Barack Obama
Speeches

Canterbury Classics
An imprint of Printers Row Publishing Group
10350 Barnes Canyon Road, Suite 100, San Diego, CA 92121
www.canterburyclassicsbooks.com • mail@canterburyclassicsbooks.com

Correspondence concerning the content of this book should be sent to Canterbury Classics, Editorial Department, at the above address.

Publisher: Peter Norton • Associate Publisher: Ana Parker
Senior Developmental Editor: April Graham Farr
Editor: Traci Douglas
Production Team: Jonathan Lopes, Rusty von Dyl

Cover design: James Dean Johns and Rusty von Dyl

Photo used in front cover design: AP Photo/Mannie Garcia
Photo for endpapers: Brooks Kraft/Corbis Historical via Getty Images

eBook ISBN: 978-1-64517-423-3
eBook Edition: October 2020

Editor's Note: The pieces in this book have been published in their original form to preserve

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PREFACE

The rise of Barack Obama on America's political stage was nothing less than meteoric. It began in the 2004 United States Senate Democratic primaries when he received more than 52 percent of the vote, far ahead of his closest Democratic rival. If that wasn't impressive enough, in November that year, Obama won the U.S. Senate seat with an overwhelming 70 percent of the vote, the largest victory margin in Illinois history. Only three years later, he became the first African American to secure from a major political party the nomination for president. He won the nomination by a narrower margin, but was chosen over a formidable opponent—Senator Hillary Clinton. Like the Founding Fathers he often references, his place in the history books was assured in 2008 when he became the first African American to be elected president of the United States.

Through the years, Obama's vision for "a more perfect union" was masterfully conveyed to the public through the strength of his writing and oration. Although he had speechwriters on his staff, few Americans may realize how much time the President himself dedicated to getting the words just right. In media interviews, Jon Favreau, former Director of Speechwriting, reflects on late nights spent with the President discussing ideas and making edits before a big speech, and last-minute adjustments in the motorcade. Campaign posters focused on optimism rose up from independent artist Shepard Fairey and were approved by the Obama campaign, forever linking Obama's name to the words "hope" and "change." Obama's oratory compelled all Americans to embody those words

in their desire for the future, whether for economic security, social equality, universal health care, or another poetic cause. His messages of unity, compassion, patriotism, and the need for action from a more positive perspective consistently reached out and asked all citizens and civil servants to examine who they were as individuals, then make decisions that reflected the best version of our nation as a whole.

You may view the volume you hold in your hands as a collection of speeches, but it is also a book of stories—tales of individual American citizens, as well as the nation as a whole—covering more than a decade of our history. Obama often kept his audiences engaged by relating the points of his speeches to stories of everyday Americans, past and present, and their struggles to reach higher ideals. It is said that his mastery of human anecdotes will prove an important part of his legacy, as engaging stories tend to be remembered and retold, changing minds and influencing opinions—something politicians with lesser speaking skills rarely accomplish long-term. Who doesn't relish a layered tale of heroism relating a journey with highs and lows, surprises, and a happy ending? The way Obama tells it, every U.S. citizen is a hero on a journey.

Right from the beginning, in his 2004 acceptance speech for the U.S. Senate (page 1), Obama relates how he met Margaret Lewis, an African American woman, who was 104 years old and very proud to have voted for him—indeed, very proud to have the *right* to vote for him. In his speech, he reflects on the incredible changes she saw over her lifetime; he lays out the changes he hopes yet to make for a better future, and invites the audience on a journey to reach that destination. He states that he stands before them because the nation "believed in the possibility of a government that was just as decent as the American people are." In his 2009 address to a joint session of Congress (page 29), Obama explains how he's found hope in unlikely places, such as Miami bank president Leonard Abess, who took care of his employees

financially during hard times; the town of Greensburg, Kansas, which was destroyed by a tornado and was rebuilding as an environmentally greener city; and a little girl in South Carolina who wrote to Congress asking for help to fix leaks in her school's roof. When he addressed the public in 2012 after the favorable Supreme Court ruling on the constitutionality of the Affordable Care Act (page 311), he referenced a framed letter on his office wall from Natoma Canfield, a cancer survivor who had to surrender her health insurance because her rates became unaffordable. And his address on the fiftieth anniversary of the Selma March (page 550) related the story of John Lewis, who led peaceful protestors across a bridge to a more just and inclusive America. Each one of Obama's speeches, and the stories of heroic citizens contained therein, have inspired enormous faith in our country, and in our fellow countrymen.

One of the five youngest presidents to grace the White House, Obama's amiable nature and sense of humor shone in many of his addresses, especially those given to university crowds. Not one to pass up a "dad joke" or a good pun, he and speechwriter David Litt ensured each dissertation was entertaining as well as informative. Events such as Obama's address on Father's Day (page 176), his White House visit with the 2015 NBA Champion Golden State Warriors (page 609), and his final annual Thanksgiving Turkey Pardon (page 657) are full of one-liners and pauses for laughter, but even during more serious speeches, such as his acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize Award (page 105), his first State of the Union address (page 115), or some of the memorials at which he spoke, Obama knew just how to relieve the tension by inspiring smiles.

Barack Obama was a unique president, not just for being the first African American to hold the highest political office in our nation, nor for his bipartisan peacemaking abilities, nor even for his masterful storytelling skills, but for his unwavering vision of an optimistic America where every citizen enjoys the freedoms set

forth in our Constitution. In his 2014 speech on preparing for college (page 508), he states:

> "There's no limit to what you can do. That's what America is all about."

The speeches contained in this volume are a tribute to his view of *E pluribus unum*—out of many, one. They are reminders that in each of us there is a neighbor, a friend, a family member, a good Samaritan—we can each make a difference in the lives of others simply through our hope and our choices. They are reminders of Obama's belief in our ability to bring about change—that together, we can do great things.

INTRODUCTION

The presidency of Barack Obama was simultaneously one of the most hopeful and one of the most divisive periods in recent American history. While successfully shoring up the nation's economy through a major recession, weathering storms in foreign policy, and attempting widespread structural reforms—most notably in healthcare—Obama led a house divided against itself. America from 2008 to 2016 was a nation wrestling with questions of national identity; a changing economy; a dragging war in the Middle East; and a public discourse increasingly characterized by demagoguery, tribalism, and snap reactions on social media over reason, universalism, and careful discussion. These led to his spending much of his term of office fighting an obstructionist Congress that sought to thwart his policy initiatives. Moreover, the election of the first African American president proved not to be the hoped-for balm to heal the race wound inflicted on the United States at its founding; though the injury seemed to have superficially healed over, a fever still raged inside, and the systemic injustice of the American system that infected the public has resisted all healing attempts.

Against a climate of increasing radicalization on both the right and the left, Obama was yet a moderate. He maintained a fundamental belief in American institutions and called for change through the political process. His message was always one of hope, tolerance, cooperation, calm optimism, and logical solutions. Ironically, these policies fueled a disconnect with the more liberal wing of his own party as well as a heartland frustrated with

resentful out-of-touch meritocratic elites, who were distrustful of expertise, suspicious of the "deep state" and centralized government, and terrified of losing what little privilege they possessed. During Obama's terms of office, the disconnect was made manifest by a Congress that sought to wind the clock back on the progress accomplished in the administration's first two years. Thus, the hope promised by Obama's far-reaching vision was dimmed by the reality of factional politics. To his detractors on the Left, Obama seemed a sort of Hamlet—well educated, sympathetic, but marred by a fatal indecision when faced with villainy. Those on the Right, conversely, read him as Richard III—a sort of misbegotten monster, given to devious scheming, and a foe of liberty.

While the passage of a mere four years did not allow the fruits of Obama's presidency to fully ripen in a way that affords us to truly evaluate his legacy, the speeches he gave while a candidate and as Chief Executive are valuable primary sources for examining both the hopes and disappointments of Obama's two terms of office, as well as a lens for viewing a pivotal moment in the history of the American republic. While we cannot yet say what Obama's final place in history might be, we can look and see with what ink the page will be written.

Barack Obama's Early Life

Barack Hussein Obama II was born in Honolulu on August 4, 1961, less than two years after Hawaii's statehood. His mother, Kansas-born Ann Dunham, was white; his father, Barack Obama, Sr., was from Kenya. They married six months before he was born. These facts would later take on outsized significance because of the so-called birther conspiracy theory, which denied that Obama was a U.S. citizen—a visceral rejection of the idea that he could be a "real" American. While the birther slander is not worthy of serious

consideration, Obama's interracial heritage, and his unquestioned acceptance by Ann Dunham's parents, were indeed unusual for mid-twentieth-century America—Loving vs. Virginia, in which the Supreme Court declared any ban on interracial marriage unconstitutional, would not be decided until 1967. However, Hawaii had a long history as a racial, ethnic, and cultural melting pot, and Obama's heritage was not seen as being too unusual in his home state.

Obama's mother and father divorced in 1964. The elder Obama, who went on to earn a master's degree in economics from Harvard and became a finance minister in Kenya, would visit his son in Hawaii only once before he was killed in an automobile accident in 1982. In fact, the younger Obama spent his childhood from 1967–71 in Indonesia after his mother remarried to Lolo Soetoro, whom she met when the latter was an international exchange student. Obama returned to Honolulu in 1971 to live with his grandparents and attend a private high school; his mother would divorce his stepfather in 1982 and go on to earn a PhD in anthropology in 1992 before dying of uterine and ovarian cancer in 1995. As Ta-Nehisi Coates—one of Obama's foremost African American chroniclers and critics—has observed, the international upbringing of the first black president was far from typical; he was raised by a highly educated, multicultural family in an unusually tolerant place for the time, and was able to attend excellent schools. He chose to become, rather than having been born, a member of the African American community.

He began college at Occidental College in Los Angeles in 1979 before transferring as a junior to Columbia University. After graduating with degrees in political science and English literature, he worked in Chicago for a number of years as a community organizer before entering Harvard Law School in 1988.

Obama's early post-college career experience was a crash course in African American politics and culture, and the South Side of Chicago was an important center of these things in the 1980s.

Harold Washington, the city's first black mayor, two-time presidential candidate Jesse Jackson, and Carol Moseley Braun, the first female African American senator, all came from the area. It was also in the South Side that Obama became immersed in that most important of African American institutions—the church—and began to describe himself as a Christian.

But Harvard shaped Obama's later career just as much as did the South Side of Chicago. He not only made valuable connections in that most prestigious of law schools, but also became the first black editor of the *Harvard Law Review*, which earned him national attention and a book contract for his memoir *Dreams from My Father*. It was also during law school, while working at a law firm as a summer associate, that he met Michelle Robinson, whom he would marry in 1992; their daughters, Malia and Natasha (Sasha), were born in 1998 and 2001. The future Michelle Obama came from the South Side, where her family had been active in local Democratic politics, and she was herself a brilliant Princeton- and Harvard-trained lawyer. Following his graduation from Harvard, Obama taught at the University of Chicago Law School; became a partner at Davis, Miner, Barnhill & Galland, a law firm specializing in civil rights and community cases; and was active in a number of charities and nonprofits.

