Remarks of Senator Barack Obama: Final Primary Night

St. Paul, MN | June 03, 2008

Tonight, after fifty-four hard-fought contests, our primary season has finally come to an end.

Sixteen months have passed since we first stood together on the steps of the Old State Capitol in Springfield, Illinois. Thousands of miles have been traveled. Millions of voices have been heard. And because of what you said – because you decided that change must come to Washington; because you believed that this year must be different than all the rest; because you chose to listen not to your doubts or your fears but to your greatest hopes and highest aspirations, tonight we mark the end of one historic journey with the beginning of another – a journey that will bring a new and better day to America.

I can stand before you and say that I will be the Democratic nominee for President of the United States.

I want to thank every American who stood with us over the course of this campaign – through the good days and the bad; from the snows of Cedar Rapids to the sunshine of Sioux Falls. And tonight I also want to thank the men and woman who took this journey with me as fellow candidates for President.

At this defining moment for our nation, we should be proud that our party put forth one of the most talented, qualified field of individuals ever to run for this office.

I have not just competed with them as rivals, I have learned from them as friends, as public servants, and as patriots who love America and are willing to work tirelessly to make this country better. They are leaders of this party, and leaders that America will turn to for years to come.

That is particularly true for the candidate who has traveled further on this journey than anyone else. Senator Hillary Clinton has made history in this campaign not just because she’s a woman who has done what no woman has done before, but because she’s a leader who inspires millions of Americans with her strength, her courage, and her commitment to the causes that brought us here tonight.

We’ve certainly had our differences over the last sixteen months. But as someone who’s shared a stage with her many times, I can tell you that what gets Hillary Clinton up in the morning – even in the face of tough odds – is exactly what sent her and Bill Clinton to sign up for their first campaign in Texas all those years ago; what sent her to work at the Children’s Defense Fund and made her fight for health care as First Lady; what led her to the United States Senate and fueled her barrier-breaking campaign for the presidency – an unyielding desire to improve the lives of ordinary Americans, no matter how difficult the fight may be. And you can rest assured that when we finally win the battle for universal health care in this country, she will be central to that victory.

There are those who say that this primary has somehow left us weaker and more divided. Well I say that because of this primary, there are millions of Americans who have cast their ballot for the very first time. There are Independents and Republicans who understand that this election isn’t just about the party in charge of Washington, it’s about the need to change Washington. There are young people, and African-Americans, and Latinos, and women of all ages who have voted in numbers that have broken records and inspired a nation.

All of you chose to support a candidate you believe in deeply. But at the end of the day, we aren’t the reason you came out and waited in lines that stretched block after block to make your voice heard. You didn’t do that because of me or Senator Clinton or anyone else. You did it because you know in your
We owe our children a better future. And for
I won't stand here and pretend that there are many good options left in Iraq, but
That's the change we need. That's what
It's
That's what change is.
We must once again have the courage and
My differences with
We owe our country a better future. It's time to rebuild our military and give our veterans
They
She needs us to pass health care plan
It's time to refocus our efforts on
But change is not one of them.
That's
That man needs us to pass an energy policy that works with automakers to raise fuel
Let us unite in common
It's understanding that fiscal
That's the change we need.
outsourced.
a clean energy future
from dictators.
around and look for a new one, he'd understand that we can't afford four more years of our addiction to oil
Maybe if he went to Pennsylvania and met the man who lost his job but can't even afford the gas to drive
Maybe if he went to Iowa and met the student who works the night shift after a full day of class and still
looking for.
in Michigan, and Ohio, and right here in Minnesota
John McCain has spent a lot of time talking about trips to Iraq in the last few weeks, but maybe if he
spent some time taking trips to the cities and towns that have been hardest hit by this economy – cities
in Michigan, and Ohio, and right here in Minnesota – he'd understand the kind of change that people are
looking for.
Maybe if he went to Iowa and met the student who works the night shift after a full day of class and still
can't pay the medical bills for a sister who's ill, he'd understand that she can't afford four more years of a
health care plan that only takes care of the healthy and wealthy. She needs us to pass health care plan
that guarantees insurance to every American who wants it and brings down premiums for every family
who needs it. That's the change we need.
Change is realizing that meeting today's threats requires not just our firepower, but the power of our
diplomacy – tough, direct diplomacy where the President of the United States isn't afraid to let any petty
dictator know where America stands and what we stand for. We must once again have the courage and
conviction to lead the free world. That is the legacy of Roosevelt, and Truman, and Kennedy. That's what
the American people want. That's what change is.
Change is building an economy that rewards not just wealth, but the work and workers who created it. It's
understanding that the struggles facing working families can't be solved by spending billions of dollars
on more tax breaks for big corporations and wealthy CEOs, but by giving a the middle-class a tax break,
and investing in our crumbling infrastructure, and transforming how we use energy, and improving our
schools, and renewing our commitment to science and innovation. It's understanding that fiscal
responsibility and shared prosperity can go hand-in-hand, as they did when Bill Clinton was President.
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around and look for a new one, he'd understand that we can't afford four more years of our addiction to oil
from dictators. That man needs us to pass an energy policy that works with automakers to raise fuel
standards, and makes corporations pay for their pollution, and oil companies invest their record profits in
a clean energy future – an energy policy that will create millions of new jobs that pay well and can't be
outsourced. That's the change we need.
And maybe if he spent some time in the schools of South Carolina or St. Paul or where he spoke tonight in New Orleans, he'd understand that we can't afford to leave the money behind for No Child Left Behind; that we owe it to our children to invest in early childhood education; to recruit an army of new teachers and give them better pay and more support; to finally decide that in this global economy, the chance to get a college education should not be a privilege for the wealthy few, but the birthright of every American. That's the change we need in America. That's why I'm running for President.

