



"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: Alliance for American Manufacturing

Pittsburgh, PA | April 14, 2008

Being here in Pennsylvania with the primary coming up, I know that politics is what's on a lot of people's minds. But as I look out at this crowd, I also know that being here isn't just about politics for me. It's personal. Because it reminds me why I entered public service in the first place.

As some of you might know, after college, I went to work as a community organizer for a group of churches on the South Side of Chicago. The job was to help lift communities that had been devastated when the local steel plants fell on hard times. Thousands of folks had been laid off and some plants were closing down. And I can still remember the first time I saw a shuttered steel mill.

It was late in the afternoon and I took a drive with another organizer over to the old Wisconsin Steel plant on the southeast side of Chicago. Some of you may know it. And as we drove up, I saw a sight that's probably familiar to some of you. I saw a plant that was empty and rusty. And behind a chain-link fence, I saw weeds sprouting up through the concrete, and an old mangy cat running around. And I thought about all the good jobs it used to provide, and all the kids who used to work there in the summer to make some extra money for college.

What I came to understand was that when a plant shuts down, it's not just the workers who pay a price, it's the whole community. I saw folks who felt like their government wasn't looking out for them and who had given up hope. So I worked with unions and the city government, and we brought the community together to fight for its common future. We gave job-training to the jobless and hope to the hopeless, and block by block, we helped turn those neighborhoods around.

More than twenty years later, as I've traveled across Pennsylvania, and West Virginia, and Ohio, and all across this country, I'm still seeing too many places where plants have closed down and where folks are feeling like they're not getting a fair shot at life, like their dreams are slipping further out of reach. And that's partly because of the same kinds of global economic pressures that led steel plants in Chicago to close down in the 1980s.

But it's also because George Bush has pursued policies that don't work for working Americans. In recent years, we've seen more than 3 million high-quality manufacturing jobs disappear, and more than 40,000 factories close down. And more often than not, the few jobs that are being created pay less than the ones we're losing and come without health insurance or a pension, which makes it even harder for families to feel secure about their future.

But we also know this is a problem that goes beyond the failures of George Bush - because for decades, through both Democratic and Republican administrations, we've seen the number of American-owned steel companies dwindle down. For decades, our economic policies have been written to pump up a corporate bottom line, rather than promote what's right, without any consideration for the burden we all bear when workers are abused or the environment is destroyed.

It's an outrage, but it's not an accident - because corporate lobbyists in Washington are writing our laws and putting their clients' interests ahead of what's fair for the American people. The men and women you represent haven't been getting a seat at the table when trade agreements are being negotiated, or tax policies are being written, or health care and pension laws are being designed because the special interests have bought every chair.

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That's not the America I believe in. That's not the America you believe in. And that's why when I'm President, we'll make sure Washington serves nobody's interests but the people's.

You know, there's been a lot of talk in this campaign lately about who's "in touch" with the workers of Pennsylvania. Senator Clinton and Senator McCain are singing from the same hymn book, saying that I'm "out of touch" - an "elitist" - because I said a lot of folks are bitter about their economic circumstances.

Now it may be that I chose my words badly. It wasn't the first time and it won't be the last. But when I hear my opponents, both of whom have spent decades in Washington, saying I'm out of touch, it's time to cut through their rhetoric and look at the reality.

After all, you've heard this kind of rhetoric before. Around election time, the candidates can't do enough for you. They'll "promise you anything, give you a long list of proposals and even come around, with TV crews in tow, to throw back a shot and a beer.

But if those same candidates are taking millions of dollars in contributions from the PACs and lobbyists, ask yourself, who are they going to be toasting once the election is over?

I'm the only candidate who doesn't take money from corporate PACs and lobbyists, and I'm here to tell you that you can count on me to stand up for you after this election, just as I've been standing up for workers all my life. That's why I'm running for President of the United States.

Senator Clinton and Senator McCain question my respect for the workers of Pennsylvania. Well, let me tell you how I believe you demonstrate your respect. You do it by telling the truth and keeping your word, so folks can know that where you stand today is where you'll stand tomorrow.

The truth is, trade is here to stay. We live in a global economy. For America's future to be as bright as our past, we have to compete. We have to win.

Not every job that has left is coming back. And not every job lost is due to trade -automation has made plants more efficient so they can make the same amount of steel with few workers. These are the realities.

I also don't oppose all trade deals. I voted for two of them because they have the worker and environmental agreements I believe in. Some of you disagreed with me on this but I did what I thought was right.

That's the truth. But let me tell you what else I believe in:

For America to win, American workers have to win, too. If CEO pay keeps rising, while the standard of living for their workers continues to decline, that's not a win for America.

That's why I opposed NAFTA, it's why I opposed CAFTA, and it's why I said any trade agreement I would support had to contain real, enforceable standards for workers.

That's why I believe the Permanent Normalized Trade agreement with China didn't do enough to ensure fairness and compliance.

Now, you can have a debate about whether my position is right or wrong. But here's what you can't do. You can't spend the better part of two decades campaigning for NAFTA and PNTR for China, and then come here to Pennsylvania, and tell the steelworkers you've been with them all along. You can't say you are opposed to the Colombia Trade deal, while your key strategist is working for the Colombian government to get the deal passed.

That's not respect. That's just more of the same old Washington politics. And we can't afford more of the same.

We need real change, and that's what I'm offering. I'm offering a new, more transparent and more inclusive path on trade so we can help promote an integrated global economy where the costs and benefits are distributed more equitably. And it starts with a principle I've always believed in - that trade should work for all Americans.

That's why we need to finally confront the issue of trade with China. As I've said before, America and the world can benefit from trade with China. But trade with China will only be good for you if China itself plays by the rules and acts as a positive force for balanced world growth.

