



## Remarks by John McCain to the National Urban League Annual Conference

By Press Office  
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ARLINGTON, VA -- U.S. Senator John McCain will deliver the following remarks as prepared for delivery to the 2008 National Urban League Annual Conference in Orlando, Florida, today at 11:00 a.m. EDT:

Thank you, Marc, for the introduction. I appreciate your kind invitation and this warm welcome to Orlando and to the Urban League. Through all the business cycles and political cycles of almost a century, this organization has championed an agenda of economic growth and opportunity. You've never lost your sense of mission, or your commitment to bettering the lives of African Americans and of all citizens. I'm honored to be with the men and women of the Urban League.

You'll hear from my opponent, Senator Obama, tomorrow, and if there's one thing he always delivers it's a great speech. But I hope you'll listen carefully, because his ideas are not always as impressive as his rhetoric. And this is especially true in the case of the Urban League's agenda of opportunity. Your Opportunity Compact speaks of the urgent need to reform our public schools, create jobs, and help small businesses grow. You understand that persistent problems of failing schools and economic stagnation cannot be solved with the same tired ideas and pandering to special interests that have failed us time and again. And you know how much the challenges have changed for those who champion the cause of equal opportunity in America.

Equal access to public education has been gained. But what is the value of access to a failing school? Equal employment opportunity is set firmly down in law. But with jobs becoming scarcer -- and more than 400,000 Americans thrown out of work just this year -- that can amount to an equal share of diminished opportunity. For years, business ownership by African Americans has been growing rapidly. This is all to the good, but that hopeful trend is threatened in a struggling economy -- with the cost of energy, health care, and just about everything else rising sharply.

As in other challenges African Americans have overcome, these problems require clarity of purpose. They require the solidarity of groups like the Urban League. And, at times, they also require a willingness to break from conventional thinking.

Nowhere are the limitations of conventional thinking any more apparent than in education policy. After decades of hearing the same big promises from the public education establishment, and seeing the same poor results, it is surely time to shake off old ways and to demand new reforms. That isn't just my opinion; it is the conviction of parents in poor neighborhoods across this nation who want better lives for their children.

Just ask the families in New Orleans who will soon have the chance to remove their sons and daughters from failing schools, and enroll them instead in a school-choice scholarship program. That program in Louisiana was proposed by Democratic state legislators and signed into law by Governor Bobby Jindal. Just three years after Katrina, they are bringing real hope to poor neighborhoods, and showing how much can be achieved when both parties work together for real reform. Or ask parents in the disadvantaged neighborhoods of Washington, D.C. whether they want more choices in education. The District's Opportunity Scholarship program serves more than 1,900 boys and girls from families with an average income of 23,000 dollars a year. And more than 7,000 more families have applied for that program. What they all have in common is the desire to get their kids into a better school.

Democrats in Congress, including my opponent, oppose the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship program. In remarks to the American Federation of Teachers last month, Senator Obama dismissed public support for private school vouchers for low-income Americans as, "tired rhetoric about vouchers and school choice." All of that went over well with the teachers union, but where does it leave families and their children who are stuck in failing schools?

Over the years, Americans have heard a lot of "tired rhetoric" about education. We've heard it in the endless excuses of people who seem more concerned about their own position than about our children. We've heard it from politicians who accept the status quo rather than stand up for real change in our public schools. Parents ask only for schools that are safe, teachers who are competent, and diplomas that open doors of opportunity. When a public school fails, repeatedly, to meet these minimal objectives, parents ask only for a

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choice in the education of their children. Some parents may choose a better public school. Some may choose a private school. Many will choose a charter school. No entrenched bureaucracy or union should deny parents that choice and children that opportunity.

We should also offer more choices to those who wish to become teachers. Many thousands of highly qualified men and women have great knowledge, wisdom, and experience to offer public school students. But a monopoly on teacher certification prevents them from getting that chance. You can be a Nobel Laureate and not qualify to teach in most public schools today because they don't have all the proper credits in educational "theory" or "methodology." All they have is learning and the desire and ability to share it. If we're putting the interests of students first, then those qualifications should be enough.

