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Remarks of Senator Barack Obama (Des Moines, IA)

Des Moines, IA | October 31, 2008

Iowa, I have just two words for you: four days.

After decades of broken politics in Washington, eight years of failed policies from George Bush, and twenty-one months of a campaign that has taken us from the rocky coast of Maine to the sunshine of California, we are four days away from change in America.

In four days, you can turn the page on policies that have put the greed and irresponsibility of Wall Street before the hard work and sacrifice of folks on Main Street.

In four days, you can choose policies that invest in our middle-class, create new jobs, and grow this economy so that everyone has a chance to succeed; from the CEO to the secretary and the janitor; from the factory owner to the men and women who work on its floor.

In four days, you can put an end to the politics that would divide a nation just to win an election; that tries to pit region against region, city against town, Republican against Democrat; that asks us to fear at a time when we need hope.

In four days, at this defining moment in history, you can give this country the change we need.

We began this journey in the depths of winter nearly two years ago, on the steps of the Old State Capitol in Springfield, Illinois. Back then, we didn't have much money or many endorsements. We weren't given much of a chance by the polls or the pundits, and we knew how steep our climb would be.

But I also knew this. I knew that the size of our challenges had outgrown the smallness of our politics. I believed that Democrats and Republicans and Americans of every political stripe were hungry for new ideas, new leadership, and a new kind of politics - one that favors common sense over ideology; one that focuses on those values and ideals we hold in common as Americans.

Most of all, I knew the American people were a decent, generous people willing to work hard and sacrifice for future generations. I was convinced that when we come together, our voices are more powerful than the most entrenched lobbyists, or the most vicious political attacks, or the full force of a status quo in Washington that wants to keep things just the way they are.

Twenty-one months later, my faith in the American people has been vindicated. That's how we've come so far and so close - because of you. That's how we'll change this country - with your help. And that's why we can't afford to slow down, sit back, or let up for one day, one minute, or one second in this last week. Not now. Not when so much is at stake.

We are in the middle of the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. 760,000 workers have lost their jobs this year. Businesses and families can't get credit. Home values are falling. Pensions are disappearing. It's gotten harder and harder to make the mortgage, or fill up your gas tank, or even keep the electricity on at the end of the month.

At a moment like this, the last thing we can afford is four more years of the tired, old theory that says we should give more to billionaires and big corporations and hope that prosperity trickles down to everyone else. The last thing we can afford is four more years where no one in Washington is watching anyone on Wall Street because politicians and lobbyists killed common-sense regulations. Those are the theories that got us into this mess. They haven't worked, and it's time for change. That's why I'm running for President of the United States.

Now, Senator McCain has served this country honorably. And he can point to a few moments over the

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past eight years where he has broken from George Bush. Just this morning, the McCain campaign put out an ad that showed me praising him and Senator Lieberman for their work on global warming - as if there's something wrong with acknowledging when an opponent has said or done something that makes sense. I think we need more of that in Washington. I don't disagree with Senator McCain on everything, and I respect his occasional displays of independence.

But when it comes to the economy - when it comes to the central issue of this election - the plain truth is that John McCain has stood with this President every step of the way. Voting for the Bush tax cuts for the wealthy that he once opposed. Voting for the Bush budgets that spent us into debt. Calling for less regulation twenty-one times just this year. Those are the facts.

And now, after twenty-one months and three debates, Senator McCain still has not been able to tell the American people a single major thing he'd do differently from George Bush when it comes to the economy. Senator McCain says that we can't spend the next four years waiting for our luck to change, but you understand that the biggest gamble we can take is embracing the same old Bush-McCain policies that have failed us for the last eight years.

It's not change when John McCain wants to give a \$700,000 tax cut to the average Fortune 500 CEO. It's not change when he wants to give \$200 billion to the biggest corporations or \$4 billion to the oil companies or \$300 billion to the same Wall Street banks that got us into this mess. It's not change when he comes up with a tax plan that doesn't give a penny of relief to more than 100 million middle-class Americans.

We've tried it John McCain's way. We've tried it George Bush's way. Deep down, Senator McCain knows that, which is why his campaign said that "if we keep talking about the economy, we're going to lose." That's why he's spending these last weeks calling me every name in the book. Because that's how you play the game in Washington. When you can't win on the strength of your ideas, you make a big election about small things.

So I expect we're going to see a lot more of that over the next four days. More of the slash and burn, say-anything, do-anything politics that's calculated to divide and distract; to tear us apart instead of bringing us together.

A couple of elections ago, there was a presidential candidate who decried this kind of politics and condemned these kinds of tactics. And I admired him for it - we all did. He said, "I will not take the low road to the highest office in this land." Those words were spoken eight years ago by my opponent, John McCain. But the high road didn't lead him to the White House then, so this time, he decided to take a different route.

