

EN ESPAÑOL

Remarks of Senator Barack Obama: Virginia Jefferson-Jackson Dinner

Richmond, VA | February 09, 2008

It has now been one year since we began this campaign for the presidency on the steps of the Old State Capitol in Springfield, Illinois - just me and 15,000 of my closest friends.

At the time, there weren't too many who imagined we'd be standing where we are today. I knew I wouldn't be Washington's favorite candidate. I knew we wouldn't get all the big donors or endorsements right off the bat. I knew I'd be the underdog in every contest from January to June. I knew it wouldn't be easy.

But then something started happening. As we met people in their living rooms and on their farms; in churches and town hall meetings, they all started telling a similar story about the state of our politics today. Whether they're young or old; black or white; Latino or Asian; Democrat, Independent or even Republican, the message is the same:

We are tired of being disappointed by our politics. We are tired of being let down. We're tired of hearing promises made and ten-point plans proposed in the heat of a campaign only to have nothing change when everyone goes back to Washington. Because the lobbyists just write another check. Or because politicians start worrying about how they'll win the next election instead of why they should. Or because they focus on who's up and who's down instead of who matters.

And while Washington is consumed with the same drama and division and distraction, another family puts up a For Sale sign in the front yard. Another factory shuts its doors forever. Another mother declares bankruptcy because she cannot pay her child's medical bills.

And another soldier waves goodbye as he leaves on another tour of duty in a war that should've never been authorized and never been waged. It goes on and on and on, year after year after year.

But in this election - at this moment - Americans are standing up all across the country to say, not this time. Not this year. The stakes are too high and the challenges too great to play the same Washington game with the same Washington players and expect a different result. And today, voters from the West Coast to the Gulf Coast to the heart of America stood up to say that it is time to turn the page. We won Louisiana, and Nebraska, and the state of Washington, and I believe that we can win in Virginia on Tuesday if you're ready to stand for change.

Each of us running for the Democratic nomination agrees on one thing that the other party does not - the next President must end the disastrous policies of George W. Bush. And both Senator Clinton and I have put forth detailed plans and good ideas that would do just that.

But I am running for President because I believe that to actually make change happen - to make this time different than all the rest - we need a leader who can finally move beyond the divisive politics of Washington and bring Democrats, Independents, and Republicans together to get things done. That's how we'll win this election, and that's how we'll change this country when I am President of the United States.

This week we found out that the presumptive nominee of the Republican Party is Senator John McCain. Now, John McCain is a good man, an American hero, and we honor his half century of service to this nation. But in this campaign, he has made the decision to embrace the failed policies George Bush's Washington.

He speaks of a hundred year war in Iraq and sees another on the horizon with Iran. He once opposed George Bush's tax cuts for the wealthiest few who don't need them and didn't ask for them. He said they were too expensive and unwise. And he was absolutely right.

But somewhere along the line, the wheels came off the Straight Talk Express because he now he supports the very same tax cuts he voted against. This is what happens when you spend too long in Washington. Politicians don't say what they mean and they don't mean what they say. And that is why in this election,

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our party cannot stand for business-as-usual in Washington. The Democratic Party must stand for change.

This fall, we owe the American people a real choice.

It's a choice between debating John McCain about who has the most experience in Washington, or debating him about who's most likely to change Washington. Because that's a debate we can win.

It's a choice between debating John McCain about lobbying reform with a nominee who's taken more money from lobbyists than he has, or doing it with a campaign that hasn't taken a dime of their money because we've been funded by you - the American people.

And it's a choice between taking on John McCain with Republicans and Independents already united against us, or running against him with a campaign that's united Americans of all parties around a common purpose.

There is a reason why the last six polls in a row have shown that I'm the strongest candidate against John McCain. It's because we've done better with Independents in almost every single contest we've had. It's because we've won in more Red States and swing states that the next Democratic nominee needs to win in November.

Virginia Democrats know how important this is. That's how Mark Warner won in this state. That's how Tim Kaine won in this state. That's how Jim Webb won in this state. And if I am your nominee, this is one Democrat who plans to campaign in Virginia and win in Virginia this fall.

We are here to make clear that this election is not between regions or religions or genders. It's not about rich versus poor; young versus old; and it is not about black versus white.

It is about the past versus the future. The Republicans in Washington are already running on the politics of yesterday, which is why our party must be the party of tomorrow. And that is the party I will lead as President of the United States.

I know what it takes to pass health care reform because I've done it -- not by demonizing anyone who disagrees with me, but by bringing Democrats and Republicans together to provide health insurance to 150,000 children and parents in Illinois.

