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### Remarks of Senator Barack Obama: A New Beginning

Chicago, IL | October 02, 2007

Thank you, Ted. Ted Sorensen has been counselor to a President in some of our toughest moments, and he has helped define our national purpose at pivotal turning points. Let me also welcome all of the elected officials from Illinois who are with us. Let me give a special welcome to all of the organizers and speakers who joined me to rally against going to war in Iraq five years ago. And I want to thank DePaul University and DePaul's students for hosting this event.

We come together at a time of renewal for DePaul. A new academic year has begun. Professors are learning the names of new students, and students are reminded that you actually do have to attend class. That cold is beginning to creep into the Chicago air. The season is changing.

DePaul is now filled with students who have not spent a single day on campus without the reality of a war in Iraq. Four classes have matriculated and four classes have graduated since this war began. And we are reminded that America's sons and daughters in uniform, and their families, bear the heavy burden. The wife of one soldier from Illinois wrote to me and said that her husband "feels like he's stationed in Iraq and deploys home." That's a tragic statement. And it could be echoed by families across our country who have seen loved ones deployed to tour after tour of duty.

You are students. And the great responsibility of students is to question the world around you, to question things that don't add up. With Iraq, we must ask the question: how did we go so wrong?

There are those who offer up easy answers. They will assert that Iraq is George Bush's war, it's all his fault. Or that Iraq was botched by the arrogance and incompetence of Donald Rumsfeld and Dick Cheney. Or that we would have gotten Iraq right if we went in with more troops, or if we had a different proconsul instead of Paul Bremer, or if only there were a stronger Iraqi Prime Minister.

These are the easy answers. And like most easy answers, they are partially true. But they don't tell the whole truth, because they overlook a harder and more fundamental truth. The hard truth is that the war in Iraq is not about a catalog of many mistakes - it is about one big mistake. The war in Iraq should never have been fought.

Five years ago today, I was asked to speak at a rally against going to war in Iraq. The vote to authorize the war in Congress was less than ten days away and I was a candidate for the United States Senate. Some friends of mine advised me to keep quiet. Going to war in Iraq, they pointed out, was popular. All the other major candidates were supporting the war at the time. If the war goes well, they said, you'll have thrown your political career away.

But I didn't see how Saddam Hussein posed an imminent threat. I was convinced that a war would distract us from Afghanistan and the real threat from al Qaeda. I worried that Iraq's history of sectarian rivalry could leave us bogged down in a bloody conflict. And I believed the war would fan the flames of extremism and lead to new terrorism. So I went to the rally. And I argued against a "rash war" - a "war based not on reason, but on politics" - "an occupation of undetermined length, with undetermined costs, and undetermined consequences."

I was not alone. Though not a majority, millions of Americans opposed giving the President the authority to wage war in Iraq. Twenty-three Senators, including the leader of the Senate Intelligence Committee, shared my concerns and resisted the march to war. For us, the war defied common sense. After all, the people who hit us on 9/11 were in Afghanistan, not Iraq.

But the conventional thinking in Washington has a way of buying into stories that make

political sense even if they don't make practical sense. We were told that the only way to prevent Iraq from getting nuclear weapons was with military force. Some leading Democrats echoed the Administration's erroneous line that there was a connection between Saddam Hussein and al Qaeda. We were counseled by some of the most experienced voices in Washington that the only way for Democrats to look tough was to talk, act and vote like a Republican.

As Ted Sorensen's old boss President Kennedy once said - "the pursuit of peace is not as dramatic as the pursuit of war - and frequently the words of the pursuer fall on deaf ears." In the fall of 2002, those deaf ears were in Washington. They belonged to a President who didn't tell the whole truth to the American people; who disdained diplomacy and bullied allies; and who squandered our unity and the support of the world after 9/11.

But it doesn't end there. Because the American people weren't just failed by a President - they were failed by much of Washington. By a media that too often reported spin instead of facts. By a foreign policy elite that largely boarded the bandwagon for war. And most of all by the majority of a Congress - a coequal branch of government - that voted to give the President the open-ended authority to wage war that he uses to this day. Let's be clear: without that vote, there would be no war.

Some seek to rewrite history. They argue that they weren't really voting for war, they were voting for inspectors, or for diplomacy. But the Congress, the Administration, the media, and the American people all understood what we were debating in the fall of 2002. This was a vote about whether or not to go to war. That's the truth as we all understood it then, and as we need to understand it now. And we need to ask those who voted for the war: how can you give the President a blank check and then act surprised when he cashes it?