Seeing the living standards of the Chinese people improve is a good thing - good because we want a stable China, and good because China can be a powerful market for American exports. But too often, China has been competing in ways that are tilting the playing field.

It's not just that China is following the path taken by so many other countries before it, and dumping goods into our market while not opening their own markets, something I've spoken out against. It's not just that they're violating intellectual property rights. They're also grossly undervaluing their currency, and giving their goods yet another unfair advantage. Each year they've had the chance, the Bush administration has failed to do anything about this. That's unacceptable. That's why I co-sponsored the



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Currency Exchange Rate Referent Reform Act. And that's why as President, I'll use all the diplomatic avenues open to me to insist that China stop manipulating its currency.

We also have to make sure that whatever goods we're importing are safe for our families. We all saw the harm that was caused by lead toys from China that were reaching our store shelves. A few months ago, when I called for a ban on any toys that have more than a trace amount of lead, an official at China's foreign ministry said I was being "unobjective, unreasonable, and unfair." But I don't think protecting our children is "unreasonable" - I think it's our obligation as parents and as Americans.

When it comes to trade, there's no one-size-fits-all approach. If countries are committed to reciprocity, if they are abiding by basic rules of the road, then we should welcome trade. Many poor countries need access to our markets and pose no threat to our workers.

But what all trade agreements I negotiate as President will have in common is that they'll all put American workers first. We won't ignore violence against union organizers in Colombia, or the non-tariff barriers that keep U.S. cars out of South Korea.

And we won't just negotiate fair trade agreements, we'll make sure they're being fully enforced. George Bush has been far too slow to press American rights. That's an outrage. When our trading partners sign an agreement with the Obama administration, you can trust that we'll hold them to it.

Now, if we're serious about standing up for American workers around the world, we also have to fight for you here at home. That means passing universal health care and making sure every American has insurance you can take with you even if you lose your job, and that a college degree is within reach, even if you're not rich - because all our children should have the skills to compete in the global economy.

And it also means protecting the rights of our workers. It's time we had a President who didn't choke saying the word "union." We need to strengthen 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, no matter whether they're full-time, or part-time, or contract workers. And that is why I will fight for and why I intend to sign the Employee Free Choice Act when it lands on my desk in the White House.

Here's what else I'll do: we'll pass the Patriot Employer Act that I've been working on since I got to the Senate - so we can stop giving tax breaks to companies that ship jobs overseas, and start giving them to companies that create good jobs with decent wages here in America.

And to those who think that the decline in American manufacturing is inevitable; or that manufacturing has no place in a 21st century economy; we say right here and right now that the fight for manufacturing's future is the fight for America's future. And that's why we'll modernize our steel industry, strengthen our entire domestic manufacturing base, and open as many markets as we can to American manufactured goods when I'm President.

We'll also make necessary long-term investments in job-growth. Back in the 1950's, Americans were put to work building the Interstate Highway system and that helped expand the middle class in this country. We need to show the same kind of leadership today. That's why I've called for a National Infrastructure Reinvestment Bank that will invest \$60 billion over ten years and generate millions of new jobs. We can't keep standing by while our roads and bridges and airports crumble and decay. We can't keep running our economy on debt. For our economy, our safety, and our workers, we have to rebuild America.

And we need to invest in green technology. We can't keep sending billions of dollars to foreign nations because of our addiction to oil. We should be investing in American companies that invest in American-manufactured solar panels and windmills, and in clean coal technology. That's why I've proposed investing \$150 billion over the next ten years in the green energy sector. This will create up to five million new American jobs - and those are jobs that pay well and can't be outsourced. That's a promise that we are making not just to this generation of Americans, but to the next generation of Americans. And that's why this will be a priority in my administration.

Now, I know some will say we can't afford all this. But let me just say this - if we can spend \$10 billion a month rebuilding Iraq, we can spend \$15 billion a year in our own country to put Americans back to work and strengthen the long-term competitiveness of our economy.

So make no mistake - the American people have a choice in this election. We can talk about our economic problems with trade all we want, but unless we change the broken system in Washington, nothing else is going to change. We can talk all we want about respecting workers and their way of life, but unless we have a President you can trust to listen and put working Americans first, nothing is really going to change.

And you can trust me. Because politics didn't lead me to working folks; working folks led me to politics. I was standing with American workers on the streets of Chicago twenty years ago, and the reason I'm here today is because I don't want to wake up one day many years from now and see that our companies are still getting hurt because foreign governments are still bending or breaking the rules, or that we're still standing idly by while American jobs get shipped overseas, or that we still haven't made the investments in infrastructure and in training our workers that we desperately need.

The reason I'm here today is because I know what it's like to go to college on student loans, and see a

mother get sick and worry that maybe she can't pay the bills. I know what it's like to have to scratch and work and claw to build a better life for your family. And I don't want to wake up many years from now and find that the American dream is still out of reach for too many Americans.

The reason I'm here today is because I believe that if we can just put an end to the politics of division and distraction, and reclaim that sense that we all have a stake in each other, that we rise and fall as one nation; if we can just unite this country around a common purpose - black, white, Hispanic, Asian, and Native American; labor and management; Democrats, Republicans, and Independents - there's no obstacle we cannot overcome, no destiny we cannot fulfill.

That's the fundamental truth I learned on the streets of Chicago. That's the idea at the heart of your Alliance for Manufacturing. And that's the opportunity we have in this election. There is a moment in the life of every generation where that spirit of unity and hopefulness has to come through if we're going to make our mark on history. This is our moment. This is our time. And if you will march with me, and organize with me, if you vote for me, then I promise you this: We will not just win this Democratic Nomination, we will win the general election and then together - you and I - we're going to change this country, and we're going to change this world. Thank you.

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