



"I'M ASKING YOU TO BELIEVE. Not just in my ability to bring about real change in Washington ... I'm asking you to believe in yours."

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Remarks for Senator Barack Obama: Building Trades National Legislative Conference

Washington, DC | April 15, 2008

We meet here at a challenging time for our families and a challenging time for America. All across the country, Americans are anxious about their future. In a global economy with new rules and new risks, they've watched their government do its best to try and shift those risks onto the backs of the American worker. And they wonder how they will ever keep up.

In coffee shops and town meetings, in VFW halls and right here in this room, the questions are all the same: Will I be able to leave my children a better world than I was given? Will I be able to save enough to send them to college or plan for a secure retirement? Will my job even be there tomorrow? Who will stand up for me in this new world?

In this time of change and uncertainty, these questions are expected, but this isn't the first time we've heard them. These are the same kinds of questions I heard over two decades ago after I turned down a job on Wall Street and went to work as a community organizer on the South Side of Chicago. The job was to help lift up neighborhoods that had been devastated by the closing of local steel plants. So I worked with unions and the city government to organize job-training for the jobless and hope for the hopeless, and block by block, we turned those neighborhoods around.

It showed me the fundamental truth that's been at the heart of America's success - and at the heart of the labor movement in this country - the idea that we all have mutual obligations to one another, that I am my brother's keeper; I am my sister's keeper, and that in this country, we rise and fall together.

But we know that for the past seven and a half years, we've had a whole different philosophy in the White House. They call it the ownership society - but what it means is you're on your own. You're a worker who's been laid off from a job? Tough luck, you're on your own. You're a single mom trying to find health care for your kids? Tough luck, you're on your own. You're a senior whose pension got dumped after a lifetime of hard work? Tough luck, you're on your own.

It's not just that this administration hasn't been fighting for you; they've actually tried to stop you from fighting for yourselves. This is the most anti-labor administration in our memory. They don't believe in unions. They don't believe in organizing. They've packed the labor relations board with their corporate buddies. Well, we've got news for them - it's not the Department of Management, it's the Department of Labor, and we're here to take it back. That's why I'm running for President of the United States of America.

Now, John McCain seems to think the Bush years have been pretty good because he's offering more of the same. And today's a good reminder of that because it's Tax Day. This is supposed to be a day when we pay what we owe to the government. But it's become a day when George Bush's Washington rewards its friends on Wall Street.

John McCain used to oppose the Bush tax cuts. He used to say that he couldn't support a tax cut where "so many of the benefits go to the most fortunate." He used to say that tax cuts in a time of war were a bad idea, and that they violated his "conscience." But somewhere along the way to the Republican nomination, I guess he figured that he had to stop speaking his mind and start towing the line - because now he wants to make those tax cuts permanent.

So I respect Senator McCain. And I honor his service to this nation. But I don't think America can afford four more years of the failed Bush policies, and that's what he's offering. We need to roll back the Bush-

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McCain tax cuts and invest in things like health care that are really important. Instead of giving tax breaks to the wealthy who don't need them and weren't even asking for them, we should be putting a middle class tax cut into the pockets of working families. That's why I'm the only candidate in this race who's proposed a tax cut that would save our families \$1,000 a year, and eliminate income taxes entirely for seniors making less than \$50,000.

But let me be clear - this isn't just about ending the failed policies of the Bush years; it's about ending the failed system in Washington that produces those policies. For far too long, through both Democratic and Republican administrations, Washington has allowed Wall Street to use lobbyists and campaign contributions to rig the system and get its way, no matter what it costs ordinary Americans.

Think about it. The top mortgage lenders spend \$185 million lobbying Congress, and we wonder why Washington looked the other way when they were tricking families into buying homes they couldn't afford. Drug and insurance companies spend \$1 billion on lobbying, and we wonder why the cost of health care continues to shoot up. When George Bush put Dick Cheney in charge of energy policy, Cheney met with the environmentalist groups once, he met with the renewable energy groups once, and he met with the oil and gas companies forty times. So it's no wonder Exxon Mobile is making \$11 billion a quarter when you're paying close to \$4 a gallon for gas.