If I am elected president, school choice for all who want it, an expansion of Opportunity Scholarships, and alternative certification for teachers will all be part of a serious agenda of education reform. I will target funding to recruit teachers who graduate in the top 25 percent of their class, or who participate in an alternative teacher recruitment program such as Teach for America, the American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence, and the New Teacher Project.

We will pay bonuses to teachers who take on the challenge of working in our most troubled schools -- because we need their fine minds and good hearts to help turn those schools around. We will award bonuses as well to our highest-achieving teachers. And no longer will we measure teacher achievement by conformity to process. We will measure it by the success of their students.

Moreover, the funds for these bonuses will not be controlled by faraway officials -- in Washington, in a state capital, or even in a district office. Under my reforms, we will put the money and the responsibilities where they belong -- in the office of the school principal. One reason charter schools are so successful, and so sought after by parents, is that principals have spending discretion. And I intend to give that same discretion to public school principals. No longer will money be spent on rigid and often meaningless formulas. Relying on the good judgment and first-hand knowledge of school principals, education money will be spent in service to public school students.

Under my reforms, parents will exercise freedom of choice in obtaining extra help for children who are falling behind. As it is, federal aid to parents for tutoring for their children has to go through another bureaucracy. They can't purchase the tutoring directly, without dealing with the same education establishment that failed their children in the first place. These needless restrictions will be removed. If a student needs extra help, parents will be able to sign them up to get it, with direct public support.

Some of these reforms, and others, are contained in a Statement of Principles drafted by a group dedicated to finally changing the status quo in our education system. The Education Equality Project has brought together leaders from all across the political spectrum, including school Chancellor Joel Klein and Mayor Michael Bloomberg of New York City. Chancellor Klein is a strong supporter of charter schools, because he understands that fundamental reform is needed. As he puts it, "in large urban areas the culture of public education is broken. If you don't fix this culture, then you are not going to be able to make the kind of changes that are needed." Among others who share this conviction are Mayor Cory Booker of Newark, Chancellor Michelle Rhee of Washington, and Harold Ford, Junior. You know that a reform movement is truly bipartisan when J.C. Watts and Al Sharpton are both members. And today I am proud to add my name as well to the list of those who support the aims and principles of the Education Equality Project.

But one name is still missing, Senator Obama's. My opponent talks a great deal about hope and change, and education is as good a test as any of his seriousness. The Education Equality Project is a practical plan for delivering change and restoring hope for children and parents who need a lot of both. And if Senator Obama continues to defer to the teachers unions, instead of committing to real reform, then he should start looking for new slogans.

Over the years, the Urban League has brought enormous good into the life of our country -- by broadening the reach of economic opportunity. There was a time when economists took little if any notice at all of the poverty of black communities. Even in times of general economic growth, many lived in a perpetual recession, and the jobs available didn't promise much upward mobility. Our country still has a lot of progress to make on this score. But with 1.2 million businesses today owned and operated by African Americans, more and more are no longer just spectators on the prosperity of our country. They are stakeholders. As much as anyone else, they count on their government to help create the conditions of economic growth -- and, as president, I intend to do just that.

Senator Obama and I have fundamental differences on economic policy, and many of them concern tax rates. He supports proposals to raise top marginal rates paid by small business and families, to raise tax rates on those with taxable incomes of more than 32,000 dollars, raise capital gains taxes, raise taxes on dividends, raise payroll taxes and raise estate taxes. That's a whole lot of raising, and for millions of families, individuals, and small businesses it will mean a lot less money to spend, save and invest as they see fit.

For my part, I believe that in a troubled economy, when folks are struggling to afford the necessities of life, higher taxes are the last thing we need. The economy isn't hurting because workers and businesses are under-taxed. Raising taxes eliminates jobs, hurts small businesses, and delays economic recovery.

