



"I'M ASKING YOU TO BELIEVE. Not just in my ability to bring about real change in Washington ... I'm asking you to believe in yours."

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Remarks for Senator Barack Obama: AFL-CIO

Philadelphia, PA | April 02, 2008

We meet here at a time of challenge and uncertainty for America's workers. We all know the stories of shuttered plants and rusting factories, of industrial centers that have become near-ghost towns across this state, and across this country.

But today's gathering isn't the first time workers have met in Philadelphia at a pivotal moment. One hundred and eighty-one years ago, in the fall of 1827, a group of mechanics met in the shadow of Independence Hall to form what they called the Mechanics Union of Trade Associations - a moment that marked the birth of the trade union movement in America.

They met all kinds of resistance from employers and wealthy merchants who said what they were trying to do would hurt workers and business, and was just plain un-American. But these mechanics - these founding fathers of organized labor - disagreed. And in the preamble to their constitution, they proposed what many believed was a radical idea - that it was in their employers' interests to pay them higher wages because higher wages for workers would help bring general prosperity for all.

It was the 19th century equivalent of the idea that what's good for Main Street is good for Wall Street. And that's an idea we need to remember today. Because what we're seeing is that another, very different view has taken hold in Washington and on Wall Street - the view that we can somehow thrive as a nation when those at the very top are doing better than ever, while ordinary Americans are struggling to get by.

Over the last seven years, we've had an administration that serves the interests of the wealthy and the well-connected, no matter what the cost to working families, and to our economy. It's an administration that didn't lift a finger while our economy rolled toward recession until the pain folks were feeling on Main Street trickled up to their friends on Wall Street.

It's an administration that's been handing out tax cuts to the wealthiest Americans who don't need them and aren't even asking for them.

And it's an administration that denies labor a seat at the table when trade deals are being negotiated, that doesn't believe in unions, that doesn't believe in organizing, and that's packed the labor relations board with their corporate buddies.

Now, John McCain said a few weeks ago that "the issue of economics is not something I've understood as well as I should" - and that's clear since all he's offering is more of the same Bush policies that have put the American Dream out of reach for so many Americans.

Like George Bush, Senator McCain is committed to more tax cuts for the rich, and more trade agreements that fail to protect American workers. His response to the housing crisis amounts to little more than watching millions of Americans face foreclosure. And some of his top advisors were lobbyists for the special interest when they went to work for his campaign, so it's not hard to guess who they'll be working for if they get into the White House.

So while I know there's been some talk about whether the Democrats will be unified in November, America can't afford another four years of the Bush policies, and that's what John McCain's offering. And that's why I know we'll come together this fall to bring this country the change we so desperately need.

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But the truth is, the problems we face go beyond any single administration. For far too long, through both Democratic and Republican administrations, the system has been rigged against everyday Americans by the lobbyists that Wall Street uses to get its way.

Think about it. The top mortgage lenders spend \$185 million lobbying Congress, and we wonder why Washington looked the other way when they were tricking families into buying homes they couldn't afford. Drug and insurance companies spend \$1 billion on lobbying, and we're surprised that our health care premiums, and co-pays, and the cost of prescription drugs goes up year after year after year. The big oil companies play the same game, and we wonder how they're making record profits at a time when you're paying close to \$4 a gallon for gas.

The system is broken - and over the weekend, we got a reminder of just how badly it's broken. You might have seen it. There was this news story about the top two executives at Countrywide Financial, a company that's as responsible as any firm for the housing crisis we're facing today. And what we learned is that when Countrywide was sold a few months ago, these two executives got a combined 19 million dollars. So millions of Americans are facing foreclosure. Our economy is in turmoil. And the guys behind it all are getting bonuses for their bad behavior.

That's an outrage. That's not the America we believe in. It's time to take on the special interests and level the playing field so that our economy works for working Americans.

Now, I know there's been some talk about Rocky Balboa over the last couple days. And we all love Rocky. But Rocky was fiction. And so is the idea that someone can fight for working people and at the same time, embrace the broken system Washington, where corporate lobbyists use their clout to shape laws to their liking.

We need to challenge the system on behalf of America's workers. And if we're not willing to take up that fight, then real change - change that will make a lasting difference in the lives of ordinary Americans - will keep getting blocked by the defenders of the status quo.

