

Barack Obama's speech

August 28, 2008

The following is the transcript of Senator Barack Obama's acceptance speech at the Democratic National Convention in Denver, as recorded by CQ Transcriptions.

OBAMA: Thank you so much.

(APPLAUSE)

Thank you very much.

(APPLAUSE)

Thank you, everybody.

To -- to Chairman Dean and my great friend Dick Durbin, and to all my fellow citizens of this great nation, with profound gratitude and great humility, I accept your nomination for presidency of the United States.

(APPLAUSE)

Let me -- let me express -- let me express my thanks to the historic slate of candidates who accompanied me on this journey, and especially the one who traveled the farthest, a champion for working Americans and an inspiration to my daughters and to yours, Hillary Rodham Clinton.

(APPLAUSE)

To President Clinton, to President Bill Clinton, who made last night the case for change as only he can make it...

(APPLAUSE)

... to Ted Kennedy, who embodies the spirit of service...

(APPLAUSE)

... and to the next vice president of the United States, Joe Biden, I thank you.

(APPLAUSE)

I am grateful to finish this journey with one of the finest statesmen of our time, a man at ease with everyone from world leaders to the conductors on the Amtrak train he still takes home every night.

To the love of my life, our next first lady, Michelle Obama...

(APPLAUSE)

... and to Malia and Sasha, I love you so much, and I am so proud of you.

(APPLAUSE)

Four years ago, I stood before you and told you my story, of the brief union between a young man from Kenya and a young woman from Kansas who weren't well-off or well-known, but shared a belief that in America their son could achieve whatever he put his mind to.

It is that promise that's always set this country apart, that through hard work and sacrifice each of us can pursue our individual dreams, but still come together as one American family, to ensure that the next generation can pursue their dreams, as well. That's why I stand here tonight. Because for 232 years, at each moment

when that promise was in jeopardy, ordinary men and women -- students and soldiers, farmers and teachers, nurses and janitors -- found the courage to keep it alive.

We meet at one of those defining moments, a moment when our nation is at war, our economy is in turmoil, and the American promise has been threatened once more.

Tonight, more Americans are out of work and more are working harder for less. More of you have lost your homes and even more are watching your home values plummet. More of you have cars you can't afford to drive, credit cards, bills you can't afford to pay, and tuition that's beyond your reach.

These challenges are not all of government's making. But the failure to respond is a direct result of a broken politics in Washington and the failed policies of George W. Bush.

(APPLAUSE)

America, we are better than these last eight years. We are a better country than this.

(APPLAUSE)

This country is more decent than one where a woman in Ohio, on the brink of retirement, finds herself one illness away from disaster after a lifetime of hard work.

We're a better country than one where a man in Indiana has to pack up the equipment that he's worked on for 20 years and watch as it's shipped off to China, and then chokes up as he explains how he felt like a failure when he went home to tell his family the news.

We are more compassionate than a government that lets veterans sleep on our streets and families slide into poverty...

(APPLAUSE)

... that sits...

(APPLAUSE)

... that sits on its hands while a major American city drowns before our eyes.

(APPLAUSE)

Tonight, tonight, I say to the people of America, to Democrats and Republicans and independents across this great land: Enough. This moment...

(APPLAUSE)

This moment, this moment, this election is our chance to keep, in the 21st century, the American promise alive.

Because next week, in Minnesota, the same party that brought you two terms of George Bush and Dick Cheney will ask this country for a third.

(AUDIENCE BOOS)

And we are here -- we are here because we love this country too much to let the next four years look just like the last eight.

(APPLAUSE)

On November 4th, on November 4th, we must stand up and say: Eight is enough.

(APPLAUSE)

Now, now, let me -- let there be no doubt. The Republican nominee, John McCain, has worn the uniform of our country with bravery and distinction, and for that we owe him our gratitude and our respect.

(APPLAUSE)

And next week, we'll also hear about those occasions when he's broken with his party as evidence that he can deliver the change that we need.

But the record's clear: John McCain has voted with George Bush 90 percent of the time.

Senator McCain likes to talk about judgment, but, really, what does it say about your judgment when you think George Bush has been right more than 90 percent of the time?

(APPLAUSE)

I don't know about you, but I am not ready to take a 10 percent chance on change.

(APPLAUSE)

The truth is, on issue after issue that would make a difference in your lives -- on health care, and education, and the economy -- Senator McCain has been anything but independent.

He said that our economy has made great progress under this president. He said that the fundamentals of the economy are strong.

