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Remarks of Senator Barack Obama (Chester, PA)

Chester, PA | October 28, 2008

One week.

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 one week away from change in America.

In one week, 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 one week, you can choose policies that invest in our middle-class, create new jobs, and grow this economy from the bottom-up 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 one week, 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 one week, 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 believed in your ability to make change happen. I knew that the American people were a decent, generous people who are willing to work hard and sacrifice for future generations. And 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. Wages are lower than they've been in a decade, at a time when the cost of health care and college have never been higher. It's getting 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.

And yet, just yesterday, we learned that despite this crisis, Wall Street bank executives are set to walk away with billions more in bonuses at the end of this year. Well, they might call that a bonus on Wall Street, but here in Pennsylvania, we call it an outrage - and they shouldn't be allowed to get away with it.

We can't afford 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. That's the failed theory that got

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us into this mess. It hasn't worked, and it's time for change. That's why I'm running for President of the United States.

Now, in the closing days of this campaign, my opponent is trying to distance himself from the President he has faithfully supported 90% of the time. He's supported four of the five Bush budgets that have taken us from the surpluses of the Clinton years to the largest deficits in history. John McCain has ridden shotgun as George Bush has driven our economy toward a cliff, and now he wants to take the wheel and step on the gas.

And when it comes to the issue of taxes, saying that John McCain is running for a third Bush term isn't being fair to George W. Bush. He's proposing \$300 billion in new tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans and big corporations. That's something not even George Bush proposed. Not even George Bush proposed another \$700,000 tax cut to the average Fortune 500 CEO. Not even George Bush proposed a plan that would leave out 100 million middle class families. That's not change.

Change is a middle class tax cut for 95% of workers and their families. Change is eliminating income taxes for seniors making under \$50,000 and giving homeowners and working parents more of a break. Change is eliminating capital gains taxes for the small businesses that are the engine of job-creation in this country.

That's what I want to do. That's what change is.

The fact is, there's only one candidate with a plan that could eventually raise taxes on millions of middle class families, and it isn't me. It's my opponent, who'd make you pay taxes on your health care benefits for the first time ever.

Now, it's true that I want to roll back the Bush tax cuts on the wealthiest Americans and go back to the rate they paid under Bill Clinton. But make no mistake: If you make less than a quarter of a million dollars a year - which includes 98% of small business owners - you won't see your taxes increase one single dime. Not your payroll taxes, not your income taxes, not your capital gains taxes - nothing. Because the last thing we should do in this economy is raise taxes on the middle-class.

In the end, the choice in this election isn't between tax cuts and no tax cuts. It's about whether you believe we should only reward wealth, or whether we should also reward the work and workers who create it. It's about whether you believe in an America where opportunity and success is open to anyone who's willing to work for it. And that's the America we will build together when I'm President of the United States.

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. If you can't beat your opponent's ideas, you distort those ideas and maybe make some up. If you don't have a record to run on, then you paint your opponent as someone people should run away from. You make a big election about small things.

Pennsylvania, we are here to say "Not this time. Not this year. Not when so much is at stake." Senator McCain might be worried about losing an election, but I'm worried about Americans who are losing their homes, and their jobs, and their life savings. I can take one more week of John McCain's attacks, but this country can't take four more years of the same old politics and the same failed policies. It's time for something new.

The question in this election is not "Are you better off than you were four years ago?" We know the answer to that. The real question is, "Will this country be better off four years from now?"

I know these are difficult times for America. 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 seeing the highest mountaintop from the deepest of valleys. It's about rejecting fear and division for unity of purpose. That's how we've overcome war and depression. That's

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how we've won great struggles for civil rights and women's rights and worker's rights. And that's how we'll emerge from this crisis stronger and more prosperous than we were before - as one nation; as one people.

Remember, we still have the most talented, most productive workers of any country on Earth. We're still home to innovation and technology, colleges and universities that are the envy of the world. Some of the biggest ideas in history have come from our small businesses and our research facilities. So there's no reason we can't make this century another American century. We just need a new direction. We need a new politics.

