States of America.