Political Career Before the Presidency

Obama's rise to the national stage and presidency was meteoric. He won election to the Illinois Senate in 1996, representing the South Side, and was reelected in 1998 and 2002. It was 2004, however, that was Obama's annus mirablis: First, he announced his candidacy for a vacant Senate seat; second, his keynote address in support of presidential nominee John Kerry at the July 2004 Democratic National Convention brought him to national prominence. The themes in this speech would presage his later

message of unity and conciliation:

> ... [T]here is not a liberal America and a conservative America—there is the United States of America. There is not a black America and a white America and Latino America and Asian America—there's the United States of America.
>
> The pundits like to slice-and-dice our country into Red States and Blue States; Red States for Republicans, Blue States for Democrats. But I've got news for them, too: We worship an awesome God in the Blue States, and we don't like federal agents poking around in our libraries in the Red States. We coach Little League in the Blue States, and, yes, we've got some gay friends in the Red States. There are patriots who opposed the war in Iraq and there are patriots who supported the war in Iraq.

Interestingly, Obama's iconic passage about imagined contrasts almost never happened: Political consultant David Axelrod later recalled his original phrasing was "something like, 'we're all Americans, standing up together for the red, white, and blue.'" However, the line was deemed too similar to a phrase in Kerry's speech, and Obama was forced to change it—though he would later deploy similar verbiage in his second presidential election victory speech, his Sixth State of the Union address, and his 2016 Building Better Politics speech.

Though Kerry's presidential challenge to George W. Bush would ultimately be unsuccessful, the then-candidate for junior senator from Illinois had garnered the national spotlight. Obama easily won the Senate seat on his strong civil-rights record, his opposition to the war in Iraq, and because his initial Republican opponent, businessman Jack Ryan, was forced to withdraw after a scandal. He would not complete his term of office, however; instead, he announced his run for the presidency on February 10,

2007. From an initial wide pool, the campaign quickly narrowed to a contest between Obama and Hillary Clinton. Obama's organization consistently outmaneuvered Clinton's and drummed up massive grassroots support, leading to her conceding the candidacy on June 7, 2008. In the November election, Obama and his running mate, Joe Biden, defeated Senator John McCain and Republican vice-presidential nominee Sarah Palin by a wide margin of 365–173 electoral votes and 52.9 percent of the popular vote versus 45.7 percent. (Independents won the remainder.) A mere 12 years had passed between Obama first winning a state office in Illinois at the age of 35 and his being sworn in as President at the age of 47—the fourth-youngest chief executive in the nation's history.

First Two Years in Office

Obama inherited a number of challenges from his predecessor, George W. Bush. The nation was gripped by a grueling recession. American troops were fighting counterinsurgencies in both Iraq and Afghanistan, while North Korea and Iran continued to seek nuclear capabilities. Domestically, there was racial unrest and controversy over gun ownership in the wake of several high-profile mass shootings. Most of all, Obama sought to end several Bush-era policies, such as the extralegal detention and "enhanced interrogation" of captured enemy combatants—torture—which was decried as human-rights abuses.

Obama's most idealistic plans were frustrated by the realities of the political landscape. While his first two years were marked by Democratic majorities in both the House and Senate and saw the rapid passage of groundbreaking legislation, Obama's party only had control of both houses of Congress for the 111th Congress, which ended on January 3, 2011. The Republican Party seized control of the Senate in the 2010 midterm elections for the 112th

and 113th Congresses (until January 3, 2015); thereafter, they held majorities in both the House and the Senate. The divided or hostile Congress thwarted many of Obama's more ambitious goals.

The 2008–2009 Recession

The economy had already begun faltering in December of 2007, thanks in part to Bush-era policies of deregulation, which in turn led to a bank run as millions of Americans defaulted on the mortgages that had allowed them to buy homes they could not afford in an overinflated housing market. Obama oversaw the passage of a stimulus package, the $787 billion American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, as well as bills that purchased depreciated assets from banks, bailed out American automakers, and tightly regulated financial markets. However, critics charged that he had rescued Wall Street while neglecting Main Street. Nine million families would eventually lose their homes. Moreover, Obama's response, relying as it did on Ivy League–educated experts and working mostly behind the scenes on the macroeconomic level, was seen in some quarters as evidence of his being an out-of-touch technocrat. The effects would be felt via the Tea Party insurgency of the 2010 midterm elections.

Indeed, despite the fact that Obama had staunched the hemorrhage, the slow bleed of America's lifeblood continued. "The top 1 percent got nearly two-thirds of the income growth in eight years even as child poverty, especially black child poverty, remained astronomical," the leftist Princeton professor Cornel West later charged in an evaluation of Obama's presidency. "Labor insurgencies in Wisconsin, Seattle and Chicago...were passed over in silence." Obama was not, however, silent on these issues: In a December 4, 2013, speech at the Center for American Progress, he noted:

> ...[S]tarting in the late '70s, this social compact began to unravel. Technology made it easier for companies to do more with less, eliminating certain job occupations.... As a trickle-down ideology became more prominent, taxes were slashed for the wealthiest, while investments in things that make us all richer, like schools and infrastructure, were allowed to wither...the result is an economy that's become profoundly unequal, and families that are more insecure.... The combined trends of increased inequality and decreasing mobility pose a fundamental threat to the American Dream.

However, many of Obama's more forward-thinking economic initiatives were doomed to defeat or modification in the Senate. The issue of income inequality remains, as Obama said in that speech, a "defining challenge of our time," and one that arguably contributed to the nation's reactionary swing to the right in the 2016 election.

Women's and LGBTQ Rights

Obama was progressive on both gender and LGBTQ issues. Among other actions early in his presidency, he helped end statutes of limitation on equal-pay lawsuits, signed the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act, repealed the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" requirement for US service members, endorsed same-sex marriage, and ended restrictions on federal funding to abortion providers. Most significantly, he nominated two women, Elena Kagan and Sonia Sotomayor, to serve on the Supreme Court, the latter of whom was also the first justice of Hispanic descent. These two justices were key to the 2015 *Obergefell vs. Hodges* ruling, in which the Supreme Court upheld marriage equality by a 5–4 vote. Obama hailed the decision as "an extraordinary

achievement" and cited his administration's actions—refusing to back the Defense of Marriage Act, ending "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," extending benefits to same-sex spouses of federal employees, and expanding hospital visitation rights—as steps down that road.

Healthcare Reform

The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, sometimes called the ACA ("Affordable Care Act") or Obamacare ("because I care," the President quipped) is the Obama Administration's signature piece of legislation. Obama chose a hands-off approach to its drafting: each of the chambers of Congress would pass their own versions of the legislation; these would then be merged in a classic piece of political deal-brokering that would take into account the advice of physicians, health insurers, and consumers. The 2010 special election victory of Scott Brown in Massachusetts made the process messy and complicated, as the Democrats lost the 60-seat Senate supermajority that would have allowed a smooth reconciliation of the House and Senate bills.

The Affordable Care Act was ultimately signed into law on March 23, 2010, without receiving a single Republican vote in either chamber. While providing protection for preexisting conditions, expanding Medicaid, establishing public options, and providing subsidies, among other reforms, it did not fundamentally change the American public-private model and fell far short of the single-payer or nationalized healthcare system desired by many liberals. Although the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the Act in 2012 with *National Federation of Independent Business v. Sebelius*, it limited some aspects of the Medicaid expansion. Opponents quickly launched legal challenges, many of which threatened to undo the ACA.

The ACA was also the last significant piece of social policy legislation Obama managed to get enacted. Faced with an

uncooperative Congress following the 2010 midterm elections, he spent much of his remaining six years in office battling to maintain the gains he had established. Still, Obama continued to inspire the American Left by voicing his ideals.

Iraq and the War on Terror

One area where Obama's necessary actions fell short of his expressed ideals was in Middle East policy. While he had promised on the campaign trail to end the unpopular and unproductive war in Iraq and to close the prison camp in Guantanamo Bay, he was stymied on both accounts. The United States was committed in the Middle East for better or worse, and Congress refused to appropriate the funds needed to close Guantanamo Bay.

Moreover, it was impossible to disentangle the US from the Iraq war, especially as the terrorist group ISIS presented a new threat in the region. In late 2011, in keeping with a 2008 agreement made by President Bush, only 150 American soldiers remained in Iraq to guard the US embassy in Baghdad. By the end of the Obama presidency, there were more than 5,200, as well as an additional 500 in Syria. Meanwhile, in Afghanistan the number of soldiers increased to 100,000 in 2010, with 8,400 remaining at the end of his presidency.

Obama also oversaw and expanded a highly controversial drone-strike program, begun under his predecessor but only publicly acknowledged under his administration, that sought to assassinate terrorist leaders behind enemy lines in civilian areas. The culmination of this clandestine war may be seen as the May 2, 2011, killing of Osama bin Laden, the terrorist leader who, a decade earlier, had claimed ultimate responsibility for the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon. However, Obama's "Disposition Matrix"—enemies of the United States targeted for capture or death—was intended to become a

permanent part of US policy. He also extended the controversial USA PATRIOT Act and presided over a surveillance state increasingly obsessed with secrecy. In 2013, he defended the data-gathering undertaken by the National Security Agency and revealed by whistleblower Edward Snowden as "a circumscribed, narrow system directed at us being able to protect our people." On the other hand, these clandestine programs may be defended as the lowest-cost, lowest-risk, lowest-commitment means of maintaining necessary security in a dangerous world—and one without the dangerous optics of American troops occupying Muslim lands.

Many of these tensions are mirrored in Obama's acceptance speech for the 2009 Nobel Peace Prize. In spite of the fact that some people saw the award as unmerited or ironic, Obama had a deep and genuine commitment to international peace, cooperation, and nuclear nonproliferation. In his acceptance speech, Obama drew upon the long tradition of the "just war" and acknowledged the paradoxes of the situation, saying that "perhaps the most profound issue surrounding my receipt of this prize is the fact that I am the Commander-in-Chief of the military of a nation in the midst of two wars." But if fighting insurgency abroad in a morally defensible manner was challenging, it was nothing compared to what Obama would shortly face domestically.

2010–2016: The Republican Insurgency

The birther conspiracy theory that first surfaced during the 2008 election, while a calumny of the worst type, may nonetheless have some revealing poetic truth to it: To large swaths of the country, Obama was an elitist, cosmopolitan alien to be opposed on general principles. But birtherism would always be on the fringe of politics: The "tea party" wing of the Republican Party, which favored a small, austere government as envisioned by Ronald

Reagan, was the real threat. The Tea Party movement had been founded in 2009 as a backlash against what proponents saw as Obama's governmental overreach, especially in the case of the ACA. Its ideas consistently polled high with voters, and its grassroots efforts to "get out the vote" was in part responsible for Republicans gaining six seats in the Senate and 63 seats in the House in the 2010 midterm elections. Republicans were now in charge of the lower house of Congress and had ended the Democratic supermajority in the Senate, making any legislation vulnerable to blockage using the filibuster rules.

The 2012 election similarly proved a Pyrrhic victory for Democrats: While Obama won reelection by defeating his Republican opponent (former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney) and the Democratic Party in fact won the popular vote for the House of Representatives, gerrymandering and reapportionment following the 2010 census meant that the Republicans only consolidated their gains. Interestingly, Romney ran against the ACA—though it was quite similar to a plan he had implemented while governor of Massachusetts.