Now, I don't believe that government can or should try to solve all our problems. I know you don't either. But I do believe that government should do that which we cannot do for ourselves - protect us from harm and provide a decent education for our children; invest in new roads and new science and technology. It should reward drive and innovation and growth in the free market, but it should also make sure businesses live up to their responsibility to create American jobs, and look out for American workers, and play by the rules of the road. It should ensure a shot at success not only for those with money and power and influence, but for every single American who's willing to work. That's how we create not just more millionaires, but more middle-class families. That's how we make sure businesses have customers that can afford their products and services. That's how we've always grown the American economy - from the bottom-up. John McCain calls this socialism. I call it opportunity, and there is nothing more American than that.

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 allowing our financial system to collapse and spending billions of taxpayer dollars to bail out Wall Street banks. As President, I will ensure that the financial rescue plan 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.

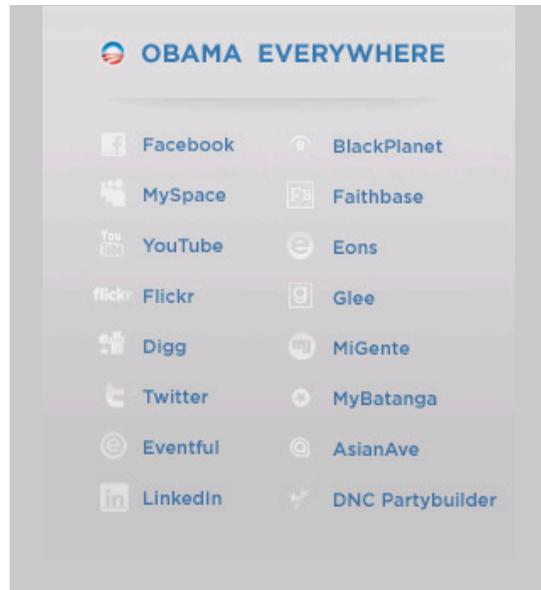
When it comes to jobs, the choice in this election is not between putting up a wall around America or allowing every job to disappear overseas. The truth is, we won't be able to bring back every job that we've lost, but that doesn't mean we should follow John McCain's plan to keep giving tax breaks to corporations that send American jobs overseas. 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. 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 building the fuel-efficient cars of tomorrow, not in Japan or South Korea but here in the United States of America; 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. We'll invest in preventative care and new technology to finally lower the cost of health care for families, businesses, and the entire economy. 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 so they can compete in this global economy for the jobs of the 21st century, 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. You invest in America, America will invest in you, and together, we will move this country forward.

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 can afford to do without. On this, there is no other choice. 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; one that reminds us of the obligations we have to ourselves and one another.

Part of the reason this economic crisis occurred is because we have been living through an era of profound irresponsibility. On Wall Street, easy money and an ethic of "what's good for me is good enough" blinded greedy executives to the danger in the decisions they were making. On Main Street, lenders tricked people into buying homes they couldn't afford. Some folks knew they couldn't afford those houses and bought them anyway. In Washington, politicians spent money they didn't have and allowed lobbyists to set the agenda. They scored political points instead of solving our problems, and even after the greatest attack on American soil since Pearl Harbor, all we were asked to do by our President was to go out and shop.

That is why 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. That's what's been lost these last eight years - our sense of common purpose; of higher purpose. And that's what we need to restore right now.

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 provide more ladders to success for young men who fall into lives of crime and despair. But all of us must do our part as parents to turn off the television and read to our children and take responsibility for providing the love and guidance they need. Yes, we can argue and debate our positions passionately, but at this defining moment, all of us must summon the strength and grace to bridge our differences and unite in common effort - black, white, Latino, 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. The stakes are too high to divide us by class and region and background; by who we are or what we believe.

Because 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. There are patriots who supported this war in Iraq and patriots who opposed it; patriots who believe in Democratic policies and those who believe in Republican policies. The men and women who serve in 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, Pennsylvania. 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. A lot of you may be disappointed and even angry with your leaders. 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."

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

Hope! 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 and carve a new life for their families in America; 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.

In one week, we can choose an economy that rewards work and creates new jobs and fuels prosperity from the bottom-up.

In one week, we can choose to invest in health care for our families, and education for our kids, and renewable energy for our future.

In one week, we can choose hope over fear, unity over division, the promise of change over the power of the status quo.

In one week, we can come together as one nation, and one people, and once more choose our better history.

That's what's at stake. That's what we're fighting for. And if in this last week, you will knock on some doors for me, and make some calls for me, and talk to your neighbors, and convince your friends; if you will stand with me, and fight with me, and give me your vote, then I promise you this - we will not just win Pennsylvania, 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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