Now, I know campaigns are tough. Because we've got real differences about big issues and we care passionately about this country's future. And make no mistake, we will respond swiftly and forcefully with the truth to whatever falsehoods they throw our way. The stakes are too high to do anything less.

But Iowa, at this moment, in this election, we have the chance to do more than just beat back this kind of politics - we have the chance to end it once and for all.

We have the chance to prove that the one thing more powerful than the politics of anything-goes - the one thing the cynics didn't count on - is the will of the American people.

We have the chance to prove that we are more than a collection of Red States and Blue States - we are the United States of America.

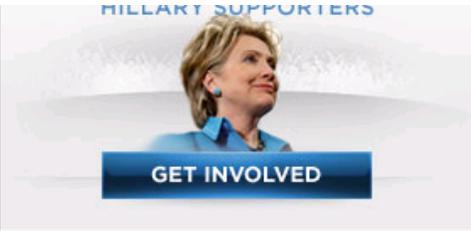
That's how we'll steer ourselves out of this crisis - with a new politics for a new time. That's how we'll build the future we know is possible - as one people, as one nation. And that's why I'm running for President of the United States of America.

Iowa, I know these are difficult times. But I also know that we have faced difficult times before. The American story has never been about things coming easy - it's been about rising to the moment when the moment was hard. It's about rejecting fear and division for unity of purpose. That's how we've overcome war and depression. That's how we've won great struggles for civil rights and women's rights and workers' rights. And that's how we'll write the next great chapter in the American story. We just need a new direction.

Understand, if we want get through this crisis, we need to get beyond the old ideological debates and divides between left and right. We don't need bigger government or smaller government. We need a better government - a more competent government - a government that upholds the values we hold in common as Americans.

We don't have to choose between letting our financial system run wild, and stifling growth and innovation. As President, I will ensure that the financial rescue plan Congress passed helps stop foreclosures and protects your money instead of enriching CEOs. And I will put in place the common-sense regulations I've been calling for throughout this campaign so that Wall Street can never cause a crisis like this again. That's the change we need.

The choice in this election isn't between tax cuts and no tax cuts. It's about whether you believe we



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should only reward wealth, or whether we should also reward the work and workers who create it. I will give a tax break to 95% of Americans who work every day and get taxes taken out of their paychecks every week. I'll eliminate income taxes for seniors making under \$50,000 and give homeowners and working parents more of a break. And I'll help pay for this by asking the folks who are making more than \$250,000 a year to go back to the tax rate they were paying in the 1990s. No matter what Senator McCain may claim, here are the facts - if you make under \$250,000, you will not see your taxes increase by a single dime - not your income taxes, not your payroll taxes, not your capital gains taxes. Nothing. Because the last thing we should do in this economy is raise taxes on the middle-class.

When it comes to jobs, the choice in this election is not between putting up a wall around America or standing by and doing nothing. The truth is, we won't be able to bring back every job that we've lost, but that doesn't mean we should follow John McCain's plan to keep giving tax breaks to corporations that send American jobs overseas and promoting unfair trade agreements. I will end those breaks as President, and I will give American businesses a \$3,000 tax credit for every job they create right here in the United States of America. I'll eliminate capital gains taxes for small businesses and start-up companies that are the engine of job creation in this country. We'll create two million new jobs by rebuilding our crumbling roads, and bridges, and schools, and by laying broadband lines to reach every corner of the country. And I will invest \$15 billion a year in renewable sources of energy to create five million new energy jobs over the next decade - jobs that pay well and can't be outsourced; jobs building solar panels and wind turbines and a new electricity grid; jobs that will help us eliminate the oil we import from the Middle East in ten years and help save the planet in the bargain. That's how America can lead again.

When it comes to health care, we don't have to choose between a government-run health care system and the unaffordable one we have now. If you already have health insurance, the only thing that will change under my plan is that we will lower premiums. If you don't have health insurance you'll be able to get the same kind of health insurance that Members of Congress get for themselves. And as someone who watched his own mother spend the final months of her life arguing with insurance companies because they claimed her cancer was a pre-existing condition and didn't want to pay for treatment, I will stop insurance companies from discriminating against those who are sick and need care most.

When it comes to giving every child a world-class education, the choice is not between more money and more reform - because our schools need both. As President, I will invest in early childhood education, recruit an army of new teachers, pay them more, and give them more support. But I will also demand higher standards and more accountability from our teachers and our schools. And I will make a deal with every American who has the drive and the will but not the money to go to college: if you commit to serving your community or your country, we will make sure you can afford your tuition.