Under my plan, we will preserve the current low rates as they are, so businesses large and small can hire more people. We will double the personal exemption from \$3,500 to \$7,000 for every dependent, in every family in America. We will offer every individual and

family a large tax credit to buy their health care, so employers can spend more on wages, and workers don't lose their coverage when they change jobs. We will lower the business tax rate, so American companies open new plants and create more jobs in this country.

There are honest differences as well about the growth of government. But surely we can find common ground in the principle that government cannot go on forever spending recklessly and incurring debt. Government has grown by 60 percent in the last eight years, because the Congress and this administration have failed to meet their responsibilities. And next year, total federal expenditures are predicted to reach over three trillion dollars. That is an awful lot for us to be spending when this nation is already more than nine trillion dollars in debt or more than thirty thousand dollars in debt for every citizen. That's a debt our government plans to leave for your children and mine to bear. And that is a failure not only of financial foresight, but of moral obligation.

There will come a day when the road reaches a dead-end. And it won't be today's politicians who suffer the consequences. It will be American workers and their children who are left with worthless promises and trillion-dollar debts. We cannot let that happen. As President, I'll work with every member of Congress -- Republican, Democrat, and Independent -- who shares my commitment to reforming government and controlling spending. I'll order a top-to-bottom review of every federal program, department, and agency. We're going to demand accountability. We're going to make sure failed programs are not rewarded ... and that discretionary spending is going where it belongs -- to essential priorities like job training, the security of our citizens, and the care of our veterans.

To get our economy running at full strength again, we need to stay focused on creating jobs for our people, and protecting paychecks from the rising costs of food, gasoline, and most everything else. Above all, we need to get a handle on the cost of oil and gasoline, and to regain energy independence for America.

All across our country, people are hurting. Small farmers, truckers, and taxi drivers are unable to cover their costs. Small business owners are struggling to meet their payrolls. The cost of living is rising, and the value of paychecks is falling. Yet even now, with the price of gasoline still around four dollars per gallon, the Congress has done exactly nothing.

Most Americans understand that producing more of something will lower its price. And if I am elected president, this nation will move quickly to increase our own energy production. Last month, the President finally lifted the executive ban on offshore oil and gas exploration, and called on Congress to lift its ban as well. Lifting that ban could seriously lower the price of oil -- and Congress should get it done immediately. We need to drill more, drill now, and pay less at the pump.

Under my energy plan, the Lexington Project, we will also make use of America's vast coal reserves. As president, I will commit this nation to a concerted effort to make clean coal a reality and create jobs in hard-pressed regions. And America will pursue the goal of building 45 nuclear power plants before 2030, which will generate not only much-needed electricity but some 700,000 jobs as well. We will also accelerate the development of wind and solar power and other renewable technologies, and we will help automakers design and sell cars that don't depend on gasoline. Production of hybrid, flex-fuel, and electric cars will bring America closer to energy independence. And it will bring jobs to auto plants, parts manufacturers, and the communities that support them.

Regaining control over the cost and supply of energy in America will not be easy, and it will not happen quickly. But no challenge to our economy is more urgent. And you have my pledge that if I am president, we're going to get it done.

Our country is passing through a very tough time. But Americans have been through worse, and beaten longer odds. The men and women of the Urban League know more than most about facing long odds, and overcoming adversity. For 98 years, this organization has been at the center of the great and honorable cause of equal opportunity for every American. I'm here today as an admirer and a fellow American, an association that means more to me than any other. I am a candidate for president who seeks your vote and hopes to earn it. But whether or not I win your support, I need your goodwill and counsel. And should I succeed, I'll need it all the more. I have always believed in this country, in a good America, a great America. But I have always known we can build a better America, where no place or person is left without hope or opportunity by the sins of injustice or indifference. It would be among the great privileges of my life to work with you in that cause. Thank you all very much.

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