With all that we know about what's gone wrong in Iraq, even today's debate is divorced from reality. We've got a surge that is somehow declared a success even though it has failed to enable the political reconciliation that was its stated purpose. The fact that violence today is only as horrific as in 2006 is held up as progress. Washington politicians and pundits trip over each other to debate a newspaper advertisement while our troops fight and die in Iraq.

And the conventional thinking today is just as entrenched as it was in 2002. This is the conventional thinking that measures experience only by the years you've been in Washington, not by your time spent serving in the wider world. This is the conventional thinking that has turned against the war, but not against the habits that got us into the war in the first place - the outdated assumptions and the refusal to talk openly to the American people.

Well I'm not running for President to conform to Washington's conventional thinking - I'm running to challenge it. I'm not running to join the kind of Washington groupthink that led us to war in Iraq - I'm running to change our politics and our policy so we can leave the world a better place than our generation has found it.

So there is a choice that has emerged in this campaign, one that the American people need to understand. They should ask themselves: who got the single most important foreign policy decision since the end of the Cold War right, and who got it wrong. This is not just a matter of debating the past. It's about who has the best judgment to make the critical decisions of the future. Because you might think that Washington would learn from Iraq. But we've seen in this campaign just how bent out of shape Washington gets when you challenge its assumptions.

When I said that as President I would lead direct diplomacy with our adversaries, I was called naïve and irresponsible. But how are we going to turn the page on the failed Bush-Cheney policy of not talking to our adversaries if we don't have a President who will lead that diplomacy?

When I said that we should take out high-level terrorists like Osama bin Laden if we have actionable intelligence about their whereabouts, I was lectured by legions of Iraq War supporters. They said we can't take out bin Laden if the country he's hiding in won't. A few weeks later, the co-chairmen of the 9/11 Commission - Tom Kean and Lee Hamilton - agreed with my position. But few in Washington seemed to notice.

Some people made a different argument on this issue. They said we can take out bin Laden, we just can't say that we will. I reject this. I am a candidate for President of the United States, and I believe that the American people have a right to know where I stand.

And when I said that we can rule out the use of nuclear weapons to take out a terrorist training camp, it was immediately branded a "gaffe" because I did not recite the conventional Washington-speak. But is there any military planner in the world who believes that we need to drop a nuclear bomb on a terrorist training camp?

We need to question the world around us. When we have a debate about experience, we can't just debate who has the most experience scoring political points. When we have a debate about experience, we can't just talk about who fought yesterday's battles - we have to focus on who can face the challenges and seize the opportunities of tomorrow. Because no matter what we think about George Bush, he's going to be gone in January 2009. He's not on the ballot. This election is about ending the Iraq War, but even more it's about moving beyond it. And we're not going to be safe in a world of unconventional threats with the same old conventional thinking that got us into Iraq. We're not going to unify a divided America to confront these threats with the same old conventional politics of just trying to beat the other side.

In 2009, we will have a window of opportunity to renew our global leadership and bring our nation together. If we don't seize that moment, we may not get another. This election is a turning point. The American people get to decide: are we going to turn back the clock, or turn the page?

I want to be straight with you. If you want conventional Washington thinking, I'm not your man. If you want rigid ideology, I'm not your man. If you think that fundamental change can wait, I'm definitely not your man. But if you want to bring this country together, if you want experience that's broader than just learning the ways of Washington, if you think that the global challenges we face are too urgent to wait, and if you think that America must offer the world a new and hopeful face, then I offer a different choice in this race and a different vision for our future.

The first thing we have to do is end this war. And the right person to end it is someone who had the judgment to oppose it from the beginning. There is no military solution in Iraq, and there never was. I will begin to remove our troops from Iraq immediately. I will remove one or two brigades a month, and get all of our combat troops out of Iraq within 16 months. The only troops I will keep in Iraq will perform the limited missions of protecting our diplomats and carrying out targeted strikes on al Qaeda. And I will launch the diplomatic and humanitarian initiatives that are so badly needed. Let there be no doubt: I will end this war.

But it's also time to learn the lessons of Iraq. We're not going to defeat the threats of the 21st century on a conventional battlefield. We cannot win a fight for hearts and minds when we outsource critical missions to unaccountable contractors. We're not going to win a battle of ideas with bullets alone.

Make no mistake: we must always be prepared to use force to protect America. But the best way to keep America safe is not to threaten terrorists with nuclear weapons - it's to keep nuclear weapons and nuclear materials away from terrorists. That's why I've worked with Republican Senator Dick Lugar to pass a law accelerating our pursuit of loose nuclear materials. And that's why I'll lead a global effort to secure all loose nuclear materials during my first term in office.