And when one of his chief advisers, the man who wrote his economic plan, was talking about the anxieties that Americans are feeling, he said that we were just suffering from a mental recession and that we've become, and I quote, "a nation of whiners."

(AUDIENCE BOOS) A nation of whiners? Tell that to the proud auto workers at a Michigan plant who, after they found out it was closing, kept showing up every day and working as hard as ever, because they knew there were people who counted on the brakes that they made.

Tell that to the military families who shoulder their burdens silently as they watch their loved ones leave for their third, or fourth, or fifth tour of duty.

These are not whiners. They work hard, and they give back, and they keep going without complaint. These are the Americans I know.

(APPLAUSE)

Now, I don't believe that Senator McCain doesn't care what's going on in the lives of Americans; I just think he doesn't know.

(LAUGHTER)

Why else would he define middle-class as someone making under \$5 million a

year? How else could he propose hundreds of billions in tax breaks for big corporations and oil companies, but not one penny of tax relief to more than 100 million Americans?

OBAMA: How else could he offer a health care plan that would actually tax people's benefits, or an education plan that would do nothing to help families pay for college, or a plan that would privatize Social Security and gamble your retirement?

(AUDIENCE BOOS)

It's not because John McCain doesn't care; it's because John McCain doesn't get it.

(APPLAUSE)

For over two decades -- for over two decades, he's subscribed to that old, discredited Republican philosophy: Give more and more to those with the most and hope that prosperity trickles down to everyone else.

In Washington, they call this the "Ownership Society," but what it really means is that you're on your own. Out of work? Tough luck, you're on your own. No health care? The market will fix it. You're on your own. Born into poverty? Pull yourself up by your own bootstraps, even if you don't have boots. You are on your own.

(APPLAUSE)

Well, it's time for them to own their failure. It's time for us to change America. And that's why I'm running for president of the United States.

(APPLAUSE)

You see, you see, we Democrats have a very different measure of what constitutes progress in this country.

We measure progress by how many people can find a job that pays the mortgage, whether you can put a little extra money away at the end of each month so you can someday watch your child receive her college diploma.

We measure progress in the 23 million new jobs that were created when Bill Clinton was president...

(APPLAUSE)

... when the average American family saw its income go up \$7,500 instead of go down \$2,000, like it has under George Bush. (APPLAUSE)

We measure the strength of our economy not by the number of billionaires we have or the profits of the Fortune 500, but by whether someone with a good idea can take a risk and start a new business, or whether the waitress who lives on tips can take a day off and look after a sick kid without losing her job, an economy that honors the dignity of work.

The fundamentals we use to measure economic strength are whether we are living up to that fundamental promise that has made this country great, a promise that is the only reason I am standing here tonight.

Because, in the faces of those young veterans who come back from Iraq and

Afghanistan, I see my grandfather, who signed up after Pearl Harbor, marched in Patton's army, and was rewarded by a grateful nation with the chance to go to college on the GI Bill.

In the face of that young student, who sleeps just three hours before working the night shift, I think about my mom, who raised my sister and me on her own while she worked and earned her degree, who once turned to food stamps, but was still able to send us to the best schools in the country with the help of student loans and scholarships.

(APPLAUSE)

When I -- when I listen to another worker tell me that his factory has shut down, I remember all those men and women on the South Side of Chicago who I stood by and fought for two decades ago after the local steel plant closed.

And when I hear a woman talk about the difficulties of starting her own business or making her way in the world, I think about my grandmother, who worked her way up from the secretarial pool to middle management, despite years of being passed over for promotions because she was a woman.

She's the one who taught me about hard work. She's the one who put off buying a new car or a new dress for herself so that I could have a better life. She poured everything she had into me. And although she can no longer travel, I know that she's watching tonight and that tonight is her night, as well.

(APPLAUSE)

Now, I don't know what kind of lives John McCain thinks that celebrities lead, but this has been mine.

(APPLAUSE)

These are my heroes; theirs are the stories that shaped my life. And it is on behalf of them that I intend to win this election and keep our promise alive as president of the United States.

(APPLAUSE)

What -- what is that American promise? It's a promise that says each of us has the freedom to make of our own lives what we will, but that we also have obligations to treat each other with dignity and respect.

It's a promise that says the market should reward drive and innovation and generate growth, but that businesses should live up to their responsibilities to create American jobs, to look out for American workers, and play by the rules of the road.

