



"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 of Senator Barack Obama: Forging a New Future for America

Des Moines, IA | May 20, 2008

You know, there is a spirit that brought us here tonight – a spirit of change, and hope, and possibility. And there are few people in this country who embody that spirit more than our friend and our champion, Senator Edward Kennedy. He has spent his life in service to this country not for the sake of glory or recognition, but because he cares – deeply, in his gut – about the causes of justice, and equality, and opportunity. So many of us here have benefited in some way or another because of the battles he's waged, and some of us are here because of them.

We know he is not well right now, but we also know that he's a fighter. And as he takes on this fight, let us lift his spirits tonight by letting Ted Kennedy know that we are thinking of him, that we are praying for him, that we are standing with him, and that we will be fighting with him every step of the way.

Fifteen months ago, in the depths of winter, it was in this great state where we took the first steps of an unlikely journey to change America.

The skeptics predicted we wouldn't get very far. The cynics dismissed us as a lot of hype and a little too much hope. And by the fall, the pundits in Washington had all but counted us out.

But the people of Iowa had a different idea.

From the very beginning, you knew that this journey wasn't about me or any of the other candidates in this race. It's about whether this country – at this defining moment – will continue down the same road that has failed us for so long, or whether we will seize this opportunity to take a different path – to forge a different future for the country we love.

That is the question that sent thousands upon thousands of you to high school gyms and VFW halls; to backyards and front porches; to steak fries and JJ dinners, where you spoke about what that future would look like.

You spoke of an America where working families don't have to file for bankruptcy just because a child gets sick; where they don't lose their home because some predatory lender tricks them out of it; where they don't have to sit on the sidelines of the global economy because they couldn't afford the cost of a college education. You spoke of an America where our parents and grandparents don't spend their retirement in poverty because some CEO dumped their pension – an America where we don't just value wealth, but the work and the workers who create it.

You spoke of an America where we don't send our sons and daughters on tour after tour of duty to a war that has cost us thousands of lives and billions of dollars but has not made us safer. You spoke of an America where we match the might of our military with the strength of our diplomacy and the power of our ideals – a nation that is still the beacon of all that is good and all that is possible for humankind.

You spoke of a future where the politics we have in Washington finally reflect the values we hold as Americans – the values you live by here in Iowa: common sense and honesty; generosity and compassion; decency and responsibility. These values don't belong to one class or one region or even one party – they are the values that bind us together as one country.

That is the country I saw in the faces of crowds that would stretch far into the horizon of our heartland – faces of every color, of every age – faces I see here tonight. You are Democrats who are tired of being

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divided; Republicans who no longer recognize the party that runs Washington; Independents who are hungry for change. You are the young people who've been inspired for the very first time and those not-so-young folks who've been inspired for the first time in a long time. You are veterans and church-goers; sportsmen and students; farmers and factory workers; teachers and business owners who have varied backgrounds and different traditions, but the same simple dreams for your children's future.

Many of you have been disappointed by politics and politicians more times than you can count. You've seen promises broken and good ideas drown in the sea of influence, and point-scoring, and petty bickering that has consumed Washington. And you've been told over and over and over again to be cynical, and doubtful, and even fearful about the possibility that things can ever be different.

And yet, in spite of all the doubt and disappointment – or perhaps because of it – you came out on a cold winter's night in numbers that this country has never seen, and you stood for change. And because you did, a few more stood up. And then a few thousand stood up. And then a few million stood up. And tonight, in the fullness of spring, with the help of those who stood up from Portland to Louisville, we have returned to Iowa with a majority of delegates elected by the American people, and you have put us within reach of the Democratic nomination for President of the United States.

The road here has been long, and that is partly because we've traveled it with one of the most formidable candidates to ever run for this office. In her thirty-five years of public service, Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton has never given up on her fight for the American people, and tonight I congratulate her on her victory in Kentucky. We have had our disagreements during this campaign, but we all admire her courage, her commitment and her perseverance. No matter how this primary ends, Senator Clinton has shattered myths and broken barriers and changed the America in which my daughters and yours will come of age.

Some may see the millions upon millions of votes cast for each of us as evidence that our party is divided, but I see it as proof that we have never been more energized and united in our desire to take this country in a new direction. More than anything, we need this unity and this energy in the months to come, because while our primary has been long and hard-fought, the hardest and most important part of our journey still lies ahead.

We face an opponent, John McCain, who arrived in Washington nearly three decades ago as a Vietnam War hero, and earned an admirable reputation for straight talk and occasional independence from his party.