I believe I can bring about that kind of change - because I'm the only candidate in this race who's actually worked to take power away from lobbyists by passing historic ethics reforms in Illinois and in the U.S. Senate. And I'm the only candidate who isn't taking a dime from Washington lobbyists. They have not funded my campaign, they will not run my administration, and they will not drown out the voices of the American people when I'm President of the United States.

Your voices will be heard.

This isn't just campaign talk. I've been fighting for working families ever since I moved to Chicago more than two decades ago to work as a community organizer, giving job training to the jobless and hope to the hopeless when the local steel plants closed. And the reason I'm standing here today is because I don't want to wake up one morning many years from now and see that nothing has changed because the system is still being rigged against America's families.

And I know you don't either. Because despite seven years of the most anti-labor administration in generations - as I look out on this crowd and as I travel across this country, the one thing I know for certain is that labor unions are still mobilizing. Labor unions are still organizing. And you're still fighting to give America's working people a voice in Washington.

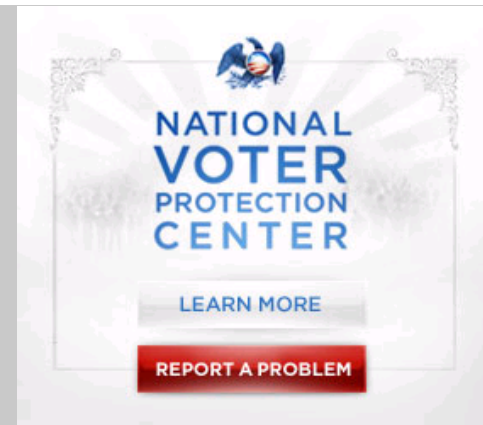
I'm tired of playing defense. I know the AFL-CIO is tired of playing defense. We're ready to play some offense. We're ready to play offense for a decent wage. We're ready to play offense for retirement security.

We're ready to play offense for universal health care. It's time to stand up to the big drug and insurance companies that have been blocking reform and say enough is enough - we're going to finally make health care affordable and available for every American. We're going to finally help folks like the young woman I met who works the night shift after a full day of college and still can't afford medicine for a sister who's ill.

No American should be driven into bankruptcy trying to pay their medical bills. No worker should have to go without a pay raise because their employer has to use the money to cover the rising cost of health care. That's why we'll pass universal health care by the end of my first term as President and save the typical family up to \$2,500 a year on their premiums. In this country of all countries, health care shouldn't be a privilege for the few; it should be a fundamental right for every American.

We're ready to play offense for organized labor. It's time we had a President who didn't choke saying the word "union." A President who knows it's the Department of Labor and not the Department of Management. And a President who strengthens our unions by letting them do what they do best - organize our workers. If a majority of workers want a union, they should get a union. It's that simple. Let's stand up to the business lobby that's been getting their friends in Washington to block card check. I've fought to pass the Employee Free Choice Act in the Senate. And I will make it the law of the land when I'm President of the United States of America.

We're ready to play offense for working families. I'm the only candidate in this race who's called for a middle class tax cut that will save families up to \$1,000 a year, including over 6 million people in this



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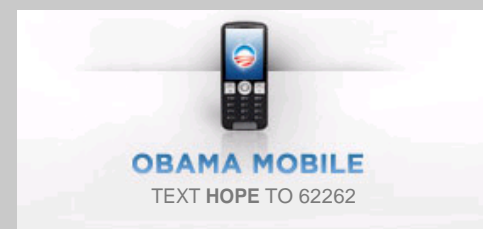
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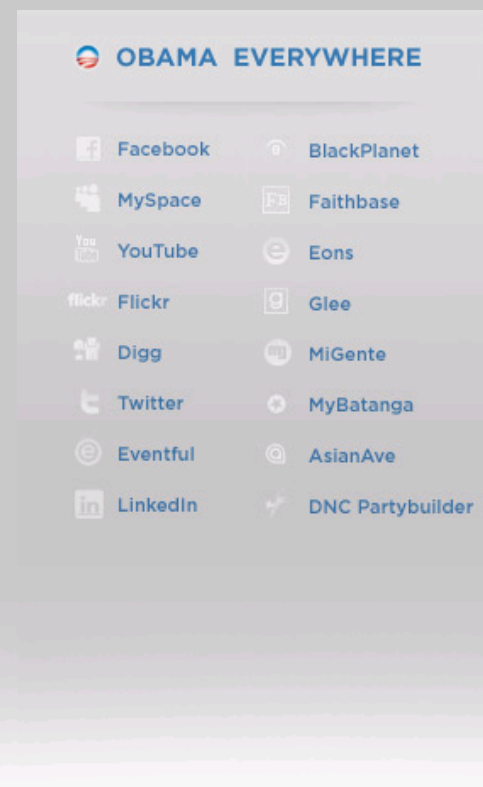
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













