



EN ESPAÑOL

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Ten months ago, I stood on the steps of the Old State Capitol in Springfield, Illinois, and began an unlikely journey to change America.

I did not run for the presidency to fulfill some long-held ambition or because I believed it was somehow owed to me. I chose to run in this election - at this moment - because of what Dr. King called "the fierce urgency of now." Because we are at a defining moment in our history. Our nation is at war. Our planet is in peril. Our health care system is broken, our economy is out of balance, our education system fails too many of our children, and our retirement system is in tatters.

At this defining moment, we cannot wait any longer for universal health care. We cannot wait to fix our schools. We cannot wait for good jobs, and living wages, and pensions we can count on. We cannot wait to halt global warming, and we cannot wait to end this war in Iraq.

I chose to run because I believed that the size of these challenges had outgrown the capacity of our broken and divided politics to solve them; because I believed that Americans of every political stripe were hungry for a new kind of politics, a politics that focused not just on how to win but why we should, a politics that focused on those values and ideals that we held in common as Americans; a politics that favored common sense over ideology, straight talk over spin.

Most of all, I believed in the power of the American people to be the real agents of change in this country - because we are not as divided as our politics suggests; because we are a decent, generous people willing to work hard and sacrifice for future generations; and I was certain that if we could just mobilize our voices to challenge the special interests that dominate Washington and challenge ourselves to reach for something better, there was no problem we couldn't solve - no destiny we couldn't fulfill.

Ten months later, Iowa, you have vindicated that faith. You've come out in the blistering heat and the bitter cold not just to cheer, but to challenge - to ask the tough questions; to lift the hood and kick the tires; to serve as one place in America where someone who hasn't spent their life in the Washington spotlight can get a fair hearing.

You've earned the role you play in our democracy because no one takes it more seriously. And I believe that's true this year more than ever because, like me, you feel that same sense of urgency.

All across this state, you've shared with me your stories. And all too often they've been stories of struggle and hardship.

I've heard from seniors who were betrayed by CEOs who dumped their pensions while pocketing bonuses, and from those who still can't afford their prescriptions because Congress refused to negotiate with the drug companies for the cheapest available price.

I've met Maytag workers who labored all their lives only to see their jobs shipped overseas; who now compete with their teenagers for \$7-an-hour jobs at Wal-Mart.

I've spoken with teachers who are working at donut shops after school just to make ends meet; who are still digging into their own pockets to pay for school supplies.

Just two weeks ago, I heard a young woman in Cedar Rapids who told me she only gets three hours of sleep because she works the night shift after a full day of college and still can't afford health care for a sister with cerebral palsy. She spoke not with self-pity but with determination, and wonders why the government isn't doing more to help her afford the education that will allow her to live out her dreams.

I've spoken to veterans who talk with pride about what they've accomplished in Afghanistan and Iraq, but who nevertheless think of those they've left behind and question the wisdom of our mission in Iraq; the mothers weeping in my arms over the memories of their sons; the disabled or homeless vets who

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wonder why their service has been forgotten.

And I've spoken to Americans in every corner of the state, patriots all, who wonder why we have allowed our standing in the world to decline so badly, so quickly. They know this has not made us safer. They know that we must never negotiate out of fear, but that we must never fear to negotiate with our enemies as well as our friends. They are ashamed of Abu Graib and Guantanamo and warrantless wiretaps and ambiguity on torture. They love their country and want its cherished values and ideals restored.

It is precisely because you've experience these frustrations, and seen the cost of inaction in your own lives, that you understand why we can't afford to settle for the same old politics. You know that we can't afford to allow the insurance lobbyists to kill health care reform one more time, and the oil lobbyists to keep us addicted to fossil fuels because no one stood up and took their power away when they had the chance.

You know that we can't afford four more years of the same divisive food fight in Washington that's about scoring political points instead of solving problems; that's about tearing your opponents down instead of lifting this country up.

We can't afford the same politics of fear that tells Democrats that the only way to look tough on national security is to talk, act, and vote like George Bush Republicans; that invokes 9/11 as a way to scare up votes instead of a challenge that should unite all Americans to defeat our real enemies.

We can't afford to be so worried about losing the next election that we lose the battles we owe to the next generation.

The real gamble in this election is playing the same Washington game with the same Washington players and expecting a different result. And that's a risk we can't take. Not this year. Not when the stakes are this high.

In this election, it is time to turn the page. In seven days, it is time to stand for change.

This has been our message since the beginning of this campaign. It was our message when we were down, and our message when we were up. And it must be catching on, because in these last few weeks, everyone is talking about change.

But you can't at once argue that you're the master of a broken system in Washington and offer yourself as the person to change it. You can't fall in line behind the conventional thinking on issues as profound as war and offer yourself as the leader who is best prepared to chart a new and better course for America.

The truth is, you can have the right kind of experience and the wrong kind of experience. Mine is rooted in the real lives of real people and it will bring real results if we have the courage to change. I believe deeply in those words. But they are not mine. They were Bill Clinton's in 1992, when Washington insiders questioned his readiness to lead.

My experience is rooted in the lives of the men and women on the South Side of Chicago who I fought for as an organizer when the local steel plant closed. It's rooted in the lives of the people I stood up for as a civil rights lawyer when they were denied opportunity on the job or justice at the voting booth because of what they looked like or where they came from. It's rooted in an understanding of how the world sees America that I gained from living, traveling, and having family beyond our shores - an understanding that led me to oppose this war in Iraq from the start. It's experience rooted in the real lives of real people, and it's the kind of experience Washington needs right now.

There are others in this race who say that this kind of change sounds good, but that I'm not angry or confrontational enough to get it done.