The significance of these two elections was that much of Obama's political capital and energy in his last six years of office were spent defending his signature piece of legislation. The fight over the ACA culminated in a 2013 government shutdown when Congress proved unable to pass a budget. About 800,000 federal employees were furloughed; 1.3 million had to report to work without pay; and programs affecting women, children, Native Americans, immigrants, and sexual assault prosecutions were negatively affected. After a 16-day standoff, congressional leadership approved an appropriations budget, which Obama promptly signed into law.

Although Tea Party credibility was diminished in the shutdown, Republican obstructionism continued and, if anything, increased following that party's gaining control of the Senate in the 2014 elections. The most notable example of this was the

Senate's refusal to confirm Merrick Garland to the Supreme Court. Obama had nominated Garland in 2016, late in his second term, to replace the deceased Justice Antonin Scalia.

Obstructionism also made itself felt in lack of progress on the environment. The Republican-led Congress refused to pass environmental legislation in spite of Obama's having identified climate change as one of the most urgent issues affecting not only the United States but the whole world. Obama was thus forced to take action through executive orders, such as instructing the EPA to adopt emissions regulations that would force the United States to move away from coal power. Republicans, in turn, criticized these orders as autocratic, though the overall number of orders Obama signed was actually fewer than George W. Bush (276 vs. 291) and not much more than the number in Bill Clinton's presidency (264). Though Obama had run as a uniting force, someone who could transcend the party politics of Washington, the partisan gulf was too large a chasm to bridge.

Education as a key to upward mobility and an internationally competitive nation was an important principle for the Obama administration, and one in which the administration experienced some success even after 2010. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 kept the standardized testing provisions introduced by the Bush-era No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), but gave more control to the states and moved away from the rigorous Common Core. The Education Secretary who implemented ESSA, Dr. John King Jr., who had worked as a high-school history teacher, also sought to loosen NCLB's dogged insistence on English and math at the expense of other disciplines.

Critics on the left criticized the Obama administration's embrace of charter schools. "Obama's education policy unleashed more market forces that closed hundreds of public schools for charter ones," Cornel West charged. On the other hand, Obama regulated the private student-loan market, provided for public-service student-loan forgiveness, tightened regulations on for-

profit colleges, and called for universal pre-K and at least two years of free postsecondary training for all Americans.

Another bright spot in the later Obama years was in foreign affairs. He not only negotiated the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) but also international climate change agreements: the Copenhagen Accords in 2009, a 2014 agreement with China, and the 2016 Paris Agreement. He successfully kept pressure on Iran as well, and in 2015 negotiated a Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in which the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, Germany, and the European Union agreed to ease sanctions if Iran would downgrade its nuclear program. The following year, sanctions against North Korea, which was also seeking a nuclear program, passed Congress with bipartisan support. Donald Trump later withdrew the United States from the TPP, the Paris Agreement, and the Iran nuclear deal.

If climate change, nuclear proliferation, and education were issues on which Obama could and did take action, gun violence was one against which he foundered. More than 24 mass shootings occurred during his presidency. Some of the more high-profile ones included an Army psychiatrist, who happened to be an observant Muslim, killing 13 people at Fort Hood in Texas; the killing of six people and wounding of 15, including Representative Gabrielle Giffords, in Tuscon, Arizona, in 2011; 12 people being killed and 70 wounded in a movie theater in Aurora, Colorado, in 2012; and the Sandy Hook shootings later in 2012, in which 26 people, including 20 children, were killed in an elementary school. There were also acts of political terrorism such as the Dallas police shooting and the Boston Marathon bombing. Obama became personally involved in most of these, meeting with and comforting victims' families. He signed 23 executive orders tightening firearms regulations. However, his calls for the "common sense" gun control he had advocated for his entire career died on the Senate floor due to strong lobbying from the NRA and the unwillingness of Democrats in swing states to alienate gun-rights

advocates. No serious firearms legislation were passed during the Obama administration.

Obama's Legacy on Race

It was unavoidable that the first African American president would become a potent symbol of race—both of the wounds in American life, and for the potential to heal the divide. He anticipated this while still a senator: "I believe deeply that we cannot solve the challenges of our time unless we solve them together, unless we perfect our union by understanding that we may have different stories, but we hold common hopes; that we may not look the same and we may not have come from the same place, but we all want to move in the same direction—toward a better future for our children and our grandchildren," as he expressed in his 2015 Eulogy for Clementa Pinckney.

In his early presidency, writers such as Ta-Nehisi Coates would criticize Obama for not addressing the reality of race in America, for "his embrace of 'personal responsibility' rhetoric when speaking to African Americans." But, in the end, Coates—generally acclaimed as the foremost African American cultural voice of the Obama years—was won over and came to see Obama as "as a skilled politician, a deeply moral human being, and one of the greatest presidents in American history ... the most agile interpreter and navigator of the color line I had ever seen. He had an ability to emote a deep and sincere connection to the hearts of black people, while never doubting the hearts of white people."

This is not to say that Obama's presidency was in some way a magical balm. In 2009, Harvard professor Henry Louis Gates Jr., who is African American, was arrested by Sgt. James Crowley, a white police officer, while Gates was attempting to enter his own home in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Obama made an off-the-cuff remark that the police officer had "acted stupidly," for which he

was roundly criticized by police unions. Obama invited both men to the White House for a "beer summit" in order to talk out their differences in a move that was seen as a model of diplomacy and reconciliation. But the following years brought crises that could not be talked through as easily, including two high-profile killings of young black men: In 2012, Trayvon Martin was shot by a white civilian, George Zimmerman, in Sanford, Florida; in 2014, Michael Brown Jr. was shot by a white police officer, Darren Wilson, in Ferguson, Missouri. Obama spoke out on both of these tragedies, but even he knew, as did his critics in the Black Lives Matter movement, that mere words would not heal the racial divide in American life. He had also learned from the Gates incident, refusing to critique his Justice Department's refusal to indict Wilson. In Coates's words, "Obama's embrace of white innocence was demonstrably necessary as a matter of political survival."

It is generally agreed that Obama was most important as a symbol: that meritocracy could work and that a man who was both black and proud could win the highest office in the land and succeed. And Obama was, above all, against cynicism and defeatism: "We do a disservice to the cause of justice by intimating that bias and discrimination are immutable, that racial division is inherent to America. If you think nothing's changed in the past 50 years .... To deny this progress, this hard-won progress—our progress—would be to rob us of our own agency, our own capacity, our responsibility to do what we can to make America better," as he said on the 50th anniversary of the Selma-Montgomery marches. The arc of the moral universe is long, and as Obama so often quoted Martin Luther King, Jr. (himself referencing the nineteenth-century Transcendentalist Theodore Parker), "but it bends toward justice."

Evaluation

In the end, Obama appears as a centrist and moderate. His progressive words are in many cases in opposition to what he was willing or politically able to accomplish. His tremendous personal warmth, power, and charisma cannot be ignored. Not only was he humble and open—the photo of Obama leaning over five-year-old Jacob Philadelphia so that he could feel that his hair was like his own has become iconic—but he was also very funny. (We have kept the indications of applause and laughter to give something of the impression he made on listeners.) Along with the serious material such as his State of the Union addresses, a few more humorous and personal speeches are included in this volume, such as his Turkey Pardon in 2016 and a Father's Day speech.

Obama's speeches should perhaps be read as a comprehensive road map of one path into America's future. He was at once all-American and an outsider; his legacy is that of a symbol and a herald of a new and diverse nation. We can look forward to Barack Obama as an elder statesman for many years to come with hope that the promise of his presidency will ultimately be fulfilled.

Ken Mondschein, PhD
Northampton, Massachusetts
January 2020

Senatorial Election Night Speech

November 2, 2004

Thank you, Illinois. Let me begin by thanking all of the people who have been involved in this effort. From downstate to upstate, city, suburb, from every community throughout the state. Let me say how grateful I am to all of you for the extraordinary privilege of standing here this evening. Let me thank, because I will forget later on, it is a thankless task, let me thank the best political staff that there has been put together in this state. They are wonderful. You know who you are. You guys have been outstanding. I appreciate all of you. Let me thank my pastor Jeremiah A. Wright Jr. of Trinity United church of Christ. Fellow Trinitarians out there. Let me thank all the elected officials that stood by me through thick and thin. But most of all let me thank my family. I am so grateful to my nephew Avery, my niece Leslie, my mother-in-law Mary, my brother-inlaw Craig Robinson. His wonderful girlfriend, Kelly. My sister Maya, my new niece Suhaila right there, my brother-in-law Conrad. And most of all my two precious daughters Malia Obama and Sasha Obama. And the biggest star in the Obama family until the two girls grow up. The love of my life, Michelle Obama, give it up to Michelle. Give it up!

Before I begin let me also thank the service of the person whose seat I'm going to be replacing. Peter Fitzgerald comes from another party, yet he served ably and with integrity and I'm grateful for his service and we shall applaud the service that he provided to us.

Six hundred fifty-six days ago I announced in a room a little smaller than this—it was a lot smaller—that I was announcing for the United States Senate. At the time, as many of you know, people were respectful but nevertheless skeptical. They knew the work we had done to provide health insurance to children who didn't have it, to help make the tax system more fair, to reform a death penalty system that was broken. But they felt that in a nation as divided as ours there was no possibility that someone who looked like me could ever aspire to United States senate. They felt that in a fearful nation like this someone named Barack Obama couldn't hope to win an election.

Yet here we stand because we had a different concept and notion of the American people. We understood that there was a core of decency to the American people. That there was a set of shared values that extended beyond race and region, extended beyond income and ethnicity. A belief that every child in America should have a decent shot at life. A belief that we are brothers and sisters. And that we have mutual obligations towards each other, and that those mutual obligations express themselves not only in our family, not only in our workplaces, not only in our places of worship, but also through our government. We believed in the possibility of a government that was just as decent as the American people are. And we knew that despite the misinformation, despite the bitterness, despite the partisan politics, that when you talk to people those common values would come out. That the innate instincts of the American people would surface, if we could speak to them, if we could connect to them, if we could talk to them directly.

And because of the efforts of so many of you in this room, we had the resources, we had the manpower, we had the capacity to touch each and every one of those hearts throughout the state.

And so as a consequence, I had a chance to hear the stories of people. And they would tell me we don't expect our government to solve all our problems. We know that we have to teach all our own

children initiative and self-respect and a sense of family and faith and community. But what we also know is that government can help provide us with the basic tools we need to live out the American dream. And we also know that we're tired of politicians who are attacking each other instead of attacking problems. And that if we can come together as one people that we can make progress and close the gap between the ideal of America and its reality.

And today we stand here in the Land of Lincoln, the man who once called for us to appeal to the better angels of our nature, we stand here as testimony to that belief that Lincoln articulated: the possibilities of appealing to those better angels. We stand here as one people, as one nation, proclaiming ourselves to be one America with a capacity to work together to create a better future for each other. And what a magnificent gift that is to the nation. How wonderful it is that we have been able to accomplish this without negative ads and without the normal partisan politics and just focusing on the issues that matter to people: healthcare, and jobs and education.

