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OBAMA NEWS & SPEECHES

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One year from now, you will have the chance to walk into a voting booth, pull back the curtain, and choose the next President of the United States.

Here's the good news - for the first time in a long time, the name George Bush will not appear on the ballot. The name Dick Cheney will not appear on the ballot. The era of Scooter Libby justice, and Brownie incompetence, and the Karl Rove politics of fear and cynicism will be over.

But the question you will have to ask yourselves when you pick up your ballot a year from today is, "What next?" How do we repair the enormous damage of these dismal years and recapture that sense of common purpose that has seen America through our toughest times?

I'm running for President because I believe we find ourselves in a moment of great challenge and great promise - a moment that comes along once in a generation.

It's a moment of challenge because America is less safe and less respected than at any time in recent history. We are more dependent on oil from dictators and closer to the day when climate change becomes a climate catastrophe.

In the midst of great prosperity, families all across this country feel further from the American Dream. You know this from your own lives. Most Americans are working harder for less and paying more for health care and college than ever before. It's harder to save. Harder to retire. And the policies of the last seven years have added to that unfairness.

George Bush said whatever the politics of the moment required in order to get elected in 2000. And those seven years of broken promises have left the American people with less trust in their leaders and less faith in their government than they have in years.

We were promised compassion and conservatism but we got Katrina and wiretaps.

We were promised a uniter, but we got a divider who couldn't even lead the half of the country who voted for him.

We were promised a kinder, gentler Washington but got a town that's more bitter, secretive, and corrupt than ever before. And the only mission ever accomplished was using fear and falsehoods to take us to a war that should've never been authorized and never been waged.

This catastrophic failure of leadership has led us to a moment where it's not just Democrats who are listening to what we have to say, but Independents and Republicans who have never been more disillusioned with what the state of our leadership in Washington has done to this country.

That's why this is also a moment of great promise. It's a chance to turn the page by offering the American people a fundamentally different choice in 2008 - not just in the policies we offer, but in the kind of leadership we offer. It's a chance to come together and finally solve the challenges that were made worse by George Bush, but existed long before he took office - challenges like health care and energy and education that we haven't met for decades because of a political system in Washington that has failed the American people.

And that's what this debate in our party right now is all about.

Much has been said about the exchanges between Senator Clinton and myself this week. Now, understand that Hillary Clinton is a colleague and a friend. She's also a skilled politician, and she's run what Washington would call a "textbook" campaign. But the problem is the textbook itself.

It's a textbook that's all about winning elections, but says nothing about how to bring the country

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together to solve problems. As we saw in the debate last week, it encourages vague, calculated answers to suit the politics of the moment, instead of clear, consistent principles about how you would lead America. It teaches you that you can promise progress for everyday people while striking a bargain with the very special interests who crowd them out.

Now, Senator Clinton is certainly not the only one in Washington to play this game. It's gone on for years, and I understand the reasoning behind it. It's a game that usually gets politicians where they need to go. But I don't believe it gets America where we need to go. When it comes to issues like war and diplomacy; energy and health care, I don't believe we can bring about real change if all we do is change our positions based on what's popular or politically convenient. If we are going to seize this moment of challenge and promise, the American people deserve more when they head to the voting booth in 2008.

I believe that our party has made the most difference in people's lives and the life of this country when we have led not by polls but by principle; not by calculation but by conviction; when we've been able to summon the entire nation to a common purpose - a higher purpose. That's how Roosevelt led us through war and lifted us from depression. It's how Kennedy called on a new generation to ask what they could do for America. And I am running for the Democratic nomination for President of the United States because that's the kind of leadership America needs right now.

I don't pretend to be a perfect man, and I will not be a perfect President. But I am in this race because I believe that if we want to break from the failures of the past and finally make progress as a country, we can't keep telling different people what we think they want to hear - we have to tell every American what they need to know. We have to be honest about the challenges we face.

When I called for higher fuel standards so we could reduce our dependence on foreign oil, I didn't say it to some environmental group in California - I said it in front of automakers in Detroit. When I called for corporate responsibility so that middle-class Americans could get a tax cut, I said it in front of CEOs on Wall Street. And when I was invited to speak out against George Bush's plan to invade Iraq as a Senate candidate five years ago, I didn't listen to those who warned me that it was politically risky position to take, I listened to my gut, and I said loud and clear that this was the wrong war at the wrong time and Congress should stand up and say so.

That's the kind of leadership we need right now. That's why I'm in this race. Because I don't think you should settle for a President who's only there for you when it's easy or convenient or popular - I think you deserve a President who's willing to fight for you every hour of every day for the next four years.

That's the change we can offer in 2008 - not change as a slogan, but change we can believe in.

One year from now, we have the chance to tell all those corporate lobbyists that the days of them setting the agenda in Washington are over. I have done more to take on lobbyists than any other candidate in this race - and I've won. I don't take a dime of their money, and when I am President, they won't find a job in my White House. Because real change isn't another four years of defending lobbyists who don't represent real Americans - it's standing with working Americans who have seen their jobs disappear and their wages decline and their hope for the future slip further and further away. That's the change we can offer in 2008.