Well, let me tell you something, Iowa. I don't need any lectures on how to bring about change, because I haven't just talked about it on the campaign trail. I've fought for change all my life.

I walked away from a job on Wall Street to bring job training to the jobless and after school programs to kids on the streets of Chicago.

I turned down the big money law firms to win justice for the powerless as a civil rights lawyer.

I took on the lobbyists in Illinois and brought Democrats and Republicans together to expand health care to 150,000 people and pass the first major campaign finance reform in twenty-five years; and I did the same thing in Washington when we passed the toughest lobbying reform since Watergate. I'm the only candidate in this race who hasn't just talked about taking power away from lobbyists, I've actually done it. So if you want to know what kind of choices we'll make as President, you should take a look at the choices we made when we had the chance to bring about change that wasn't easy or convenient.

That's the kind of change that's more than just rhetoric - that's change you can believe in.

It's change that won't just come from more anger at Washington or turning up the heat on Republicans. There's no shortage of anger and bluster and bitter partisanship out there. We don't need more heat. We need more light. I've learned in my life that you can stand firm in your principles while still reaching

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out to those who might not always agree with you. And although the Republican operatives in Washington might not be interested in hearing what we have to say, I think Republican and independent voters outside of Washington are. That's the once-in-a-generation opportunity we have in this election.

For the first time in a long time, we have the chance to build a new majority of not just Democrats, but Independents and Republicans who've lost faith in their Washington leaders but want to believe again - who desperately want something new.

We can change the electoral math that's been all about division and make it about addition - about building a coalition for change and progress that stretches through Blue States and Red States. That's how I won some of the reddest, most Republican counties in Illinois. That's why the polls show that I do best against the Republicans running for President - because we're attracting more support from Independents and Republicans than any other candidate. That's how we'll win in November and that's how we'll change this country over the next four years.

In the end, the argument we are having between the candidates in the last seven days is not just about the meaning of change. It's about the meaning of hope. Some of my opponents appear scornful of the word; they think it speaks of naivete, passivity, and wishful thinking.

But that's not what hope is. Hope is not blind optimism. It's not ignoring the enormity of the task before us or the roadblocks that stand in our path. Yes, the lobbyists will fight us. Yes, the Republican attack dogs will go after us in the general election. Yes, the problems of poverty and climate change and failing schools will resist easy repair. I know - I've been on the streets, I've been in the courts. I've watched legislation die because the powerful held sway and good intentions weren't fortified by political will, and I've watched a nation get misled into war because no one had the judgment or the courage to ask the hard questions before we sent our troops to fight.

But I also know this. I know that hope has been the guiding force behind the most improbable changes this country has ever made. In the face of tyranny, it's what led a band of colonists to rise up against an Empire. In the face of slavery, it's what fueled the resistance of the slave and the abolitionist, and what allowed a President to chart a treacherous course to ensure that the nation would not continue half slave and half free. In the face of war and Depression, it's what led the greatest of generations to free a continent and heal a nation. In the face of oppression, it's what led young men and women to sit at lunch counters and brave fire hoses and march through the streets of Selma and Montgomery for freedom's cause. That's the power of hope - to imagine, and then work for, what had seemed impossible before.

That's the change we seek. And that's the change you can stand for in seven days.

We've already beaten odds that the cynics said couldn't be beaten. When we started ten months ago, they said we couldn't run a different kind of campaign.

They said we couldn't compete without taking money from Washington lobbyists. But you proved them wrong when we raised more small donations from more Americans than any other campaign in history.

They said we couldn't be successful if we didn't have the full support of the establishment in Washington. But you proved them wrong when we built a grassroots movement that could forever change the face of American politics.

They said we wouldn't have a chance in this campaign unless we resorted to the same old negative attacks. But we resisted, even when we were written off, and ran a positive campaign that pointed out real differences and rejected the politics of slash and burn.

And now, in seven days, you have a chance once again to prove the cynics wrong. In seven days, what was improbable has the chance to beat what Washington said was inevitable. And that's why in these last weeks, Washington is fighting back with everything it has -- with attack ads and insults; with distractions and dishonesty; with millions of dollars from outside groups and undisclosed donors to try and block our path.

We've seen this script many times before. But I know that this time can be different.

Because I know that when the American people believe in something, it happens.

If you believe, then we can tell the lobbyists that their days of setting the agenda in Washington are over.

If you believe, then we can stop making promises to America's workers and start delivering - jobs that pay, health care that's affordable, pensions you can count on, and a tax cut for working Americans instead of the companies who send their jobs overseas .

If you believe, we can offer a world-class education to every child, and pay our teachers more, and make college dreams a reality for every American.

If you believe, we can save this planet and end our dependence on foreign oil.

If you believe, we can end this war, close Guantanamo, restore our standing, renew our diplomacy, and once again respect the Constitution of the United States of America .

That's the future within our reach. That's what hope is - that thing inside us that insists, despite all evidence to the contrary, that something better is waiting for us around the corner. But only if we're willing to work for it and fight for it. To shed our fears and our doubts and our cynicism. To glory in the task before us of remaking this country block by block, precinct by precinct, county by county, state by state.

There is a moment in the life of every generation when, if we are to make our mark on history, this spirit must break through

This is the moment.

This is our time.

And if you will stand with me in seven days - if you will stand for change so that our children have the same chance that somebody gave us; if you'll stand to keep the American dream alive for those who still hunger for opportunity and thirst for justice; if you're ready to stop settling for what the cynics tell you you must accept, and finally reach for what you know is possible, then we will win this caucus, we will win this election, we will change the course of history, and the real journey - to heal a nation and repair the world - will have truly begun.

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