And it is because of you that I have been able to do that. Because you created a protective garment over this campaign. Your spirit allowed us to run the kind of campaign that we've been able to run. We have had some good breaks in this campaign. There is no doubt about it. And I am under no illusion that we come out of this assuming that all people throughout the state of Illinois agree with me on every single position. But I think that what we've showed is that all of us can disagree without being disagreeable; that we can set aside the scorched-earth politics, the slash and burn politics of the past. We can consign that to the past. We can look forward to the future. We can build step by step to ensure that we arrive at the practical common sense solutions that all of us hope for. That's what this campaign has been about.

But we also have to remind ourselves that this is really just the end of the beginning. This is not the end itself. In the ultimate

equation we will not be measured by the margin of our victory, but we will be measured by whether we are able to deliver concrete improvements to the lives of so many people all across the state who are struggling.

We will be measured by whether those men all across the state in Galesburg, in Rockford and Decatur and Alton, those folks who have been laid off their jobs, seen their jobs move to Mexico or China, lost their health care, their pensions threatened, whether they are able to find jobs that allow them to support a family and maintain their dignity. We are going to be measured by how well we deliver the resources to the school districts all across the state who are in deficit spending. To make sure that our children have the teachers and the programs they need to excel. We are going to be measured by whether or not we can provide access and affordability to healthcare so that no families in Illinois are bankrupt when they get sick. We are going to be measured by whether our senior citizens can retire with some dignity and some respect. We are going to be measured by the degree to which we can craft a foreign policy in which we are not simply feared in the world but we are also respected. That's what we are going to be measured by.

I told some of you about a story a couple of days ago where during a rally that the clergy had organized on the South Side of Chicago I was asked to meet with a woman who had attended a reception beforehand. And she was a woman who had voted absentee for me already and wanted to shake my hand and take a picture with me. And she came to the reception and she was very gracious and said how proud she was to have voted for me and how proud she was of the campaign that we had run. We shook hands, we hugged, we took a picture and all of this would be unexceptional except for the fact that she was born in 1899. Her name was Margaret Lewis. She may be watching television tonight. She's 104. She will be 105 on November 24.

And I have had much occasion over the last several days to

think about Margaret Lewis. Trying to imagine what it would be like for this woman, an African American woman born in 1899, born in the shadow of slavery. Born in the midst of Jim Crow. Born before there were automobiles or roads to carry those automobiles. Born before there were airplanes in the sky, before telephones and televisions and cameras. Born before there were cell phones and the Internet. Imagining her life spanning three centuries, she lived to see World War I; she lived to see the Great Depression; she lived to see World War II; and she lived to see her brothers and uncles and nephews and cousins coming home and still sitting in the back of a bus.

She lived to see women get the right to vote. She lived to see F.D.R. drag this nation out of its own fear and establish the GI bill and social security and all the programs that we now take for granted. She saw unions rising up and she saw immigrant families coming from every direction making a better life for themselves in this nation.

And yet she still was held back by her status until finally she saw hope breaking through the horizon and the Civil Rights Movement. And women who were willing to walk instead of riding the bus after a long day's work doing somebody else's laundry and looking after somebody else's children. And she saw young people of every race and every creed take a bus down to Mississippi and Alabama to register voters and some of them never coming back. And she saw four little girls die in a Sunday school and catalyze a nation. And then she saw the Civil Rights Act of 1964 passed and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 passed.

And she saw people lining up to vote for the first time and she was among those voters and she never forgot it. And she kept on voting each and every election, each and every election she kept voting thinking that there was a better future ahead despite her trials despite her tribulations, continually believing in this nation and its possibilities. Margaret Lewis believed. And she still believes at the age of 104 that her voice matters, that her life counts, that

her story is sacred, just like the story of every person in this room and the stories of their parents and grandparents, the legacy that we've established. The history of so many people building calloused hand, by calloused hand, brick by brick a better future for our children.

That's what America understands that we don't just inherit the world from our parents, but we also borrow it from our children. And that is why tonight; as we stand here we have to understand that we have another journey ahead and it is going to be a journey even more challenging than the one we have already embarked on. There are people today right now who are as skeptical about the future as they were at the outset of this campaign. There are people who are saying that the country is too divided, that the special interests are too entrenched. That there is no possibility that one person in the senate can ever make a difference, they don't believe that we can provide affordable healthcare to families across the state of Illinois. They are not convinced we can provide economic development for rural communities that have been forgotten. They don't really ascribe to the notion that in this competitive global economy we can still assure that every person gets a living wage. They are skeptical of the possibilities that our children can enjoy a better future than we had.

And for those skeptics who believe that we can accomplish what we set out to accomplish, if our minds are clear and our heart is pure and we believe in a just and merciful God, I say to them look at this crowd tonight, look at this election today, and I have three words for them.

The same three words that we started the campaign, the same three words that we finished the primary, the same three words that are going to carry us, because as Dr. King said, "The arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice as long as we help bend it that way."

I have three words for them. What are those words? Yes, we can. Thank you, Illinois, and I love you. Thank you. Thank you,

Illinois.

Keynote Address on Faith and Politics

(Call to Renewal Conference, Washington, D.C.)

June 28, 2006

Good morning. I appreciate the opportunity to speak here at the Call to Renewal's Building a Covenant for a New America conference. I've had the opportunity to take a look at your Covenant for a New America. It is filled with outstanding policies and prescriptions for much of what ails this country. So I'd like to congratulate you all on the thoughtful presentations you've given so far about poverty and justice in America, and for putting fire under the feet of the political leadership here in Washington.

But today I'd like to talk about the connection between religion and politics and perhaps offer some thoughts about how we can sort through some of the often bitter arguments that we've been seeing over the last several years.

I do so because, as you all know, we can affirm the importance of poverty in the Bible; and we can raise up and pass out this Covenant for a New America. We can talk to the press, and we can discuss the religious call to address poverty and environmental stewardship all we want, but it won't have an impact unless we tackle head-on the mutual suspicion that sometimes exists between religious America and secular America.

I want to give you an example that I think illustrates this fact. As some of you know, during the 2004 U.S. Senate General Election I ran against a gentleman named Alan Keyes. Mr. Keyes is well-versed in the Jerry Falwell-Pat Robertson style of rhetoric that

often labels progressives as both immoral and godless.

Indeed, Mr. Keyes announced towards the end of the campaign that, "Jesus Christ would not vote for Barack Obama. Christ would not vote for Barack Obama because Barack Obama has behaved in a way that it is inconceivable for Christ to have behaved."

Jesus Christ would not vote for Barack Obama.

Now, I was urged by some of my liberal supporters not to take this statement seriously, to essentially ignore it. To them, Mr. Keyes was an extremist, and his arguments not worth entertaining. And since at the time, I was up 40 points in the polls, it probably wasn't a bad piece of strategic advice.

But what they didn't understand, however, was that I had to take Mr. Keyes seriously, for he claimed to speak for my religion, and my God. He claimed knowledge of certain truths.

Mr. Obama says he's a Christian, he was saying, and yet he supports a lifestyle that the Bible calls an abomination.

Mr. Obama says he's a Christian, but supports the destruction of innocent and sacred life.

And so what would my supporters have me say? How should I respond? Should I say that a literalist reading of the Bible was folly? Should I say that Mr. Keyes, who is a Roman Catholic, should ignore the teachings of the Pope?

Unwilling to go there, I answered with what has come to be the typically liberal response in such debates—namely, I said that we live in a pluralistic society, that I can't impose my own religious views on another, that I was running to be the U.S. Senator of Illinois and not the Minister of Illinois.

But Mr. Keyes's implicit accusation that I was not a true Christian nagged at me, and I was also aware that my answer did not adequately address the role my faith has in guiding my own values and my own beliefs.

Now, my dilemma was by no means unique. In a way, it reflected the broader debate we've been having in this country for

the last thirty years over the role of religion in politics.

For some time now, there has been plenty of talk among pundits and pollsters that the political divide in this country has fallen sharply along religious lines. Indeed, the single biggest "gap" in party affiliation among white Americans today is not between men and women, or those who reside in so-called Red States and those who reside in Blue, but between those who attend church regularly and those who don't.

Conservative leaders have been all too happy to exploit this gap, consistently reminding evangelical Christians that Democrats disrespect their values and dislike their Church, while suggesting to the rest of the country that religious Americans care only about issues like abortion and gay marriage; school prayer and intelligent design.

Democrats, for the most part, have taken the bait. At best, we may try to avoid the conversation about religious values altogether, fearful of offending anyone and claiming that—regardless of our personal beliefs—constitutional principles tie our hands. At worst, there are some liberals who dismiss religion in the public square as inherently irrational or intolerant, insisting on a caricature of religious Americans that paints them as fanatical, or thinking that the very word "Christian" describes one's political opponents, not people of faith.

Now, such strategies of avoidance may work for progressives when our opponent is Alan Keyes. But over the long haul, I think we make a mistake when we fail to acknowledge the power of faith in people's lives—in the lives of the American people—and I think it's time that we join a serious debate about how to reconcile faith with our modern, pluralistic democracy.

And if we're going to do that then we first need to understand that Americans are a religious people. 90 percent of us believe in God, 70 percent affiliate themselves with an organized religion, 38 percent call themselves committed Christians, and substantially more people in America believe in angels than they do in

evolution.

This religious tendency is not simply the result of successful marketing by skilled preachers or the draw of popular mega-churches. In fact, it speaks to a hunger that's deeper than that—a hunger that goes beyond any particular issue or cause.

Each day, it seems, thousands of Americans are going about their daily rounds—dropping off the kids at school, driving to the office, flying to a business meeting, shopping at the mall, trying to stay on their diets—and they're coming to the realization that something is missing. They are deciding that their work, their possessions, their diversions, their sheer busyness, is not enough.

They want a sense of purpose, a narrative arc to their lives. They're looking to relieve a chronic loneliness, a feeling supported by a recent study that shows Americans have fewer close friends and confidants than ever before. And so they need an assurance that somebody out there cares about them, is listening to them—that they are not just destined to travel down that long highway towards nothingness.

And I speak with some experience on this matter. I was not raised in a particularly religious household, as undoubtedly many in the audience were. My father, who returned to Kenya when I was just two, was born Muslim but as an adult became an atheist. My mother, whose parents were non-practicing Baptists and Methodists, was probably one of the most spiritual and kindest people I've ever known, but grew up with a healthy skepticism of organized religion herself. As a consequence, so did I.

It wasn't until after college, when I went to Chicago to work as a community organizer for a group of Christian churches, that I confronted my own spiritual dilemma.

I was working with churches, and the Christians who I worked with recognized themselves in me. They saw that I knew their Book and that I shared their values and sang their songs. But they sensed that a part of me that remained removed, detached, that I was an observer in their midst.

And in time, I came to realize that something was missing as well—that without a vessel for my beliefs, without a commitment to a particular community of faith, at some level I would always remain apart, and alone.

And if it weren't for the particular attributes of the historically black church, I may have accepted this fate. But as the months passed in Chicago, I found myself drawn—not just to work with the church, but to be in the church.

For one thing, I believed and still believe in the power of the African-American religious tradition to spur social change, a power made real by some of the leaders here today. Because of its past, the black church understands in an intimate way the Biblical call to feed the hungry and clothe the naked and challenge powers and principalities. And in its historical struggles for freedom and the rights of man, I was able to see faith as more than just a comfort to the weary or a hedge against death, but rather as an active, palpable agent in the world. As a source of hope.