But we need to do much more. We need to change our nuclear policy and our posture, which is still focused on deterring the Soviet Union - a country that doesn't exist. Meanwhile, India and Pakistan and North Korea have joined the club of nuclear-armed nations, and Iran is knocking on the door. More nuclear weapons and more nuclear-armed nations mean more danger to us all.

Here's what I'll say as President: America seeks a world in which there are no nuclear weapons.

We will not pursue unilateral disarmament. As long as nuclear weapons exist, we'll retain a strong nuclear deterrent. But we'll keep our commitment under the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty on the long road towards eliminating nuclear weapons. We'll work with Russia to take U.S. and Russian ballistic missiles off hair-trigger alert, and to dramatically reduce the stockpiles of our nuclear weapons and material. We'll start by seeking a global ban on the production of fissile material for weapons. And we'll set a goal to expand the U.S.-Russian ban on intermediate-range missiles so that the agreement is global.

As we do this, we'll be in a better position to lead the world in enforcing the rules of the road if we firmly abide by those rules. It's time to stop giving countries like Iran and North Korea an excuse. It's time for America to lead. When I'm President, we'll strengthen the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty so that nations that don't comply will automatically face strong international sanctions.

This will require a new era of American diplomacy. To signal the dawn of that era, we need a President who is willing to talk to all nations, friend and foe. I'm not afraid that America will lose a propaganda battle with a petty tyrant - we need to go before the world and win those battles. If we take the attitude that the President just parachutes in for a photo-op after an

agreement has already been reached, then we're only going to reach agreements with our friends. That's not the way to protect the American people. That's not the way to advance our interests.

Just look at our history. Kennedy had a direct line to Khrushchev. Nixon met with Mao. Carter did the hard work of negotiating the Camp David Accords. Reagan was negotiating arms agreements with Gorbachev even as he called on him to "tear down this wall."

It's time to make diplomacy a top priority. Instead of shuttering consulates, we need to open them in the tough and hopeless corners of the world. Instead of having more Americans serving in military bands than the diplomatic corps, we need to grow our foreign service. Instead of retreating from the world, I will personally lead a new chapter of American engagement.

It is time to offer the world a message of hope to counter the prophets of hate. My experience has brought me to the hopeless places. As a boy, I lived in Indonesia and played barefoot with children who could not dream the same dreams that I did. As an adult, I've returned to be with my family in their small village in Kenya, where the promise of America is still an inspiration. As a community organizer, I worked in South Side neighborhoods that had been left behind by global change. As a Senator, I've been to refugee camps in Chad where proud and dignified people can't hope for anything beyond the next handout.

In the 21st century, progress must mean more than a vote at the ballot box - it must mean freedom from fear and freedom from want. We cannot stand for the freedom of anarchy. Nor can we support the globalization of the empty stomach. We need new approaches to help people to help themselves. The United Nations has embraced the Millennium Development Goals, which aim to cut extreme poverty in half by 2015. When I'm President, they will be America's goals. The Bush Administration tried to keep the UN from proclaiming these goals; the Obama Administration will double foreign assistance to \$50 billion to lead the world to achieve them.

In the 21st century, we cannot stand up before the world and say that there's one set of rules for America and another for everyone else. To lead the world, we must lead by example. We must be willing to acknowledge our failings, not just trumpet our victories. And when I'm President, we'll reject torture - without exception or equivocation; we'll close Guantanamo; we'll be the country that credibly tells the dissidents in the prison camps around the world that America is your voice, America is your dream, America is your light of justice.

We cannot - we must not - let the promotion of our values be a casualty of the Iraq War. But we cannot secure America and show our best face to the world unless we change how we do business in Washington.

We all know what Iraq has cost us abroad. But these last few years we've seen an unacceptable abuse of power at home. We face real threats. Any President needs the latitude to confront them swiftly and surely. But we've paid a heavy price for having a President whose priority is expanding his own power. The Constitution is treated like a nuisance. Matters of war and peace are used as political tools to bludgeon the other side. We get subjected to endless spin to keep our troops at war, but we don't get to see the flag-draped coffins of our heroes coming home. We get secret task forces, secret budgeting, slanted intelligence, and the shameful smearing of people who speak out against the President's policies.

All of this has left us where we are today: more divided, more distrusted, more in debt, and mired in an endless war. A war to disarm a dictator has become an open-ended occupation of a foreign country. This is not America. This is not who we are. It's time for us to stand up and tell George Bush that the government in this country is not based on the whims of one person, the government is of the people, by the people and for the people.