Ours -- ours is a promise that says government cannot solve all our problems, but what it should do is that which we cannot do for ourselves: protect us from harm and provide every child a decent education; keep our water clean and our toys safe; invest in new schools, and new roads, and science, and technology.

Our government should work for us, not against us. It should help us, not hurt us. It should ensure opportunity not just for those with the most money and influence, but for every American who's willing to work.

That's the promise of America, the idea that we are responsible for ourselves, but that we also rise or fall as one nation, the fundamental belief that I am my brother's keeper, I am my sister's keeper.

That's the promise we need to keep. That's the change we need right now.

(APPLAUSE)

So -- so let me -- let me spell out exactly what that change would mean if I am president.

(APPLAUSE)

Change means a tax code that doesn't reward the lobbyists who wrote it, but the American workers and small businesses who deserve it.

(APPLAUSE)

You know, unlike John McCain, I will stop giving tax breaks to companies that ship jobs overseas, and I will start giving them to companies that create good jobs right here in America.

(APPLAUSE)

I'll eliminate capital gains taxes for the small businesses and start-ups that will create the high-wage, high-tech jobs of tomorrow.

(APPLAUSE)

I will -- listen now -- I will cut taxes -- cut taxes -- for 95 percent of all working families, because, in an economy like this, the last thing we should do is raise taxes on the middle class.

(APPLAUSE)

And for the sake of our economy, our security, and the future of our planet, I will set a clear goal as president: In 10 years, we will finally end our dependence on oil from the Middle East.

(APPLAUSE)

We will do this. Washington -- Washington has been talking about our oil addiction for the last 30 years. And, by the way, John McCain has been there for 26 of them.

(LAUGHTER)

And in that time, he has said no to higher fuel-efficiency standards for cars, no to investments in renewable energy, no to renewable fuels. And today, we import triple the amount of oil than we had on the day that Senator McCain took office.

Now is the time to end this addiction and to understand that drilling is a stop-gap measure, not a long-term solution, not even close.

(APPLAUSE)

As president, as president, I will tap our natural gas reserves, invest in clean coal technology, and find ways to safely harness nuclear power. I'll help our auto companies re-tool, so that the fuel-efficient cars of the future are built right here in America.

(APPLAUSE)

I'll make it easier for the American people to afford these new cars.

OBAMA: And I'll invest \$150 billion over the next decade in affordable, renewable sources of energy -- wind power, and solar power, and the next generation of biofuels -- an investment that will lead to new industries and 5 million new jobs that pay well and can't be outsourced.

(APPLAUSE)

America, now is not the time for small plans. Now is the time to finally meet our moral obligation to provide every child a world-class education, because it will take nothing less to compete in the global economy.

You know, Michelle and I are only here tonight because we were given a chance at an education. And I will not settle for an America where some kids don't have that chance.

(APPLAUSE)

I'll invest in early childhood education. I'll recruit an army of new teachers, and pay them higher salaries, and give them more support. And in exchange, I'll ask for higher standards and more accountability.

And we will keep our promise to every young American: If you commit to serving your community or our country, we will make sure you can afford a college education.

(APPLAUSE)

Now -- now is the time to finally keep the promise of affordable, accessible health care for every single American.

(APPLAUSE)

If you have health care -- if you have health care, my plan will lower your premiums. If you don't, you'll be able to get the same kind of coverage that members of Congress give themselves.

(APPLAUSE)

And -- and as someone who watched my mother argue with insurance companies while she lay in bed dying of cancer, I will make certain those companies stop discriminating against those who are sick and need care the most.

(APPLAUSE)

Now is the time to help families with paid sick days and better family leave, because nobody in America should have to choose between keeping their job and caring for a sick child or an ailing parent.

Now is the time to change our bankruptcy laws, so that your pensions are protected ahead of CEO bonuses, and the time to protect Social Security for future generations.

And now is the time to keep the promise of equal pay for an equal day's work, because I want my daughters to have the exact same opportunities as your sons.

(APPLAUSE)

Now, many of these plans will cost money, which is why I've laid out how I'll pay

for every dime: by closing corporate loopholes and tax havens that don't help America grow.

But I will also go through the federal budget line by line, eliminating programs that no longer work and making the ones we do need work better and cost less, because we cannot meet 21st-century challenges with a 20th-century bureaucracy.

(APPLAUSE)

And, Democrats, Democrats, we must also admit that fulfilling America's promise will require more than just money. It will require a renewed sense of responsibility from each of us to recover what John F. Kennedy called our intellectual and moral strength.