And perhaps it was out of this intimate knowledge of hardship —the grounding of faith in struggle—that the church offered me a second insight, one that I think is important to emphasize today.

Faith doesn't mean that you don't have doubts.

You need to come to church in the first place precisely because you are first of this world, not apart from it. You need to embrace Christ precisely because you have sins to wash away—because you are human and need an ally in this difficult journey.

It was because of these newfound understandings that I was finally able to walk down the aisle of Trinity United Church of Christ on 95th Street in the South Side of Chicago one day and affirm my Christian faith. It came about as a choice, and not an epiphany. I didn't fall out in church. The questions I had didn't magically disappear. But kneeling beneath that cross on the South Side, I felt that I heard God's spirit beckoning me. I submitted myself to His will, and dedicated myself to discovering His truth.

That's a path that has been shared by millions upon millions of

Americans—evangelicals, Catholics, Protestants, Jews and Muslims alike; some since birth, others at certain turning points in their lives. It is not something they set apart from the rest of their beliefs and values. In fact, it is often what drives their beliefs and their values.

And that is why that, if we truly hope to speak to people where they're at—to communicate our hopes and values in a way that's relevant to their own—then as progressives, we cannot abandon the field of religious discourse.

Because when we ignore the debate about what it means to be a good Christian or Muslim or Jew; when we discuss religion only in the negative sense of where or how it should not be practiced, rather than in the positive sense of what it tells us about our obligations towards one another; when we shy away from religious venues and religious broadcasts because we assume that we will be unwelcome—others will fill the vacuum, those with the most insular views of faith, or those who cynically use religion to justify partisan ends.

In other words, if we don't reach out to evangelical Christians and other religious Americans and tell them what we stand for, then the Jerry Falwells and Pat Robertsons and Alan Keyeses will continue to hold sway.

More fundamentally, the discomfort of some progressives with any hint of religion has often prevented us from effectively addressing issues in moral terms. Some of the problem here is rhetorical—if we scrub language of all religious content, we forfeit the imagery and terminology through which millions of Americans understand both their personal morality and social justice.

Imagine Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address without reference to "the judgments of the Lord." Or King's I Have a Dream speech without references to "all of God's children." Their summoning of a higher truth helped inspire what had seemed impossible, and move the nation to embrace a common destiny.

Our failure as progressives to tap into the moral underpinnings

of the nation is not just rhetorical, though. Our fear of getting "preachy" may also lead us to discount the role that values and culture play in some of our most urgent social problems.

After all, the problems of poverty and racism, the uninsured and the unemployed, are not simply technical problems in search of the perfect ten point plan. They are rooted in both societal indifference and individual callousness—in the imperfections of man.

Solving these problems will require changes in government policy, but it will also require changes in hearts and a change in minds. I believe in keeping guns out of our inner cities, and that our leaders must say so in the face of the gun manufacturers' lobby —but I also believe that when a gang-banger shoots indiscriminately into a crowd because he feels somebody disrespected him, we've got a moral problem. There's a hole in that young man's heart—a hole that the government alone cannot fix.

I believe in vigorous enforcement of our non-discrimination laws. But I also believe that a transformation of conscience and a genuine commitment to diversity on the part of the nation's CEOs could bring about quicker results than a battalion of lawyers. They have more lawyers than us anyway.

I think that we should put more of our tax dollars into educating poor girls and boys. I think that the work that Marian Wright Edelman has done all her life is absolutely how we should prioritize our resources in the wealthiest nation on Earth. I also think that we should give them the information about contraception that can prevent unwanted pregnancies, lower abortion rates, and help assure that that every child is loved and cherished.

But, you know, my Bible tells me that if we train a child in the way he should go, when he is old he will not turn from it. So I think faith and guidance can help fortify a young woman's sense of self, a young man's sense of responsibility, and a sense of reverence

that all young people should have for the act of sexual intimacy.

I am not suggesting that every progressive suddenly latch on to religious terminology—that can be dangerous. Nothing is more transparent than inauthentic expressions of faith. As Jim has mentioned, some politicians come and clap—off rhythm—to the choir. We don't need that.

In fact, because I do not believe that religious people have a monopoly on morality, I would rather have someone who is grounded in morality and ethics, and who is also secular, affirm their morality and ethics and values without pretending that they're something they're not. They don't need to do that. None of us need to do that.

But what I am suggesting is this—secularists are wrong when they ask believers to leave their religion at the door before entering into the public square. Frederick Douglass, Abraham Lincoln, Williams Jennings Bryan, Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King—indeed, the majority of great reformers in American history—were not only motivated by faith, but repeatedly used religious language to argue for their cause. So to say that men and women should not inject their "personal morality" into public policy debates is a practical absurdity. Our law is by definition a codification of morality, much of it grounded in the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Moreover, if we progressives shed some of these biases, we might recognize some overlapping values that both religious and secular people share when it comes to the moral and material direction of our country. We might recognize that the call to sacrifice on behalf of the next generation, the need to think in terms of "thou" and not just "I," resonates in religious congregations all across the country. And we might realize that we have the ability to reach out to the evangelical community and engage millions of religious Americans in the larger project of American renewal.

Some of this is already beginning to happen. Pastors, friends of

mine like Rick Warren and T.D. Jakes are wielding their enormous influences to confront AIDS, Third World debt relief, and the genocide in Darfur. Religious thinkers and activists like our good friend Jim Wallis and Tony Campolo are lifting up the Biblical injunction to help the poor as a means of mobilizing Christians against budget cuts to social programs and growing inequality.

And by the way, we need Christians on Capitol Hill, Jews on Capitol Hill and Muslims on Capitol Hill talking about the estate tax. When you've got an estate tax debate that proposes a trillion dollars being taken out of social programs to go to a handful of folks who don't need and weren't even asking for it, you know that we need an injection of morality in our political debate.

Across the country, individual churches like my own and your own are sponsoring day care programs, building senior centers, helping ex-offenders reclaim their lives, and rebuilding our gulf coast in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

So the question is, how do we build on these still-tentative partnerships between religious and secular people of good will? It's going to take more work, a lot more work than we've done so far. The tensions and the suspicions on each side of the religious divide will have to be squarely addressed. And each side will need to accept some ground rules for collaboration.

While I've already laid out some of the work that progressive leaders need to do, I want to talk a little bit about what conservative leaders need to do—some truths they need to acknowledge.

For one, they need to understand the critical role that the separation of church and state has played in preserving not only our democracy, but the robustness of our religious practice. Folks tend to forget that during our founding, it wasn't the atheists or the civil libertarians who were the most effective champions of the First Amendment. It was the persecuted minorities, it was Baptists like John Leland who didn't want the established churches to impose their views on folks who were getting happy out in the

fields and teaching the scripture to slaves. It was the forebearers of the evangelicals who were the most adamant about not mingling government with religion, because they did not want state-sponsored religion hindering their ability to practice their faith as they understood it.

Moreover, given the increasing diversity of America's population, the dangers of sectarianism have never been greater. Whatever we once were, we are no longer just a Christian nation; we are also a Jewish nation, a Muslim nation, a Buddhist nation, a Hindu nation, and a nation of nonbelievers.

And even if we did have only Christians in our midst, if we expelled every non-Christian from the United States of America, whose Christianity would we teach in the schools? Would we go with James Dobson's, or Al Sharpton's? Which passages of Scripture should guide our public policy? Should we go with Leviticus, which suggests slavery is ok and that eating shellfish is abomination? How about Deuteronomy, which suggests stoning your child if he strays from the faith? Or should we just stick to the Sermon on the Mount—a passage that is so radical that it's doubtful that our own Defense Department would survive its application? So before we get carried away, let's read our bibles. Folks haven't been reading their bibles.

This brings me to my second point. Democracy demands that the religiously motivated translate their concerns into universal, rather than religion-specific, values. It requires that their proposals be subject to argument, and amenable to reason. I may be opposed to abortion for religious reasons, but if I seek to pass a law banning the practice, I cannot simply point to the teachings of my church or evoke God's will. I have to explain why abortion violates some principle that is accessible to people of all faiths, including those with no faith at all.

Now this is going to be difficult for some who believe in the inerrancy of the Bible, as many evangelicals do. But in a pluralistic democracy, we have no choice. Politics depends on our ability to

persuade each other of common aims based on a common reality. It involves the compromise, the art of what's possible. At some fundamental level, religion does not allow for compromise. It's the art of the impossible. If God has spoken, then followers are expected to live up to God's edicts, regardless of the consequences. To base one's life on such uncompromising commitments may be sublime, but to base our policy making on such commitments would be a dangerous thing. And if you doubt that, let me give you an example.

We all know the story of Abraham and Isaac. Abraham is ordered by God to offer up his only son, and without argument, he takes Isaac to the mountaintop, binds him to an altar, and raises his knife, prepared to act as God has commanded.

Of course, in the end God sends down an angel to intercede at the very last minute, and Abraham passes God's test of devotion.

But it's fair to say that if any of us leaving this church saw Abraham on a roof of a building raising his knife, we would, at the very least, call the police and expect the Department of Children and Family Services to take Isaac away from Abraham. We would do so because we do not hear what Abraham hears, do not see what Abraham sees, true as those experiences may be. So the best we can do is act in accordance with those things that we all see, and that we all hear, be it common laws or basic reason.

Finally, any reconciliation between faith and democratic pluralism requires some sense of proportion.

This goes for both sides.

Even those who claim the Bible's inerrancy make distinctions between Scriptural edicts, sensing that some passages—the Ten Commandments, say, or a belief in Christ's divinity—are central to Christian faith, while others are more culturally specific and may be modified to accommodate modern life.

The American people intuitively understand this, which is why the majority of Catholics practice birth control and some of those opposed to gay marriage nevertheless are opposed to a

Constitutional amendment to ban it. Religious leadership need not accept such wisdom in counseling their flocks, but they should recognize this wisdom in their politics.

But a sense of proportion should also guide those who police the boundaries between church and state. Not every mention of God in public is a breach to the wall of separation—context matters. It is doubtful that children reciting the Pledge of Allegiance feel oppressed or brainwashed as a consequence of muttering the phrase "under God." I didn't. Having voluntary student prayer groups use school property to meet should not be a threat, any more than its use by the High School Republicans should threaten Democrats. And one can envision certain faith-based programs—targeting ex-offenders or substance abusers—that offer a uniquely powerful way of solving problems.

So we all have some work to do here. But I am hopeful that we can bridge the gaps that exist and overcome the prejudices each of us bring to this debate. And I have faith that millions of believing Americans want that to happen. No matter how religious they may or may not be, people are tired of seeing faith used as a tool of attack. They don't want faith used to belittle or to divide. They're tired of hearing folks deliver more screed than sermon. Because in the end, that's not how they think about faith in their own lives.

So let me end with just one other interaction I had during my campaign. A few days after I won the Democratic nomination in my U.S. Senate race, I received an email from a doctor at the University of Chicago Medical School that said the following:

"Congratulations on your overwhelming and inspiring primary win. I was happy to vote for you, and I will tell you that I am seriously considering voting for you in the general election. I write to express my concerns that may, in the end, prevent me from supporting you."

The doctor described himself as a Christian who understood his commitments to be "totalizing." His faith led him to a strong opposition to abortion and gay marriage, although he said that his

faith also led him to question the idolatry of the free market and quick resort to militarism that seemed to characterize much of the Republican agenda.