We need a President who's thinking about not just Wall Street, but Main Street; who's not just looking to bump up a corporate bottom line, but to do what's right for the American people. Because that's the only way we're going to bring about real change - change that will make a lasting difference in the lives of ordinary Americans.

I believe I can bring about that change - because I'm the only candidate in this race who's actually worked to rein in the power of lobbyists by passing historic ethics reforms in Illinois and in the U.S. Senate. And I'm the only candidate who isn't taking a dime from Washington lobbyists and PACs. They have not funded my campaign, they will not run my administration, and they will not drown out the voices of the American people, of working people, of unions when I'm President of the United States.

Your voices will be heard. If you have any doubts, you can ask the union leaders in Illinois. When I was home talking to some of the local leaders there a couple of years ago, they told me they were being underbid on projects because unscrupulous builders were gaming the system. And I listened. They said that on some construction jobs, those builders were calling their employees "independent contractors" to get out of having to pay employment taxes and workers comp or overtime.

That didn't sound right to me. So I set about leading an effort with Senator Durbin, Senator Kennedy and others in the Senate to end this practice. Because if you're doing the same work as other employees, you should have worker protections, the same ability to organize, and the same wages and benefits. And I'll fight to make that the law of the land when I'm President of the United States.

We'll make sure Washington serves nobody's interests but the people's. Because I don't know about you, but I'm tired of playing defense. I'm ready to play some offense. I know the Building and Construction Trades are ready to play offense. We're ready to play offense for the minimum wage. We're ready to play offense for retirement security.

We're ready to play offense for universal health care. It's time we stood up to the drug and insurance companies who've been blocking reform for too long and tell them enough is enough. I refuse to accept that in the richest nation on Earth, we have to stand by while 47 million Americans go without health insurance, and millions more are being driven to financial ruin trying to pay their medical bills. I'm tired of seeing union members having to spend all their time negotiating about the health care they already have when they should be negotiating for better wages that can support their families.

We're going to change that. We're going to work with employers who are providing health care for their employees and lower premiums by up to \$2,500 per family per year. And for those who don't have health care, we're going to set up a plan that's as good as the one I have as a Member of Congress. And we're not going to do it twenty years from now, or ten years from now. We're going to do it by the end of my first term as President of the United States of America.

We're ready to play offense for working Americans. We need to make sure workers building America's infrastructure are making the prevailing wage and getting the benefits they deserve. After Katrina, George Bush suspended Davis-Bacon. Families had nothing left. Whole communities had been destroyed. But George Bush thought people didn't deserve to make 9 or 10 bucks an hour to rebuild that city. And John McCain isn't much different. He seems to think Davis-Bacon is something that comes from a pig farm. He's opposed it time and time again. That's wrong. We need to strengthen Davis-Bacon, and make sure any new infrastructure projects we're proposing adhere to Davis-Bacon standards. And that's what I'll do when I'm President of the United States of America.

But it's not enough to make sure we're paying workers fair wages and benefits. We need to make sure the government uses project labor agreements to encourage completion of projects on time and on budget. One of the first things George Bush did when he got into office was to ban PLAs. That's bad for



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workers and bad for America, and that's why one of the first things I'll do as President will be to repeal that ban and put PLAs back into place.

It's time we had a President who didn't choke saying the word "union." It's time we had a Democratic nominee who didn't choke saying the word "union." We need to strengthen our unions by letting them do what they do best - organize our workers. If a majority of workers want a union, they should get a union. And that is why I'll fight for and why I intend to sign the Employee Free Choice Act when it lands on my desk in the White House.