Yes, government must lead on energy independence, but each of us must do our part to make our homes and businesses more efficient.

(APPLAUSE)

Yes, we must provide more ladders to success for young men who fall into lives of crime and despair. But we must also admit that programs alone can't replace parents, that government can't turn off the television and make a child do her homework, that fathers must take more responsibility to provide love and guidance to their children.

Individual responsibility and mutual responsibility, that's the essence of America's promise. And just as we keep our promise to the next generation here at home, so must we keep America's promise abroad.

If John McCain wants to have a debate about who has the temperament and judgment to serve as the next commander-in-chief, that's a debate I'm ready to have.

(APPLAUSE)

For -- for while -- while Senator McCain was turning his sights to Iraq just days after 9/11, I stood up and opposed this war, knowing that it would distract us from the real threats that we face.

When John McCain said we could just muddle through in Afghanistan, I argued for more resources and more troops to finish the fight against the terrorists who actually attacked us on 9/11, and made clear that we must take out Osama bin Laden and his lieutenants if we have them in our sights.

You know, John McCain likes to say that he'll follow bin Laden to the gates of Hell, but he won't even follow him to the cave where he lives.

(APPLAUSE)

And today, today, as my call for a timeframe to remove our troops from Iraq has been echoed by the Iraqi government and even the Bush administration, even after we learned that Iraq has \$79 billion in surplus while we are wallowing in deficit, John McCain stands alone in his stubborn refusal to end a misguided war.

That's not the judgment we need; that won't keep America safe. We need a president who can face the threats of the future, not keep grasping at the ideas of

the past.

(APPLAUSE)

You don't defeat -- you don't defeat a terrorist network that operates in 80 countries by occupying Iraq. You don't protect Israel and deter Iran just by talking tough in Washington. You can't truly stand up for Georgia when you've strained our oldest alliances.

If John McCain wants to follow George Bush with more tough talk and bad strategy, that is his choice, but that is not the change that America needs.

(APPLAUSE)

We are the party of Roosevelt. We are the party of Kennedy. So don't tell me that Democrats won't defend this country. Don't tell me that Democrats won't keep us safe.

The Bush-McCain foreign policy has squandered the legacy that generations of Americans, Democrats and Republicans, have built, and we are here to restore that legacy.

(APPLAUSE)

As commander-in-chief, I will never hesitate to defend this nation, but I will only send our troops into harm's way with a clear mission and a sacred commitment to give them the equipment they need in battle and the care and benefits they deserve when they come home.

(APPLAUSE)

I will end this war in Iraq responsibly and finish the fight against Al Qaida and the Taliban in Afghanistan. I will rebuild our military to meet future conflicts, but I will also renew the tough, direct diplomacy that can prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons and curb Russian aggression.

I will build new partnerships to defeat the threats of the 21st century: terrorism and nuclear proliferation, poverty and genocide, climate change and disease.

And I will restore our moral standing so that America is once again that last, best hope for all who are called to the cause of freedom, who long for lives of peace, and who yearn for a better future.

(APPLAUSE)

These -- these are the policies I will pursue. And in the weeks ahead, I look forward to debating them with John McCain.

But what I will not do is suggest that the senator takes his positions for political purposes, because one of the things that we have to change in our politics is the idea that people cannot disagree without challenging each other's character and each other's patriotism.

(APPLAUSE)

The times are too serious, the stakes are too high for this same partisan playbook. So let us agree that patriotism has no party. I love this country, and so do you, and so does John McCain.

The men and women who serve in our battlefields may be Democrats and

Republicans and independents, but they have fought together, and bled together, and some died together under the same proud flag. They have not served a red America or a blue America; they have served the United States of America.

(APPLAUSE)

So I've got news for you, John McCain: We all put our country first.

(APPLAUSE)

America, our work will not be easy. The challenges we face require tough choices. And Democrats, as well as Republicans, will need to cast off the worn-out ideas and politics of the past, for part of what has been lost these past eight years can't just be measured by lost wages or bigger trade deficits. What has also been lost is our sense of common purpose, and that's what we have to restore.

We may not agree on abortion, but surely we can agree on reducing the number of unwanted pregnancies in this country.

(APPLAUSE)

The -- the reality of gun ownership may be different for hunters in rural Ohio than they are for those plagued by gang violence in Cleveland, but don't tell me we can't uphold the Second Amendment while keeping AK-47s out of the hands of criminals.