But the reason the doctor was considering not voting for me was not simply my position on abortion. Rather, he had read an entry that my campaign had posted on my website, which suggested that I would fight "right-wing ideologues who want to take away a woman's right to choose." The doctor went on to write:

"I sense that you have a strong sense of justice...and I also sense that you are a fair minded person with a high regard for reason...Whatever your convictions, if you truly believe that those who oppose abortion are all ideologues driven by perverse desires to inflict suffering on women, then you, in my judgment, are not fair-minded....You know that we enter times that are fraught with possibilities for good and for harm, times when we are struggling to make sense of a common polity in the context of plurality, when we are unsure of what grounds we have for making any claims that involve others...I do not ask at this point that you oppose abortion, only that you speak about this issue in fair-minded words."

Fair-minded words.

So I looked at my website and found the offending words. In fairness to them, my staff had written them using standard Democratic boilerplate language to summarize my pro-choice position during the Democratic primary, at a time when some of my opponents were questioning my commitment to protect *Roe v. Wade*.

Re-reading the doctor's letter, though, I felt a pang of shame. It is people like him who are looking for a deeper, fuller conversation about religion in this country. They may not change their positions, but they are willing to listen and learn from those who are willing to speak in fair-minded words. Those who know of the central and awesome place that God holds in the lives of so many, and who refuse to treat faith as simply another political issue with

which to score points.

So I wrote back to the doctor, and I thanked him for his advice. The next day, I circulated the email to my staff and changed the language on my website to state in clear but simple terms my pro-choice position. And that night, before I went to bed, I said a prayer of my own—a prayer that I might extend the same presumption of good faith to others that the doctor had extended to me.

And that night, before I went to bed I said a prayer of my own. It's a prayer I think I share with a lot of Americans. A hope that we can live with one another in a way that reconciles the beliefs of each with the good of all. It's a prayer worth praying, and a conversation worth having in this country in the months and years to come. Thank you.

An Honest Government, a Hopeful Future

(Campus Progress, Center for American Progress)

August 28, 2006

I want to congratulate all of you at Campus Progress for the work you've been doing to build a new generation of progressive leadership in this country. At a time when too many in the media have written off your generation as apathetic or uninvolved, you're proving not only that you care very deeply about the future of this country, but that you're willing to do something about it.

I could stand up here today and talk about that future—about our vision for America—but I know that we share similar views on this and that you're pretty well-versed on the issues anyway.

So instead I'd like to talk a bit about what comes next for all of you—what happens after you leave the confines of college and head out into the real world.

It's a scary thought, I know, but I also remember that by the end of my four years in college, I may have had a vague idea that I wanted to go into community organizing, but no clue how I would go about doing that or whether it was even the right choice for me.

I have a feeling that many of you might be in a similar boat when it comes to politics and organizing and activism after college, and so today I'd just like to offer you a few pieces of advice that might be able to help you on your way.

The first is to take risks.

When I told people that after college, I planned on being a community organizer and working in low-income neighborhoods,

they thought I was crazy.

My mother and grandparents thought I should go to law school. My friends had applied for jobs on Wall Street. But I went ahead and wrote letters to every organization in the country that I could think of. And finally, this small group of churches on the south side of Chicago wrote back and gave me a job organizing neighborhoods devastated by steel-plant closings in the early '80s.

The churches didn't have much money—so they offered me a grand sum of $12,000 a year plus $1,000 to buy a car. And I got ready to move to Chicago—a place I had never been and where I didn't know a living soul.

Even people who didn't know me were skeptical of my decision. I remember having a conversation with an older man I had met before I arrived in Chicago. I told him about my plans, and he looked at me and said, "Let me tell something. You look like a nice clean-cut young man, and you've got a nice voice. So let me give you a piece of advice—forget this community organizing business. You can't change the world, and people won't appreciate you trying. What you should do is go into television broadcasting. I'm telling you, you've got a future."

I could've taken my mother's advice and I could've taken my grandparents' advice. I could've taken the path my friends traveled. And objectively speaking, that TV thing might have made some sense.

But I knew there was something in me that wanted to try for something bigger. And so I went.

This is harder than it sounds—and it will be for all of you. With all the work you've done and the organizations you've been involved in, you'll have boundless opportunities when you graduate. And it's very easy to just take that diploma, forget about all this progressive politics stuff, and go chasing after the big house and the large salary and the nice suits and all the other things that our money culture says you should buy.

But I hope you don't. Focusing your life solely on making a

problem to take care of.

I hope you don't listen to this. I hope you choose to broaden, and not contract, your ambit of concern. Not because you have an obligation to those who are less fortunate, although you do have that obligation. Not because you have a debt to all of those who helped you get to where you are, although you do have that debt.

It's because you have an obligation to yourself. Because our individual salvation depends on collective salvation. And because it's only when you hitch your wagon to something larger than yourself that you will realize your true potential—and become full-grown.

As I think about all of the good each of you has the potential to do in this world, I'm reminded of this image. It's the image of young Americans—teenagers and college kids not much older than you—from all over the country, watching the Civil Rights Movement unfold before them on their television sets. I imagine that they would've seen the marchers and heard the speeches, but they also probably saw the dogs and the fire hoses, or the footage of innocent people being beaten within an inch of their lives, or maybe they would've heard the news the day those four little girls died when someone threw a bomb into their church.

Instinctively, they knew that it was safer and smarter to stay at home; to watch the movement from afar. But somewhere in their hearts, they also understood that these people in Georgia and Alabama and Mississippi were their brothers and sisters; that what was happening was wrong; and that they had an obligation to make it right. And so when the buses pulled up for a Freedom Ride down South, they got on. And they rode. Thousands of them. And they changed the world.

We need you to do the same. As Robert F. Kennedy once told a crowd of South Africans no older than you, "The world demands the qualities of youth; not a time of life but a state of mind, a temper of the will, a quality of the imagination, a predominance of courage over timidity, of the appetite for adventure over the love

of ease."

Today, I want thank each of you for demonstrating these qualities through your service to the people of this nation, and I wish all of you a future that is hopeful, dedicated, and ever youthful. Thank you.

Announcement to Form a Presidential Exploratory Committee

January 16, 2007

As many of you know, over the last few months I have been thinking hard about my plans for 2008. Running for the presidency is a profound decision—a decision no one should make on the basis of media hype or personal ambition alone—and so before I committed myself and my family to this race, I wanted to be sure that this was right for us and, more importantly, right for the country.

I certainly didn't expect to find myself in this position a year ago. But as I've spoken to many of you in my travels across the states these past months; as I've read your emails and read your letters; I've been struck by how hungry we all are for a different kind of politics.

So I've spent some time thinking about how I could best advance the cause of change and progress that we so desperately need.

The decisions that have been made in Washington these past six years, and the problems that have been ignored, have put our country in a precarious place. Our economy is changing rapidly, and that means profound changes for working people. Many of you have shared with me your stories about skyrocketing health care bills, the pensions you've lost and your struggles to pay for college for your kids. Our continued dependence on oil has put our

security and our very planet at risk. And we're still mired in a tragic and costly war that should have never been waged.

But challenging as they are, it's not the magnitude of our problems that concerns me the most. It's the smallness of our politics. America's faced big problems before. But today, our leaders in Washington seem incapable of working together in a practical, common sense way. Politics has become so bitter and partisan, so gummed up by money and influence, that we can't tackle the big problems that demand solutions.

And that's what we have to change first.

We have to change our politics, and come together around our common interests and concerns as Americans.

This won't happen by itself. A change in our politics can only come from you; from people across our country who believe there's a better way and are willing to work for it.

Years ago, as a community organizer in Chicago, I learned that meaningful change always begins at the grass roots, and that engaged citizens working together can accomplish extraordinary things.

So even in the midst of the enormous challenges we face today, I have great faith and hope about the future—because I believe in you.

And that's why I wanted to tell you first that I'll be filing papers today to create a presidential exploratory committee. For the next several weeks, I am going to talk with people from around the country, listening and learning more about the challenges we face as a nation, the opportunities that lie before us, and the role that a presidential campaign might play in bringing our country together. And on February 10th, at the end of these decisions and in my home state of Illinois, I'll share my plans with my friends, neighbors and fellow Americans.

In the meantime, I want to thank all of you for your time, your suggestions, your encouragement and your prayers. And I look forward to continuing our conversation in the weeks and months

to come.

and worked till their hands were raw so that we might live a better life. They saw America as bigger than the sum of our individual ambitions, greater than all the differences of birth or wealth or faction.

This is the journey we continue today. We remain the most prosperous, powerful nation on Earth. Our workers are no less productive than when this crisis began. Our minds are no less inventive, our goods and services no less needed than they were last week, or last month, or last year. Our capacity remains undiminished. But our time of standing pat, of protecting narrow interests and putting off unpleasant decisions—that time has surely passed. Starting today, we must pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off, and begin again the work of remaking America. (Applause.)

For everywhere we look, there is work to be done. The state of our economy calls for action, bold and swift. And we will act, not only to create new jobs, but to lay a new foundation for growth. We will build the roads and bridges, the electric grids and digital lines that feed our commerce and bind us together. We'll restore science to its rightful place, and wield technology's wonders to raise health care's quality and lower its cost. We will harness the sun and the winds and the soil to fuel our cars and run our factories. And we will transform our schools and colleges and universities to meet the demands of a new age. All this we can do. All this we will do.

Now, there are some who question the scale of our ambitions, who suggest that our system cannot tolerate too many big plans. Their memories are short, for they have forgotten what this country has already done, what free men and women can achieve when imagination is joined to common purpose, and necessity to courage. What the cynics fail to understand is that the ground has shifted beneath them, that the stale political arguments that have consumed us for so long no longer apply.

The question we ask today is not whether our government is

too big or too small, but whether it works—whether it helps families find jobs at a decent wage, care they can afford, a retirement that is dignified. Where the answer is yes, we intend to move forward. Where the answer is no, programs will end. And those of us who manage the public's dollars will be held to account, to spend wisely, reform bad habits, and do our business in the light of day, because only then can we restore the vital trust between a people and their government.

Nor is the question before us whether the market is a force for good or ill. Its power to generate wealth and expand freedom is unmatched. But this crisis has reminded us that without a watchful eye, the market can spin out of control. The nation cannot prosper long when it favors only the prosperous. The success of our economy has always depended not just on the size of our gross domestic product, but on the reach of our prosperity, on the ability to extend opportunity to every willing heart—not out of charity, but because it is the surest route to our common good. (Applause.)

As for our common defense, we reject as false the choice between our safety and our ideals. Our Founding Fathers—(applause)—our Founding Fathers, faced with perils that we can scarcely imagine, drafted a charter to assure the rule of law and the rights of man—a charter expanded by the blood of generations. Those ideals still light the world, and we will not give them up for expedience sake. (Applause.)

And so, to all the other peoples and governments who are watching today, from the grandest capitals to the small village where my father was born, know that America is a friend of each nation, and every man, woman and child who seeks a future of peace and dignity. And we are ready to lead once more. (Applause.)

Recall that earlier generations faced down fascism and communism not just with missiles and tanks, but with the sturdy alliances and enduring convictions. They understood that our power alone cannot protect us, nor does it entitle us to do as we

please. Instead they knew that our power grows through its prudent use; our security emanates from the justness of our cause, the force of our example, the tempering qualities of humility and restraint.