And when it comes to keeping this country safe, we don't have to choose between retreating from the world and fighting a war without end in Iraq. It's time to stop spending \$10 billion a month in Iraq while the Iraqi government sits on a huge surplus. As President, I will end this war by asking the Iraqi government to step up, and I will finally finish the fight against bin Laden and the al Qaeda terrorists who attacked us on 9/11. I will never hesitate to defend this nation. From day one of this campaign, I have made clear that we will increase our ground troops and our investments in the finest fighting force the world has ever known. Watching our Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines fight in Iraq and Afghanistan has only deepened my commitment to invest in 21st century technologies so that our men and women have the best training and equipment when they deploy into combat and the care and benefits they have earned when they come home.

I won't stand here and pretend that any of this will be easy - especially now. The cost of this economic crisis, and the cost of the war in Iraq, means that Washington will have to tighten its belt and put off spending on things we don't need. As President, I will go through the federal budget, line-by-line, ending programs that we don't need and making the ones we do need work better and cost less.

But as I've said from the day we began this journey all those months ago, the change we need isn't just about new programs and policies. It's about a new politics - a politics that calls on our better angels instead of encouraging our worst instincts.

What we have lost in these last eight years cannot be measured by lost wages or bigger trade deficits alone. What has also been lost is the idea that in this American story, each of us has a role to play. Each of us has a responsibility to work hard and look after ourselves and our families, and each of us has a responsibility to our fellow citizens. And that's what we need to restore right now - our sense of common purpose; of higher purpose.

Yes, government must lead the way on energy independence, but each of us must do our part to make our homes and our businesses more efficient. Yes, we must put more money into our schools, but government can't be that parent who turns off the TV and makes a child do their homework. Yes, we can argue and debate our positions passionately, but all of us must summon the strength and grace to bridge our differences and unite in common effort - black, white, Hispanic, Asian, Native American; Democrat and Republican, young and old, rich and poor, gay and straight, disabled or not.

In this election, we cannot afford the same political games and tactics that are being used to pit us against one another and make us afraid of one another.

Despite what our opponents may claim, there are no real or fake parts of this country. There is no city or town that is more pro-America than anywhere else - we are one nation, all of us proud, all of us patriots. The men and women who serve on our battlefields may be Democrats and Republicans and Independents, but they have fought together and bled together and some died together under the same proud flag. They have not served a Red America or a Blue America - they have served the United States of America.

It won't be easy, Iowa. It won't be quick. But you and I know that it is time to come together and change this country. Some of you may be cynical and fed up with politics. You have every right to be. But despite all of this, I ask of you what has been asked of Americans throughout our history.

I ask you to believe - not just in my ability to bring about change, but in yours.

I know this change is possible. Because I have seen it over the last twenty-one months. Because in this campaign, I have had the privilege to witness what is best in America.

I've seen it in lines of voters that stretched around schools and churches; in the young people who cast their ballot for the first time, and those not so young folks who got involved again after a very long time. I've seen it in the workers who would rather cut back their hours than see their friends lose their jobs; in the neighbors who take a stranger in when the floodwaters rise; in the soldiers who re-enlist after losing a limb. I've seen it in the faces of the men and women I've met at countless rallies and town halls across the country, men and women who speak of their struggles but also of their hopes and dreams.

I still remember the email that a woman named Robyn sent me after I met her in Ft. Lauderdale. Sometime after our event, her son nearly went into cardiac arrest, and was diagnosed with a heart condition that could only be treated with a procedure that cost tens of thousands of dollars. Her insurance company refused to pay, and their family just didn't have that kind of money.

In her email, Robyn wrote, "I ask only this of you - on the days where you feel so tired you can't think of uttering another word to the people, think of us. When those who oppose you have you down, reach deep and fight back harder."

Iowa, that's what hope is - that thing inside us that insists, despite all evidence to the contrary, that there are better days ahead. If we're willing to work for it. If we're willing to shed our fears. If we're willing to reach deep down inside ourselves when we're tired and come back fighting harder.

That's what kept some of our parents and grandparents going when times were tough. What led them to say, "Maybe I can't go to college, but if I save a little bit each week my child can; maybe I can't have my own business but if I work really hard my child can open one of her own." It's what led immigrants from distant lands to come to these shores against great odds; what led those who couldn't vote to march and organize and stand for freedom; that led them to cry out, "It may look dark tonight, but if I hold on to hope, tomorrow will be brighter."

That's what this election is about. That is the choice we face right now.

Don't believe for a second this election is over. Don't think for a minute that power concedes. We have to work like our future depends on it in this last week, because it does.

I know this, Iowa - the time for change has come.

And if in this last week, you will knock on some doors for me, and make some calls for me, and go to barackobama.com

and find out where to vote - and remember, you can vote early here in Iowa. If you will stand with me, and fight by my side, and cast your ballot for me, then I promise you this - we will not just win Iowa, we will not just win this election, but together, we will change this country and we will change the world. Thank you, God bless you, and may God bless America.

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