The other side will come here in September and offer a very different set of policies and positions, and that is a debate I look forward to. It is a debate the American people deserve. But what you don't deserve is another election that's governed by fear, and innuendo, and division. What you won't hear from this campaign or this party is the kind of politics that uses religion as a wedge, and patriotism as a bludgeon – that sees our opponents not as competitors to challenge, but enemies to demonize. Because we may call ourselves Democrats and Republicans, but we are Americans first. We are always Americans first.

Despite what the good Senator from Arizona said tonight, I have seen people of differing views and opinions find common cause many times during my two decades in public life, and I have brought many together myself. I've walked arm-in-arm with community leaders on the South Side of Chicago and watched tensions fade as black, white, and Latino fought together for good jobs and good schools. I've sat across the table from law enforcement and civil rights advocates to reform a criminal justice system that sent thirteen innocent people to death row. And I've worked with friends in the other party to provide more children with health insurance and more working families with a tax break; to curb the spread of nuclear weapons and ensure that the American people know where their tax dollars are being spent; and to reduce the influence of lobbyists who have all too often set the agenda in Washington.

In our country, I have found that this cooperation happens not because we agree on everything, but because behind all the labels and false divisions and categories that define us; beyond all the petty bickering and point-scoring in Washington, Americans are a decent, generous, compassionate people, united by common challenges and common hopes. And every so often, there are moments which call on that fundamental goodness to make this country great again.

So it was for that band of patriots who declared in a Philadelphia hall the formation of a more perfect union; and for all those who gave on the fields of Gettysburg and Antietam their last full measure of devotion to save that same union.

So it was for the Greatest Generation that conquered fear itself, and liberated a continent from tyranny, and made this country home to untold opportunity and prosperity.

So it was for the workers who stood out on the picket lines; the women who shattered glass ceilings; the children who braved a Selma bridge for freedom's cause.

So it has been for every generation that faced down the greatest challenges and the most improbable odds to leave their children a world that's better, and kinder, and more just.

And so it must be for us.

America, this is our moment. This is our time. Our time to turn the page on the policies of the past. Our time to bring new energy and new ideas to the challenges we face. Our time to offer a new direction for the country we love.

The journey will be difficult. The road will be long. I face this challenge with profound humility, and knowledge of my own limitations. But I also face it with limitless faith in the capacity of the American people. Because if we are willing to work for it, and fight for it, and believe in it, then I am absolutely certain that generations from now, we will be able to look back and tell our children that this was the moment when we began to provide care for the sick and good jobs to the jobless; this was the moment when the rise of the oceans began to slow and our planet began to heal; this was the moment when we came together to remake this great nation so that it may always reflect our very best selves, and our highest ideals. Thank you, God Bless you, and may God Bless the United States of America.