We are the keepers of this legacy. Guided by these principles once more we can meet those new threats that demand even greater effort, even greater cooperation and understanding between nations. We will begin to responsibly leave Iraq to its people and forge a hard-earned peace in Afghanistan. With old friends and former foes, we'll work tirelessly to lessen the nuclear threat, and roll back the specter of a warming planet.

We will not apologize for our way of life, nor will we waver in its defense. And for those who seek to advance their aims by inducing terror and slaughtering innocents, we say to you now that our spirit is stronger and cannot be broken—you cannot outlast us, and we will defeat you. (Applause.)

For we know that our patchwork heritage is a strength, not a weakness. We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus, and non-believers. We are shaped by every language and culture, drawn from every end of this Earth; and because we have tasted the bitter swill of civil war and segregation, and emerged from that dark chapter stronger and more united, we cannot help but believe that the old hatreds shall someday pass; that the lines of tribe shall soon dissolve; that as the world grows smaller, our common humanity shall reveal itself; and that America must play its role in ushering in a new era of peace.

To the Muslim world, we seek a new way forward, based on mutual interest and mutual respect. To those leaders around the globe who seek to sow conflict, or blame their society's ills on the West, know that your people will judge you on what you can build, not what you destroy. (Applause.)

To those who cling to power through corruption and deceit and the silencing of dissent, know that you are on the wrong side of history, but that we will extend a hand if you are willing to

unclench your fist. (Applause.)

To the people of poor nations, we pledge to work alongside you to make your farms flourish and let clean waters flow; to nourish starved bodies and feed hungry minds. And to those nations like ours that enjoy relative plenty, we say we can no longer afford indifference to the suffering outside our borders, nor can we consume the world's resources without regard to effect. For the world has changed, and we must change with it.

As we consider the role that unfolds before us, we remember with humble gratitude those brave Americans who at this very hour patrol faroff deserts and distant mountains. They have something to tell us, just as the fallen heroes who lie in Arlington whisper through the ages.

We honor them not only because they are the guardians of our liberty, but because they embody the spirit of service—a willingness to find meaning in something greater than themselves

And yet at this moment, a moment that will define a generation, it is precisely this spirit that must inhabit us all. For as much as government can do, and must do, it is ultimately the faith and determination of the American people upon which this nation relies. It is the kindness to take in a stranger when the levees break, the selflessness of workers who would rather cut their hours than see a friend lose their job which sees us through our darkest hours. It is the firefighter's courage to storm a stairway filled with smoke, but also a parent's willingness to nurture a child that finally decides our fate.

Our challenges may be new. The instruments with which we meet them may be new. But those values upon which our success depends—honesty and hard work, courage and fair play, tolerance and curiosity, loyalty and patriotism—these things are old. These things are true. They have been the quiet force of progress throughout our history.

What is demanded, then, is a return to these truths. What is required of us now is a new era of responsibility—a recognition on

the part of every American that we have duties to ourselves, our nation and the world; duties that we do not grudgingly accept, but rather seize gladly, firm in the knowledge that there is nothing so satisfying to the spirit, so defining of our character than giving our all to a difficult task.

This is the price and the promise of citizenship. This is the source of our confidence—the knowledge that God calls on us to shape an uncertain destiny. This is the meaning of our liberty and our creed, why men and women and children of every race and every faith can join in celebration across this magnificent mall; and why a man whose father less than 60 years ago might not have been served in a local restaurant can now stand before you to take a most sacred oath. (Applause.)

So let us mark this day with remembrance of who we are and how far we have traveled. In the year of America's birth, in the coldest of months, a small band of patriots huddled by dying campfires on the shores of an icy river. The capital was abandoned. The enemy was advancing. The snow was stained with blood. At the moment when the outcome of our revolution was most in doubt, the father of our nation ordered these words to be read to the people:

"Let it be told to the future world...that in the depth of winter, when nothing but hope and virtue could survive...that the city and the country, alarmed at one common danger, came forth to meet [it]."

America: In the face of our common dangers, in this winter of our hardship, let us remember these timeless words. With hope and virtue, let us brave once more the icy currents, and endure what storms may come. Let it be said by our children's children that when we were tested we refused to let this journey end, that we did not turn back nor did we falter; and with eyes fixed on the horizon and God's grace upon us, we carried forth that great gift of freedom and delivered it safely to future generations.

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

They exist in our laboratories and universities; in our fields and our factories; in the imaginations of our entrepreneurs and the pride of the hardest-working people on Earth. Those qualities that have made America the greatest force of progress and prosperity in human history we still possess in ample measure. What is required now is for this country to pull together, confront boldly the challenges we face, and take responsibility for our future once more.

Now, if we're honest with ourselves, we'll admit that for too long, we have not always met these responsibilities—as a government or as a people. I say this not to lay blame or look backwards, but because it is only by understanding how we arrived at this moment that we'll be able to lift ourselves out of this predicament.

The fact is, our economy did not fall into decline overnight. Nor did all of our problems begin when the housing market collapsed or the stock market sank. We have known for decades that our survival depends on finding new sources of energy. Yet we import more oil today than ever before. The cost of health care eats up more and more of our savings each year, yet we keep delaying reform. Our children will compete for jobs in a global economy that too many of our schools do not prepare them for. And though all these challenges went unsolved, we still managed to spend more money and pile up more debt, both as individuals and through our government, than ever before.

In other words, we have lived through an era where too often, short-term gains were prized over long-term prosperity; where we failed to look beyond the next payment, the next quarter, or the next election. A surplus became an excuse to transfer wealth to the wealthy instead of an opportunity to invest in our future. Regulations were gutted for the sake of a quick profit at the expense of a healthy market. People bought homes they knew they couldn't afford from banks and lenders who pushed those bad loans anyway. And all the while, critical debates and difficult

decisions were put off for some other time on some other day.

Well, that day of reckoning has arrived, and the time to take charge of our future is here.

Now is the time to act boldly and wisely—to not only revive this economy, but to build a new foundation for lasting prosperity. Now is the time to jumpstart job creation, re-start lending, and invest in areas like energy, health care, and education that will grow our economy, even as we make hard choices to bring our deficit down. That is what my economic agenda is designed to do, and that's what I'd like to talk to you about tonight.

It's an agenda that begins with jobs.

As soon as I took office, I asked this Congress to send me a recovery plan by President's Day that would put people back to work and put money in their pockets. Not because I believe in bigger government—I don't. Not because I'm not mindful of the massive debt we've inherited—I am. I called for action because the failure to do so would have cost more jobs and caused more hardships. In fact, a failure to act would have worsened our long-term deficit by assuring weak economic growth for years. That's why I pushed for quick action. And tonight, I am grateful that this Congress delivered, and pleased to say that the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act is now law.

Over the next two years, this plan will save or create 3.5 million jobs. More than 90% of these jobs will be in the private sector—jobs rebuilding our roads and bridges; constructing wind turbines and solar panels; laying broadband and expanding mass transit.

Because of this plan, there are teachers who can now keep their jobs and educate our kids. Health care professionals can continue caring for our sick. There are 57 police officers who are still on the streets of Minneapolis tonight because this plan prevented the layoffs their department was about to make.

Because of this plan, 95% of the working households in America will receive a tax cut—a tax cut that you will see in your paychecks beginning on April 1st.

Because of this plan, families who are struggling to pay tuition costs will receive a $2,500 tax credit for all four years of college. And Americans who have lost their jobs in this recession will be able to receive extended unemployment benefits and continued health care coverage to help them weather this storm.

I know there are some in this chamber and watching at home who are skeptical of whether this plan will work. I understand that skepticism. Here in Washington, we've all seen how quickly good intentions can turn into broken promises and wasteful spending. And with a plan of this scale comes enormous responsibility to get it right.

That is why I have asked Vice President Biden to lead a tough, unprecedented oversight effort—because nobody messes with Joe. I have told each member of my Cabinet as well as mayors and governors across the country that they will be held accountable by me and the American people for every dollar they spend. I have appointed a proven and aggressive Inspector General to ferret out any and all cases of waste and fraud. And we have created a new website called recovery.gov so that every American can find out how and where their money is being spent.

So the recovery plan we passed is the first step in getting our economy back on track. But it is just the first step. Because even if we manage this plan flawlessly, there will be no real recovery unless we clean up the credit crisis that has severely weakened our financial system.

I want to speak plainly and candidly about this issue tonight, because every American should know that it directly affects you and your family's well-being. You should also know that the money you've deposited in banks across the country is safe; your insurance is secure; and you can rely on the continued operation of our financial system. That is not the source of concern.

The concern is that if we do not re-start lending in this country, our recovery will be choked off before it even begins.

You see, the flow of credit is the lifeblood of our economy. The

ability to get a loan is how you finance the purchase of everything from a home to a car to a college education; how stores stock their shelves, farms buy equipment, and businesses make payroll.

But credit has stopped flowing the way it should. Too many bad loans from the housing crisis have made their way onto the books of too many banks. With so much debt and so little confidence, these banks are now fearful of lending out any more money to households, to businesses, or to each other. When there is no lending, families can't afford to buy homes or cars. So businesses are forced to make layoffs. Our economy suffers even more, and credit dries up even further.

That is why this administration is moving swiftly and aggressively to break this destructive cycle, restore confidence, and re-start lending.

We will do so in several ways. First, we are creating a new lending fund that represents the largest effort ever to help provide auto loans, college loans, and small business loans to the consumers and entrepreneurs who keep this economy running.

Second, we have launched a housing plan that will help responsible families facing the threat of foreclosure lower their monthly payments and re-finance their mortgages. It's a plan that won't help speculators or that neighbor down the street who bought a house he could never hope to afford, but it will help millions of Americans who are struggling with declining home values—Americans who will now be able to take advantage of the lower interest rates that this plan has already helped bring about. In fact, the average family who re-finances today can save nearly $2,000 per year on their mortgage.

Third, we will act with the full force of the federal government to ensure that the major banks that Americans depend on have enough confidence and enough money to lend even in more difficult times. And when we learn that a major bank has serious problems, we will hold accountable those responsible, force the necessary adjustments, provide the support to clean up their

balance sheets, and assure the continuity of a strong, viable institution that can serve our people and our economy.

I understand that on any given day, Wall Street may be more comforted by an approach that gives banks bailouts with no strings attached, and that holds nobody accountable for their reckless decisions. But such an approach won't solve the problem. And our goal is to quicken the day when we restart lending to the American people and American business and end this crisis once and for all.

I intend to hold these banks fully accountable for the assistance they receive, and this time, they will have to clearly demonstrate how taxpayer dollars result in more lending for the American taxpayer. This time, CEOs won't be able to use taxpayer money to pad their paychecks or buy fancy drapes or disappear on a private jet. Those days are over.

Still, this plan will require significant resources from the federal government—and yes, probably more than we've already set aside. But while the cost of action will be great, I can assure you that the cost of inaction will be far greater, for it could result in an economy that sputters along for not months or years, but perhaps a decade. That would be worse for our deficit, worse for business, worse for you, and worse for the next generation. And I refuse to let that happen.