(APPLAUSE)

I know there are differences on same-sex marriage, but surely we can agree that our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters deserve to visit the person they love in a hospital and to live lives free of discrimination.

(APPLAUSE)

You know, passions may fly on immigration, but I don't know anyone who benefits when a mother is separated from her infant child or an employer undercuts American wages by hiring illegal workers.

But this, too, is part of America's promise, the promise of a democracy where we can find the strength and grace to bridge divides and unite in common effort.

I know there are those who dismiss such beliefs as happy talk. They claim that our insistence on something larger, something firmer, and more honest in our public life is just a Trojan horse for higher taxes and the abandonment of traditional values.

And that's to be expected, because if you don't have any fresh ideas, then you use stale tactics to scare voters.

(APPLAUSE)

If you don't have a record to run on, then you paint your opponent as someone people should run from. You make a big election about small things.

And you know what? It's worked before, because it feeds into the cynicism we all have about government. When Washington doesn't work, all its promises seem empty. If your hopes have been dashed again and again, then it's best to stop hoping and settle for what you already know.

I get it. I realize that I am not the likeliest candidate for this office. I don't fit the typical pedigree, and I haven't spent my career in the halls of Washington.

But I stand before you tonight because all across America something is stirring. What the naysayers don't understand is that this election has never been about me; it's about you.

(APPLAUSE)

It's about you.

(APPLAUSE)

For 18 long months, you have stood up, one by one, and said, "Enough," to the politics of the past. You understand that, in this election, the greatest risk we can take is to try the same, old politics with the same, old players and expect a different result.

You have shown what history teaches us, that at defining moments like this one, the change we need doesn't come from Washington. Change comes to Washington.

(APPLAUSE)

Change happens -- change happens because the American people demand it, because they rise up and insist on new ideas and new leadership, a new politics for a new time.

America, this is one of those moments.

I believe that, as hard as it will be, the change we need is coming, because I've seen it, because I've lived it.

Because I've seen it in Illinois, when we provided health care to more children and moved more families from welfare to work.

I've seen it in Washington, where we worked across party lines to open up government and hold lobbyists more accountable, to give better care for our veterans, and keep nuclear weapons out of the hands of terrorists.

And I've seen it in this campaign, in the young people who voted for the first time and the young at heart, those who got involved again after a very long time; in the Republicans who never thought they'd pick up a Democratic ballot, but did.

(APPLAUSE)

I've seen it -- I've seen it in the workers who would rather cut their hours back a day, even though they can't afford it, than see their friends lose their jobs; in the soldiers who re-enlist after losing a limb; in the good neighbors who take a stranger in when a hurricane strikes and the floodwaters rise.

You know, this country of ours has more wealth than any nation, but that's not what makes us rich. We have the most powerful military on Earth, but that's not what makes us strong. Our universities and our culture are the envy of the world, but that's not what keeps the world coming to our shores.

Instead, it is that American spirit, that American promise, that pushes us forward even when the path is uncertain; that binds us together in spite of our

differences; that makes us fix our eye not on what is seen, but what is unseen, that better place around the bend.

That promise is our greatest inheritance. It's a promise I make to my daughters when I tuck them in at night and a promise that you make to yours, a promise that has led immigrants to cross oceans and pioneers to travel west, a promise that led workers to picket lines and women to reach for the ballot.

(APPLAUSE) And it is that promise that, 45 years ago today, brought Americans from every corner of this land to stand together on a Mall in Washington, before Lincoln's Memorial, and hear a young preacher from Georgia speak of his dream.

(APPLAUSE)

The men and women who gathered there could've heard many things. They could've heard words of anger and discord. They could've been told to succumb to the fear and frustrations of so many dreams deferred.

But what the people heard instead -- people of every creed and color, from every walk of life -- is that, in America, our destiny is inextricably linked, that together our dreams can be one.

"We cannot walk alone," the preacher cried. "And as we walk, we must make the pledge that we shall always march ahead. We cannot turn back."

America, we cannot turn back...

(APPLAUSE)

... not with so much work to be done; not with so many children to educate, and so many veterans to care for; not with an economy to fix, and cities to rebuild, and farms to save; not with so many families to protect and so many lives to mend.

America, we cannot turn back. We cannot walk alone.

At this moment, in this election, we must pledge once more to march into the future. Let us keep that promise, that American promise, and in the words of scripture hold firmly, without wavering, to the hope that we confess.

Thank you. God bless you. And God bless the United States of America.

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