When I am President, I will end the tax giveaways to companies that ship our jobs overseas, and I will put the money in the pockets of working Americans, and seniors, and homeowners who deserve a break. I won't wait ten years to raise the minimum wage - I'll raise it to keep pace every single year. And if American workers are being denied their right to organize when I'm in the White House, I will put on a comfortable pair of shoes and I will walk on that picket line with you as President of the United States.

One year from now, we can stop campaigning on the outrage of 47 million uninsured Americans and finally start doing something about it. I reformed health care in Illinois, and I didn't do it alone - I did it by reaching out to Democrats and Republicans. We took on the insurance industry, and we won. That's how I'll pass a universal health care bill that allows every American to get the same kind of health care that members of Congress get for themselves and cuts every family's premiums by up to \$2500. And mark my words - I will sign this bill by the end of my first term as President. That's the change we can offer in 2008.

One year from now, we can stop sending our children down corridors of shame and start putting them on a pathway to success. When I am President, we will stop passing bills called No Child Left Behind that leave the money behind and start making real investments in education from cradle to adulthood. That means early childhood education. That means recruiting an army of new teachers, and paying them better, and supporting them more so they're not just teaching to test, but teaching to teach. And it means finally putting a college education within reach of every American. That's the change we can offer in 2008.

One year from now, we can stop sending hundreds of millions of dollars to dictators for their oil while we melt the polar ice caps in the bargain. I will raise our fuel standards, and put a cap on carbon emissions to reduce them 80% by 2050. We'll tell polluters that they have to pay for their pollution,

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because they don't own the skies, the American people own the skies. And we'll use the money to invest in the clean, renewable fuels that are our future. That's the change we can offer in 2008.

In this election, we have the chance to turn the page on the last six years of being told that the only way for Democrats to look tough on national security is to talk, and act, and vote like George Bush Republicans.

When I'm your nominee, my opponent won't be able to say that I was for the war in Iraq before I was against it; or that I supported an extension of the Iraq war into Iran; or that I support the Bush-Cheney diplomacy of not talking to leaders we don't like. And he won't be able to say that I flip-flopped on something as fundamental as whether our nation should use torture. Because we are not a nation that makes excuses for torture, we are a nation that rejects it. That's the change we can offer in 2008.

When I am President, I will end this war in Iraq. I will bring our troops home within sixteen months. I'll finish the fight against al Qaeda in Afghanistan. And I will lead the world against the common threats of the 21st century - nuclear weapons and terrorism; climate change and poverty; genocide and disease. That's what Democrats must stand for, and that's what America must stand for. And I'll be a President who finally sends a message to the black, white, and brown faces beyond our shores; from the halls of power to the huts of Africa that says, "You matter to America. Your future is our future. And our moment is now."

America, our moment is now. Now is our chance to turn the page. Now is our chance to write a new chapter.

I am in this race because I don't want to see us spend the next year re-fighting the Washington battles of the 1990s. I don't want to pit Blue America against Red America, I want to lead a United States of America. I don't want this election to be about the past, because if it's about the future, we all win. If this election is about whether or not to end this war, or pass universal health care, or make more college affordable, it won't just be a Democratic victory; it will be an American victory.

That's the victory this country needs right now. This election and this moment are too important to settle for what we already know. The time has come to reach for what we know is possible.

I am not running for this office to fulfill any long-held plans or because I believe it is somehow owed to me. I never expected to be here, and I always knew the journey would be improbable. I've never been on one that wasn't.

I am running because of what Dr. King called "the fierce urgency of now." I am running because I do believe there's such a thing as being too late. And that hour is almost here.

I'm running because I don't want to wake up one morning four years from now, and turn on one of those cable talk shows, and see that Washington is still stuck in the same food fight it's been in for over a decade. I don't want to see that more Americans lost their health care and fell into bankruptcy because we let the insurance industry spend millions to stop us for yet another year. I don't want to see that.

I don't want to see that the oceans rose another few inches and the planet has reached the point of no return because we couldn't find a way to stop ourselves from buying oil from dictators. I don't want to see that.

I don't want to see that we risked more American lives in another misguided war because no one had the judgment to ask the tough questions before we sent our troops to fight. I don't want to see that.

I don't want to see homeless veterans on the street. I don't want to send another generation of children through corridors of shame. I don't want this future for my daughters and I do not accept this future for America. It is time to turn the page.

I run for the presidency for the same reason I drove halfway across the country over two decades ago to bring jobs to the jobless and hope to the hopeless on the streets of Chicago; for the same reason I stood up for justice and equality as a civil rights lawyer; for the same reason I've fought for Illinois families for over a decade. Because I will never forget that the only reason I am standing here today is because someone, somewhere stood up when it wasn't popular, when it was risky; when it was hard. And because that someone stood up, a few more did. And then a few thousand. And then a few million. And together, they changed the world.

That's why I run in this election. I run to give my children and their children the same chances that someone, somewhere gave me. I run so that a year from today, there is a chance that the world will look at America differently, and that America will look at itself differently. And I run to keep the promise of the United States of America alive for all those who still hunger for opportunity and thirst for equality and long to believe again.

That is the change that's possible in this election. That is the moment I want to seize as President. And I ask you all to join me in this journey. Thank you.

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