Here's what else we'll do - we'll put Americans back to work. I applaud your partnership with Helmets-to-Hardhats. I believe we have a responsibility to serve our soldiers as well as they're serving us, and by helping make sure they have the skills to work in the trades when they come home, you're living up to that responsibility. As President, I'll support funding for this critical program.

And we won't just promote job-training, we'll promote job-creation. That's why we'll pass what I'm calling the Patriot Employer Act that I've been working on since I got to the Senate - because in my administration, we're not going to give tax breaks to companies that ship jobs overseas; we'll give them to companies that create good jobs with decent wages here in America.

We're going to invest in this country. Back in the 1950's, Americans were put to work building the Interstate Highway system and that helped expand our middle class. We need to show the same kind of leadership today. That's why I've called for a National Infrastructure Reinvestment Bank that will invest \$60 billion over ten years and generate millions of new jobs. We can't keep standing by while our roads and bridges and airports crumble and decay. For our economy, our safety, and our workers, we have to rebuild America.

Investing in America means investing in the jobs of the future. We shouldn't be sending billions of dollars to foreign nations because of our addiction to oil. We should be investing in American-made solar panels, windmills, and clean coal technology. That's why I've proposed investing \$150 billion over the next ten years in the green energy sector. This will create up to five million new American jobs - and those are jobs that pay well, and can't be outsourced. That's why this will be a priority in my administration.

Now, I know some will say we can't afford all this. But it seems to me - if we can spend \$10 billion a month rebuilding Iraq, we can spend \$15 billion a year in our own country to create jobs and strengthen the long-term competitiveness of our economy.

But if we're serious about fighting for our workers here at home, we've got to fight for them around the world. Now, the truth is trade is here to stay, and that if we have strong labor and environmental protections in our agreements, and if our trading partners are playing by the rules, trade can be a good thing for our workers and our economy. But what we can't do is ignore violence against union organizers in Colombia. What we can't do is sign trade deals that put the interests of multinational corporations ahead of the interests of our workers or our environment. That's why I opposed NAFTA, and CAFTA, and that's why I'll make sure our trade agreements work for all Americans when I'm President of the United States.

So make no mistake - the American people have a choice in this election. We can talk about our economic problems all we want, but unless we change the broken system in Washington, nothing else is going to change. We can talk all we want about standing up for our workers, but unless we have a President you can trust to listen and put working Americans first, nothing is really going to change.

And you can trust me. Because politics didn't lead me to working folks; working folks led me to politics. I was standing with American workers on the streets of Chicago twenty years ago, and the reason I'm here today is because I don't want to wake up one day many years from now and see that our workers are still being denied the wages and benefits and rights that they deserve, or that we still haven't made the investments in infrastructure and in training our workers that we desperately need.

The reason I'm here today is because I know what it's like to go to college on student loans, and see a mother get sick and worry that maybe she can't pay the bills. I know what it's like to have to scratch and work and claw to build a better life for your family. And I don't want to wake up many years from now and find that the American dream is still out of reach for too many Americans.

The reason I'm here today is because I believe that if we can just put an end to the politics of division and distraction, and reclaim that sense that we all have a stake in each other, that we rise and fall as one nation; if we can just unite this country around a common purpose - black, white, Hispanic, Asian, and Native American; labor and management; Democrats, Republicans, and Independents - there's no obstacle we cannot overcome, no destiny we cannot fulfill.

That's the fundamental truth I learned on the streets of Chicago. That's the idea at the heart of the Building and Construction Trades. And that's the opportunity we have in this election. There is a moment in the life of every generation where that spirit of unity and hopefulness has to come through if we're going to make our mark on history. This is our moment. This is our time. I'm proud and honored that the first union endorsement I received in this campaign was from a Building and Construction Trades union - the Plumbers and Pipefitters. And I'd be proud and honored to have all of your support. And if you will

march with me, and organize with me, and if you vote for me, then I promise you this: We will not just win this Democratic Nomination, we will win the general election and then together - you and I - we're going to change this country, and we're going to change this world. Thank you.

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