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state. And I've also called for eliminating income taxes entirely for seniors making under \$50,000 a year. And we also have to do more to make sure folks who are getting laid off in these hard times still have enough money to make ends meet, which is why I'm working with my friend Senator Bob Casey to extend unemployment insurance, and make it available for working folks who aren't in a union and don't work a regular 9-to-5 job.

But we also have to do more over the long-term to invest in our middle class. And that's what we'll do as President. To ensure that our children have the skills to compete in our global economy, we'll make college affordable with a \$4,000 tax credit for anyone who's willing to do some community service. And we'll pass the Patriot Employer Act that I've been fighting for ever since I ran for the Senate - so we can end tax breaks for companies that ship jobs overseas, and give them to companies that create good jobs with decent wages right here in America.

I've also proposed creating millions of new jobs and doing it in a way that's fiscally responsible. I've called for investing \$60 billion over the next ten years to rebuild our crumbling roads and bridges, and this will generate millions of new jobs, many of them in the construction industry that's been hard hit by our housing crisis.

I also believe it's time Washington started showing the same kind of leadership that Pennsylvania's labor movement has shown by fighting to create the green jobs that are the jobs of the future. That's why I'll invest \$150 billion over the next decade to establish a green energy sector that will create up to 5 million new jobs - and those are jobs that pay well and can't be outsourced. And thanks to leaders like my friend Congressman Patrick Murphy, these kinds of jobs are bringing new life back to places that have been hard hit in recent decades - places like Fairless Hills in Bucks County, where the old U.S. Steel plant is now being used to help produce wind power.

Now, if we're honest with ourselves, we'll acknowledge that we can't stop globalization in its tracks and that opening new markets to our goods can help strengthen our economy. But what I refuse to accept is that we have to sign trade deals like the South Korea Agreement that are bad for American workers. What I oppose - and what I have always opposed - are trade deals that put the interests of multinational corporations ahead of the interests of Americans workers - like NAFTA, and CAFTA, and permanent normal trade relations with China.

And I'll also oppose the Colombia Free Trade Agreement if President Bush insists on sending it to Congress because the violence against unions in Colombia would make a mockery of the very labor protections that we have insisted be included in these kinds of agreements. So you can trust me when I say that whatever trade deals we negotiate when I'm President will be good for American workers, and that they'll have strong labor and environmental protections that we'll enforce.

These are the battles we should be fighting. This is the future we should be building. But it's going to be hard to do all this so long as we're spending \$10 billion a month fighting a war in Iraq that should have never been authorized and never been waged. I opposed this war from the start. I've opposed it each year it's been going on. And that's why I'm the one candidate who will offer a real choice in November because I can stand up to John McCain with credibility and say no to a 100-year occupation of Iraq, and no to a third Bush term. It's time to bring out troops home.

It's time to end the fight in Iraq and take up the fight for good jobs and universal health care. It's time to end the fight in Iraq and take up the fight for a world-class education and Social Security. It's time to end the fight in Iraq and take up the fight for opportunity and prosperity here at home.

So make no mistake - the American people have a choice in this election. We can keep playing the same Washington game with the same Washington players, and somehow expect a different result. Or we can choose a different future. Just imagine it.

Imagine a President whose life's story is like so many of your own, who knows what it's like to go to college on student loans, and see his mother get sick and worry that maybe she can't pay the medical bills.

Imagine a Washington where the only lobby that has real influence is the people's lobby. A Washington where you can trust that your voice will be heard before any major piece of labor legislation is signed into law.

Imagine an America that lives up to the idea that those mechanics proposed nearly two hundred years ago, where we finally have a system that works for Main Street and not just Wall Street.

That's the change we seek. That's the vision the AFL-CIO has always fought for. And that's the future that's within our grasp. So I'm asking you to march with me, and work with me, and fight with me. And if you do, then I truly believe we won't just win this primary, and we won't just defeat John McCain in November - we'll build an America where labor is on the rise, where hope is on the rise, and where the American dream is within reach for every family in this country. Thank you.

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