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Remarks of Senator Barack Obama College Democrats of America Columbia, SC | July 26, 2007

I want to start by thanking your President, Lauren Wolfe, for the leadership you bring to this organization and to students all across America. I'd also like to thank your Vice President, Awais Khaleel, and your Executive Director, LaToia Jones.

I'd like to give a special shout-out to two other College Democrat leaders who I am lucky enough to have working on my campaign - Bess Evans is an organizer for us in Iowa and Ashley Baia is organizing for us right here in South Carolina. And I'd like to especially thank the couple hundred of you who have joined my College Democrats Steering Committee. This is an unprecedented show of support and we're very grateful to have it.

But mostly I want to thank every student here for the work you're doing all across the country. You are organizing campuses, you are registering new voters, and you are breathing new life into a politics that has never needed it more, and for that you should all be very proud.

Each of you has made the decision to come here and get involved for a reason. Maybe you want to make sure the college education you're receiving will lead to a good job that can pay off all those loans. Maybe you're tired of watching our planet polluted and our climate changed forever because you know that you and your children will be the ones dealing with it.

Maybe you've traveled abroad and heard people belittle America, and maybe you felt angry because you know we're a better country than this - you know we're not a country that tortures people or locks them away without ever telling them why. You know we're not a country that alienates our allies and rejects diplomacy with our enemies. We're better than that.

Or maybe you're here because you had to say goodbye to a friend or a classmate when they left to fight this war in Iraq. You know how brave they are, and you know they've done everything that's been asked of them, but you also know one other thing - you know that this is a war that should've never been authorized and never been waged, and it's time for that friend to come home.

But no matter what the reason is that brought you here, you came because you believe that we can change all this. You believe what was said about this country in the earliest days of our revolution - that we have it within our power to begin the world anew.

I want you to know that's why I'm here too. That's what I have believed all my life. And that's why I'm running for President of the United States.

I know it's not an easy proposition to believe. Especially today. Not when our politics is more concerned with who's up and who's down than who's working to solve the challenges facing our generation. Not when our politicians allow the oil companies to control our energy policy, and the insurance companies to control our health care policy, and whoever's got the most money and influence to control the agenda in Washington. And not when we've got a 24-hour news cycle that never fails to keep us posted on how many days Paris Hilton will spend in jail but doesn't always cover the continuing genocide in Darfur or the recovery effort in New Orleans or the poverty that plagues too many American streets.

You see all this and it's easy to become cynical - to believe these same pundits when they say that the youth vote doesn't really matter; that college students don't register to vote and when they do, they never go to the polls anyway. And so it's easy to just stay home and give in to the proposition that one person really can't make a difference after all.

Don't believe it. If there's one thing I've learned in my own life, it's that when you stop listening to the cynics and start trying to make that difference, extraordinary things can happen.

A few years after I graduated from college I had this crazy idea that I wanted to be a community organizer. My friends had all applied for jobs on Wall Street and my mother and grandparents thought I should go to law school. But I went ahead and wrote letters to every organization in the country that I could think of. And finally, this small group of churches on the south side of Chicago wrote back and gave me a job for \$12,000 a year helping to turn around neighborhoods that had been devastated by steel-plant closings.

And I can still remember the conversation I had with an older man I had met before I moved to Chicago. I told him about my plans, and he looked at me and said, "Let me tell something. You look like a nice clean-cut young man, and you've got a nice voice. So let me give you a piece of advice - forget this community organizing business. You can't change the world, and people won't appreciate you trying. What you should do is go into television broadcasting. I'm telling you, you've got a future."

Now, no offense to my friends with the microphones in the back of the room, but boy am I glad I didn't listen to that old man.

I kept going to Chicago, and when I got there and saw the joblessness and hopelessness that existed in those neighborhoods, I knew my job wouldn't be easy.

But I worked hard to build coalitions with all kinds of community leaders, and we kept working, and we set up child care and job training programs, and we taught people to stand up to their government when it wasn't standing up for them. We didn't change the world, but we changed those neighborhoods, and I proved that old man wrong.

And I've done the same thing ever since.

When I got to the Illinois state Senate, people said it was too tough to take on the issue of money in politics - that I couldn't do anything about a law that actually allowed politicians to pocket the money in their campaign accounts for personal use. But I brought people together, and I found a few folks on the other side of the aisle who were willing to listen, and we passed the first major ethics reform in twenty-five years.

People told me I couldn't reform a death penalty system that had sent 13 innocent people to death row. But we did that. They told me that trying to pass laws to stop racial profiling would stir up too much controversy. But we did that too.

They doubted whether we could put government back on the side of average people - but we put tax cuts in the pockets of the working families who needed them instead of the folks who didn't. And I passed health care reform that insured another 150,000 children and parents.

So I want you to know that I've been where you are. I looked at the world as a young man and I wanted to make a difference. And I was often told that change wasn't possible. But I learned that it was, I believe that it still is, and I'm ready to join you in changing the course that we're on by bringing a new generation of leadership to the United States of America.

The reason this President has failed to lead our country is because he has not been able to unite our country. He has polarized us when he could've pulled us together. He has put what's right for his friends and supporters ahead of what's right for America.

That's why the experience we need in the next President is the ability to bring this country together; to find common ground so we can meet common challenges.

That's the kind of experience I will bring to the White House. I know it's not enough to just change parties or even presidents. I know that to truly change the way Washington works, we need to build a movement of everyday Americans who are committed to that change long after the last ballot is counted.