But this year's Republican primary was a contest to see which candidate could out-Bush the other, and that is the contest John McCain won. The Bush tax cuts for the wealthiest 2% of Americans that once bothered Senator McCain's conscience are now his only economic policy. The Bush health care plan that only helps those who are already healthy and wealthy is now John McCain's answer to the 47 million Americans without insurance and the millions more who can't pay their medical bills. The Bush Iraq policy that asks everything of our troops and nothing of Iraqi politicians is John McCain's policy too, and so is the fear of tough and aggressive diplomacy that has left this country more isolated and less secure than at any time in recent history. The lobbyists who ruled George Bush's Washington are now running John McCain's campaign, and they actually had the nerve to say that the American people won't care about this. Talk about out of touch!

I will leave it up to Senator McCain to explain to the American people whether his policies and positions represent long-held convictions or Washington calculations, but the one thing they don't represent is change.

Change is a tax code that rewards work instead of wealth by cutting taxes for middle-class families, and senior citizens, and struggling homeowners; a tax code that rewards businesses that create good jobs here in America instead of the corporations that ship them overseas. That's what change is.

Change is a health care plan that guarantees insurance to every American who wants; that brings down premiums for every family who needs it; that stops insurance companies from discriminating and denying coverage to those who need it most.

Change is an energy policy that doesn't rely on buddying up to the Saudi Royal Family and then begging them for oil – an energy policy that puts a price on pollution and makes the oil companies invest their record profits in clean, renewable sources of energy that will create five million new jobs and leave our children a safer planet. That's what change is.

Change is giving every child a world-class education by recruiting an army of new teachers with better pay and more support; by promising four years of tuition to any American willing to serve their community and their country; by realizing that the best education starts with parents who turn off the TV, and take away the video games, and read to our children once in awhile.

Change is ending a war that we never should've started and finishing a war against Al Qaeda in Afghanistan that we never should've ignored. Change is facing the threats of the twenty-first century not with bluster, or fear-mongering, or tough talk, but with tough diplomacy, and strong alliances, and



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confidence in the ideals that have made this nation the last, best hope of Earth. That is the legacy of Roosevelt, and Truman, and Kennedy.

That is what change is.

That is the choice in this election.

The same question that first led us to Iowa fifteen months ago is the one that has brought us back here tonight; it is the one we will debate from Washington to Florida, from New Hampshire to New Mexico – the question of whether this country, at this moment, will keep doing what we've been doing for four more years, or whether we will take that different path. It is more of the same versus change. It is the past versus the future. It has been asked and answered by generations before us, and now it is our turn to choose.

We will face our share of difficult and uncertain days in the journey ahead. The other side knows they have embraced yesterday's policies and so they will also embrace yesterday's tactics to try and change the subject. They will play on our fears and our doubts and our divisions to distract us from what matters to you and your future.

Well they can take the low road if they want, but it will not lead this country to a better place. And it will not work in this election. It won't work because you won't let it. Not this time. Not this year.

My faith in the decency, and honesty, and generosity of the American people is not based on false hope or blind optimism, but on what I have lived and what I have seen in this very state.

For in the darkest days of this campaign, when we were dismissed by all the polls and all the pundits, I would come to Iowa and see that there was something happening here that the world did not yet understand.

It's what led high school and college students to give up their vacations to stuff envelopes and knock on doors, and why grandparents have spent all their afternoons making phone calls to perfect strangers. It's what led men and women who can barely pay the bills to dig into their savings and write five dollar checks and ten dollar checks, and why young people from all over this country have left their friends and their families for a job that offers little pay and less sleep.

Change is coming to America.

It's the spirit that sent the first patriots to Lexington and Concord and led the defenders of freedom to light the way north on an Underground Railroad. It's what sent my grandfather's generation to beachheads in Normandy, and women to Seneca Falls, and workers to picket lines and factory fences. It's what led all those young men and women who saw beatings and billy clubs on their television screens to leave their homes, and get on buses, and march through the streets of Selma and Montgomery – black and white, rich and poor.

Change is coming to America.

It's what I saw all those years ago on the streets of Chicago when I worked as an organizer – that in the face of joblessness, and hopelessness, and despair, a better day is still possible if there are people willing to work for it, and fight for it, and believe in it. That's what I've seen here in Iowa. That's what is happening in America – our journey may be long, our work will be great, but we know in our hearts we are ready for change, we are ready to come together, and in this election, we are ready to believe again. Thank you Iowa, and may God Bless America.

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