We thought we learned this lesson. After Vietnam, Congress swore it would never again be duped into war, and even wrote a new law -- the War Powers Act -- to ensure it would not repeat its mistakes. But no law can force a Congress to stand up to the President. No law can make Senators read the intelligence that showed the President was overstating the case for war. No law can give Congress a backbone if it refuses to stand up as the co-equal branch the Constitution made it.

That is why it is not enough to change parties. It is time to change our politics. We don't need another President who puts politics and loyalty over candor. We don't need another President who thinks big but doesn't feel the need to tell the American people what they think. We don't need another President who shuts the door on the American people when they make policy. The American people are not the problem in this country - they are the answer. And it's time we had a President who acted like that.

I will always tell the American people the truth. I will always tell you where I stand. It's what I'm doing in this campaign. It's what I'll do as President. I'll lead a new era of openness. I'll give an annual "State of the World" address to the American people in which I lay out our national security policy. I'll draw on the legacy of one of our greatest Presidents - Franklin Roosevelt - and give regular "fireside webcasts," and I'll have members of my national security team do the same.

I'll turn the page on a growing empire of classified information, and restore the balance we've lost between the necessarily secret and the necessity of openness in a democratic society by creating a new National Declassification Center. We'll protect sources and methods, but we won't use sources and methods as pretexts to hide the truth. Our history doesn't belong to Washington, it belongs to America.

I'll use the intelligence that I do receive to make good policy - I won't manipulate it to sell a bad policy. We don't need any more officials who tell the President what they want to hear. I will make the Director of National Intelligence an official with a fixed term, like the Chairman of the Federal Reserve - not someone who can be fired by the President. We need consistency and integrity at the top of our intelligence agencies. We don't need politics. My test won't be loyalty - it will be the truth.

And I'll turn the page on the imperial presidency that treats national security as a partisan issue - not an American issue. I will call for a standing, bipartisan Consultative Group of congressional leaders on national security. I will meet with this Consultative Group every month, and consult with them before taking major military action. The buck will stop with me. But these discussions have to take place on a bipartisan basis, and support for these decisions will be stronger if they draw on bipartisan counsel. We're not going to secure this country unless we turn the page on the conventional thinking that says politics is just about beating the other side.

It's time to unite America, because we are at an urgent and pivotal moment.

There are those who suggest that there are easy answers to the challenges we face. We can look, they say, to Washington experience - the same experience that got us into this war. Or we can turn the page to something new, to unite this country and to seize this moment.

I am not a perfect man and I won't be a perfect President. But my own American story tells me that this country moves forward when we cast off our doubts and seek new beginnings.

It's what brought my father across an ocean in search of a dream. It's what I saw in the eyes of men and women and children in Indonesia who heard the word "America" and thought of the possibility beyond the horizon. It's what I saw in the streets of the South Side, when people who had every reason to give in decided to pick themselves up. It's what I've seen in the United States Senate when Republicans and Democrats of good will do come together to take on tough issues. And it's what I've seen in this campaign, when over half a million Americans have come together to seek the change this country needs.

Now I know that some will shake their heads. It's easy to be cynical. When it comes to our foreign policy, you get it from all sides. Some folks on the right will tell you that you don't love your country if you don't support the war in Iraq. Some folks on the left will tell you that America can do no right in the world. Some shrug their shoulders because Washington says, "trust us, we'll take care of it." And we know happened the last time they said that.

Yes, it's easy to be cynical. But right now, somewhere in Iraq, there's someone about your age. He's maybe on his second or third tour. It's hot. He would rather be at home. But he's in his uniform, got his combat gear on. He's getting in a Humvee. He's going out on patrol. He's lost a buddy in this war, maybe more. He risked his life yesterday, he's risking his life today, and he's going to risk it tomorrow.

So why do we reject the cynicism? We reject it because of men and women like him. We reject it because the legacy of their sacrifice must be a better America. We reject it because they embody the spirit of those who fought to free the slaves and free a continent from a madman; who rebuilt Europe and sent Peace Corps volunteers around the globe; because they are fighting for a better America and a better world.

And I reject it because I wouldn't be on this stage if, throughout our history, America had not made the right choice over the easy choice, the ambitious choice over the cautious choice. I wouldn't be here if I didn't think we were ready to move past the fights of the 1960s and the 1990s. I wouldn't be here if, time and again, the torch had not been passed to a new generation - to unite this country at home, to show a new face of this country to the world. I'm running for the presidency of the United States of America so that together we can do the hard work to seek a new dawn of peace and prosperity for our children, and for the children of

the world.

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