And that's what we're doing in this campaign. We've had more people sign up and contribute than any other campaign in history. We've had countless people show up at our events who are coming to the first political event of their lifetime. They are young and old, rich and poor, gay and straight, black, white, Latino, and Asian.

These Americans are saying it's time for a change. It's time to turn the page. It's time for a new generation of leadership in Washington.

It's time for a new generation of leadership to solve this health care crisis once and for all. It's time to move past the failed debates of yesterday, bring everyone to the table, and finally let the drug and insurance companies know that while they get a seat at that table, they don't get to buy every chair.

I have a universal health care plan that will cover every American and cut the cost of a typical family's premiums by up to \$2500 a year. It's a plan that lets the uninsured buy insurance that's similar to the kind members of Congress give themselves. If you can't afford that, you'll get a subsidy to pay for it. And here's something we included after hearing about it from young people across the country - if you graduate and don't find a job that provides health insurance right away, you'll be able to stay on your parents' insurance until you're twenty-five. I can't promise they'll let you live at home for that long, but I can promise you this - I will sign this universal health care bill by the end of my first term in office as your President. It's time to get that done.

It's time for a new generation of leadership to make college more affordable for any American who wants to go. It's time to tell all those private lenders and banks that we're not going to give them eight billion in taxpayer dollars every year so that they can bribe colleges to get business giving students loans at inflated prices. We're not going to make college an unaffordable opportunity or saddle our students with a lifetime of debt. It's time to end those high-priced loans and use the savings to help more kids afford a college education. And it's time we had a President who fights for that proposal instead of threatening to veto it. The very first bill I introduced when I got to the U.S. Senate was a bill to make college more affordable and provide more grants to students. That's the kind of leadership we need.

It's time for a new generation of leadership to save our generation from global catastrophe. It's time to tell the auto and oil industry lobbyists that they don't get to stand in the way of higher fuel standards, and renewable sources of energy, and lower carbon emissions anymore. It's time to let them know that our economy, our security, and our planet come before their profits.

As President, I will place a cap on carbon emissions, and require companies who can't meet the cap to buy credits from those who can. This will generate millions of dollars to invest in renewable sources of energy and create new jobs and even a new industry in the process. I'll put in place a low-carbon fuel standard that will take 50 million cars' worth of pollution off the road. And I'd raise the fuel efficiency standards for our cars and trucks because we know we have the technology to do it and it's time we did.

And one more thing. It is time for a new generation of leadership to end this war in Iraq and restore American leadership in the world.

I opposed this war back in 2002 when I was running for the United States Senate. And people told me that position might cost me the election. But I believed then that being a leader means that you do what's right and leave the politics aside because you don't get a do-over on an issue as important as war.

I introduced a plan in January that would've already started bringing our troops home by now, with the goal of bringing all combat brigades home by March 31st, 2008.

George Bush vetoed a bipartisan plan just like that - but he doesn't get the last word here. We are fifteen votes away in the Senate from ending this war without him. So we need to keep turning up the pressure on all those Republican Congressmen and Senators who aren't voting the right way. And I'm asking you all to help me with this. You can help bring this war to an end. Some of these Senators are already changing their mind. So I need you to call them up, and write them, and tell them that if they don't switch their votes on Iraq, you'll be switching your votes next November.

It's time to start getting our troops out of Iraq so we can start focusing on the growing threat from al Qaeda - because we can't win a war against the terrorists if we're on the wrong battlefield.

It's time to turn the page on the era of Bush-Cheney diplomacy and reach out to the rest of the world again. Refusing to engage in tough, smart diplomacy with world leaders we don't like doesn't show your strength, it shows your stubbornness, and we don't need another eight years of that.

Whether it's terrorism or climate change, global AIDS or the spread of weapons of mass destruction, America cannot meet the threats of this new century alone, but the world cannot meet them without America. It's time for America to show the world that we're still the last, best hope of Earth. It's time for America to lead again, and we need a new generation of leadership to make that happen.

That's where you come in. This country needs you. As someone who is ready to serve as your next President, I need you. We need your energy, your enthusiasm, and your commitment to this movement for change. We need you to get involved, and join or start up a Students for Obama chapter of your own, and I'd like to especially ask each of you to go back

to your college campuses and register ten, or fifteen, or fifty new voters. I led a voter registration drive when I wasn't much older than you and we registered 150,000 new voters when no one thought it was possible. So let's prove the cynics wrong again. Let's show them you do make a difference - that your vote does count - that America better start listening to the next generation of Americans.

This is our moment to make a difference.

Throughout America's story, there have been some generations that just fade into history, and others that have changed the course of that history forever.

In the face of secession and slavery, a generation answered their President's call to the better angels of our nature by saving a union and freeing a people.

In the face of Depression and fascism, a generation answered a leader who said that fear itself was the only thing standing our way by conquering that fear, lifting our nation from despair, and liberating a continent.

In the face of inequality and injustice, a generation answered a King's dream of brotherhood by taking Freedom Rides, and sitting at lunch counters, and marching in the streets until justice rolled down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream.

And now, in this election, it is our generation's turn to answer this call. It is our turn to write a new chapter in the America story. Let's write that next chapter. Let's turn that next page. Let's bring a new generation of leadership to America, and let's change this country together. Thank you.

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