And when I am President, we'll pass universal health care not in twenty years, not in ten years, but by the end of my first term in office. But you don't have to take my word for it. Senator Ted Kennedy recently said that he wouldn't have endorsed me if he didn't believe passionately that I will fight for universal health care as President. And if there's someone who knows something about health care, it's Ted Kennedy.

My plan would bring down premiums for the typical family by \$2500 a year. We'd ban insurance companies from denying you coverage because of a pre-existing condition. We'd allow every American to get the same kind of health care that members of Congress get for themselves. And the one difference between my plan and Senator Clinton's plan is that she said she'd 'go after' your wages if you don't buy health care. Well I believe the reason people don't have health care isn't because no one's forced them to buy it, it's because no one's made it affordable - and that's why we bring down the cost of health care more than any other plan in this race.

It's also time to bring the cost of living down for working families who are struggling in this economy like never before. They're facing rising costs and falling wages, and we owe it to them to end the Bush-McCain tax cuts for the wealthiest 2% and put a tax cut into the pockets of the families who need it.

That's what I did in Illinois when I brought Democrats and Republicans together to provide \$100 million in tax relief to working families and the working poor, and that's the kind of tax relief I'll provide as President.

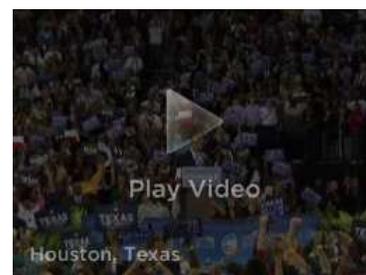
I will end the tax breaks for companies who ship our jobs overseas and give a middle-class tax break to 95% of working Americans. And homeowners who are struggling. And seniors who deserve to retire with dignity and respect. And I won't wait another ten years to raise the minimum wage in this country - I will raise it to keep pace with inflation every single year.

It's also time to give every child, everywhere, a world-class education, from the day they're born to the day they graduate college. I am only here today because somebody, somewhere, gave my father a ticket to come study in America. Because my mother got the opportunity to put herself through graduate school. Because even though we didn't have much growing up, I got scholarships to go to some of the best schools in the country. That's the chance I believe every child should have.

When I am President, we will give our children the best possible start by investing in early childhood education. We'll stop talking about how great our teachers are, and start rewarding them for their greatness, with better pay and more support. And we will provide every American with a \$4,000 a year tax credit that will finally help make a college education affordable and available for all.

And when I am President, this party will be the party that finally makes sure our sons and daughters don't grow up in a century where our economy is weighed down by our addiction to oil; our foreign policy is held hostage to the whims of dictators; and our planet passes a moment of no return.

When I called for higher fuel efficiency standards, I didn't do it in front of an environmental group in California - I did it in front of the automakers in Detroit. Now it was pretty quiet - I didn't get a lot of



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applause. But we need leadership that tells the American people not just what they want to hear, but what we need to know. That's why I will set the goal of an 80% reduction in carbon emissions by 2050, and we will meet it - with higher fuel standards and new investments in renewable fuels that will create millions of new jobs and entire new industries right here in America.

Finally, it is time to turn the page on eight years of a foreign policy that has made us less safe and less respected in the world. If I am the nominee of this party, John McCain will not be able to say that I agreed with him on voting for the war in Iraq; agreed with him on giving George Bush the benefit of the doubt on Iran; and agree with him in embracing the Bush-Cheney policy of not talking to leaders we don't like. Because that doesn't make us look strong, it makes us look arrogant. John F. Kennedy said that you should never negotiate out of fear, but you should never fear to negotiate. And that's what I will do as President. I don't just want to end this war in Iraq, I want to end the mindset that got us into war. It is time to turn the page.

This is our moment. This is our time for change. Our party - the Democratic Party - has always been at its best when we've led not by polls, but by principle; not by calculation, but by conviction; when we've called all Americans to a common purpose - a higher purpose.

We are the party of Jefferson, who wrote the words that we are still trying to heed - that all of us are created equal - that all of us deserve the chance to pursue our happiness.

We're the party of Jackson, who took back the White House for the people of this country.

We're the party of a man who overcame his own disability to tell us that the only thing we had to fear was fear itself; who faced down fascism and liberated a continent from tyranny.

And we're the party of a young President who asked what we could do for our country, and the challenged us to do it.

That is who we are. That is the Party that we need to be, and can be, if we cast off our doubts, and leave behind our fears, and choose the America that we know is possible. Because there is a moment in the life of every generation, if it is to make its mark on history, when its spirit has to come through, when it must choose the future over the past, when it must make its own change from the bottom up.

This is our moment. This is our message - the same message we had when we were up, and when we were down. The same message that we will carry all the way to the convention. And in seven months time we can realize this promise; we can claim this legacy; we can choose new leadership for America. Because there is nothing we cannot do if the American people decide it is time.



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