I understand that when the last administration asked this Congress to provide assistance for struggling banks, Democrats and Republicans alike were infuriated by the mismanagement and results that followed. So were the American taxpayers. So was I.

So I know how unpopular it is to be seen as helping banks right now, especially when everyone is suffering in part from their bad decisions. I promise you—I get it.

But I also know that in a time of crisis, we cannot afford to govern out of anger, or yield to the politics of the moment. My job—our job—is to solve the problem. Our job is to govern with a sense of responsibility. I will not spend a single penny for the purpose of

that has launched the largest effort in history to make their economy energy efficient. We invented solar technology, but we've fallen behind countries like Germany and Japan in producing it. New plug-in hybrids roll off our assembly lines, but they will run on batteries made in Korea.

Well, I do not accept a future where the jobs and industries of tomorrow take root beyond our borders—and I know you don't either. It is time for America to lead again.

Thanks to our recovery plan, we will double this nation's supply of renewable energy in the next three years. We have also made the largest investment in basic research funding in American history—an investment that will spur not only new discoveries in energy, but breakthroughs in medicine, science, and technology.

We will soon lay down thousands of miles of power lines that can carry new energy to cities and towns across this country. And we will put Americans to work making our homes and buildings more efficient so that we can save billions of dollars on our energy bills.

But to truly transform our economy, protect our security, and save our planet from the ravages of climate change, we need to ultimately make clean, renewable energy the profitable kind of energy. So I ask this Congress to send me legislation that places a market-based cap on carbon pollution and drives the production of more renewable energy in America. And to support that innovation, we will invest fifteen billion dollars a year to develop technologies like wind power and solar power; advanced biofuels, clean coal, and more fuel-efficient cars and trucks built right here in America.

As for our auto industry, everyone recognizes that years of bad decision-making and a global recession have pushed our automakers to the brink. We should not, and will not, protect them from their own bad practices. But we are committed to the goal of a re-tooled, re-imagined auto industry that can compete and win. Millions of jobs depend on it. Scores of communities depend on it.

And I believe the nation that invented the automobile cannot walk away from it.

None of this will come without cost, nor will it be easy. But this is America. We don't do what's easy. We do what is necessary to move this country forward.

For that same reason, we must also address the crushing cost of health care.

This is a cost that now causes a bankruptcy in America every thirty seconds. By the end of the year, it could cause 1.5 million Americans to lose their homes. In the last eight years, premiums have grown four times faster than wages. And in each of these years, one million more Americans have lost their health insurance. It is one of the major reasons why small businesses close their doors and corporations ship jobs overseas. And it's one of the largest and fastest-growing parts of our budget.

Given these facts, we can no longer afford to put health care reform on hold.

Already, we have done more to advance the cause of health care reform in the last thirty days than we have in the last decade. When it was days old, this Congress passed a law to provide and protect health insurance for eleven million American children whose parents work full-time. Our recovery plan will invest in electronic health records and new technology that will reduce errors, bring down costs, ensure privacy, and save lives. It will launch a new effort to conquer a disease that has touched the life of nearly every American by seeking a cure for cancer in our time. And it makes the largest investment ever in preventive care, because that is one of the best ways to keep our people healthy and our costs under control.

This budget builds on these reforms. It includes an historic commitment to comprehensive health care reform—a down payment on the principle that we must have quality, affordable health care for every American. It's a commitment that's paid for in part by efficiencies in our system that are long overdue. And it's

a step we must take if we hope to bring down our deficit in the years to come.

Now, there will be many different opinions and ideas about how to achieve reform, and that is why I'm bringing together businesses and workers, doctors and health care providers, Democrats and Republicans to begin work on this issue next week.

I suffer no illusions that this will be an easy process. It will be hard. But I also know that nearly a century after Teddy Roosevelt first called for reform, the cost of our health care has weighed down our economy and the conscience of our nation long enough. So let there be no doubt: health care reform cannot wait, it must not wait, and it will not wait another year.

The third challenge we must address is the urgent need to expand the promise of education in America.

In a global economy where the most valuable skill you can sell is your knowledge, a good education is no longer just a pathway to opportunity—it is a prerequisite.

Right now, three-quarters of the fastest-growing occupations require more than a high school diploma. And yet, just over half of our citizens have that level of education. We have one of the highest high school dropout rates of any industrialized nation. And half of the students who begin college never finish.

This is a prescription for economic decline, because we know the countries that out-teach us today will out-compete us tomorrow. That is why it will be the goal of this administration to ensure that every child has access to a complete and competitive education—from the day they are born to the day they begin a career.

Already, we have made an historic investment in education through the economic recovery plan. We have dramatically expanded early childhood education and will continue to improve its quality, because we know that the most formative learning comes in those first years of life. We have made college affordable for nearly seven million more students. And we have provided the

resources necessary to prevent painful cuts and teacher layoffs that would set back our children's progress.

But we know that our schools don't just need more resources. They need more reform. That is why this budget creates new incentives for teacher performance; pathways for advancement, and rewards for success. We'll invest in innovative programs that are already helping schools meet high standards and close achievement gaps. And we will expand our commitment to charter schools.

It is our responsibility as lawmakers and educators to make this system work. But it is the responsibility of every citizen to participate in it. And so tonight, I ask every American to commit to at least one year or more of higher education or career training. This can be community college or a four-year school; vocational training or an apprenticeship. But whatever the training may be, every American will need to get more than a high school diploma. And dropping out of high school is no longer an option. It's not just quitting on yourself, it's quitting on your country—and this country needs and values the talents of every American. That is why we will provide the support necessary for you to complete college and meet a new goal: by 2020, America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world.

I know that the price of tuition is higher than ever, which is why if you are willing to volunteer in your neighborhood or give back to your community or serve your country, we will make sure that you can afford a higher education. And to encourage a renewed spirit of national service for this and future generations, I ask this Congress to send me the bipartisan legislation that bears the name of Senator Orrin Hatch as well as an American who has never stopped asking what he can do for his country—Senator Edward Kennedy.

These education policies will open the doors of opportunity for our children. But it is up to us to ensure they walk through them. In the end, there is no program or policy that can substitute for a

mother or father who will attend those parent/teacher conferences, or help with homework after dinner, or turn off the TV, put away the video games, and read to their child. I speak to you not just as a President, but as a father when I say that responsibility for our children's education must begin at home.

There is, of course, another responsibility we have to our children. And that is the responsibility to ensure that we do not pass on to them a debt they cannot pay. With the deficit we inherited, the cost of the crisis we face, and the long-term challenges we must meet, it has never been more important to ensure that as our economy recovers, we do what it takes to bring this deficit down.

I'm proud that we passed the recovery plan free of earmarks, and I want to pass a budget next year that ensures that each dollar we spend reflects only our most important national priorities.

Yesterday, I held a fiscal summit where I pledged to cut the deficit in half by the end of my first term in office. My administration has also begun to go line by line through the federal budget in order to eliminate wasteful and ineffective programs. As you can imagine, this is a process that will take some time. But we're starting with the biggest lines. We have already identified two trillion dollars in savings over the next decade.

In this budget, we will end education programs that don't work and end direct payments to large agribusinesses that don't need them. We'll eliminate the no-bid contracts that have wasted billions in Iraq, and reform our defense budget so that we're not paying for Cold War–era weapons systems we don't use. We will root out the waste, fraud, and abuse in our Medicare program that doesn't make our seniors any healthier, and we will restore a sense of fairness and balance to our tax code by finally ending the tax breaks for corporations that ship our jobs overseas.

In order to save our children from a future of debt, we will also end the tax breaks for the wealthiest 2% of Americans. But let me be perfectly clear, because I know you'll hear the same old claims

with this moment; waiting for us to lead.

Those of us gathered here tonight have been called to govern in extraordinary times. It is a tremendous burden, but also a great privilege—one that has been entrusted to few generations of Americans. For in our hands lies the ability to shape our world for good or for ill.

I know that it is easy to lose sight of this truth—to become cynical and doubtful; consumed with the petty and the trivial.

But in my life, I have also learned that hope is found in unlikely places; that inspiration often comes not from those with the most power or celebrity, but from the dreams and aspirations of Americans who are anything but ordinary.

I think about Leonard Abess, the bank president from Miami who reportedly cashed out of his company, took a $60 million bonus, and gave it out to all 399 people who worked for him, plus another 72 who used to work for him. He didn't tell anyone, but when the local newspaper found out, he simply said, ''I knew some of these people since I was 7 years old. I didn't feel right getting the money myself."

I think about Greensburg, Kansas, a town that was completely destroyed by a tornado, but is being rebuilt by its residents as a global example of how clean energy can power an entire community—how it can bring jobs and businesses to a place where piles of bricks and rubble once lay. "The tragedy was terrible," said one of the men who helped them rebuild. "But the folks here know that it also provided an incredible opportunity."

And I think about Ty'Sheoma Bethea, the young girl from that school I visited in Dillon, South Carolina—a place where the ceilings leak, the paint peels off the walls, and they have to stop teaching six times a day because the train barrels by their classroom. She has been told that her school is hopeless, but the other day after class she went to the public library and typed up a letter to the people sitting in this room. She even asked her principal for the money to buy a stamp. The letter asks us for help,

and says, "We are just students trying to become lawyers, doctors, congressmen like yourself and one day president, so we can make a change to not just the state of South Carolina but also the world. We are not quitters."

We are not quitters.

These words and these stories tell us something about the spirit of the people who sent us here. They tell us that even in the most trying times, amid the most difficult circumstances, there is a generosity, a resilience, a decency, and a determination that perseveres; a willingness to take responsibility for our future and for posterity.

Their resolve must be our inspiration. Their concerns must be our cause. And we must show them and all our people that we are equal to the task before us.

I know that we haven't agreed on every issue thus far, and there are surely times in the future when we will part ways. But I also know that every American who is sitting here tonight loves this country and wants it to succeed. That must be the starting point for every debate we have in the coming months, and where we return after those debates are done. That is the foundation on which the American people expect us to build common ground.

And if we do—if we come together and lift this nation from the depths of this crisis; if we put our people back to work and restart the engine of our prosperity; if we confront without fear the challenges of our time and summon that enduring spirit of an America that does not quit, then someday years from now our children can tell their children that this was the time when we performed, in the words that are carved into this very chamber, "something worthy to be remembered." Thank you, God Bless you, and may God Bless the United States of America.

A New Foundation Speech

(Georgetown University)

April 14, 2009

Thank you so much. (Applause.) It's good to be back. Thank you so much. Please, everybody be seated. (Applause.) Well, to President DeGioia, thank you so much for the gracious introduction, and thanks for bringing your family—including JT—appreciate you. We're going to invite him over, hang out with the girls. (Laughter.) He's a pretty good-looking young man. (Laughter.)

To Mayor Adrian Fenty, who's doing such a great job in this city, thank you so much for your attendance. (Applause.) To Representative Donna Edwards, who is here and represents Maryland's 4th District, thank you. (Applause.)

To Georgetown University students, it is great to be here. (Applause.) Well, it is good to be back. I appeared in this room during the campaign and had a wonderful reception then, and it's wonderful to be back and be with all of you.

We're going to talk about the economy today. And I was telling President DeGioia this may be a slightly longer speech than I usually give, but it's a slightly bigger topic, and that is how we are going to deal with so many of our economic challenges.

You know, it's been 12 weeks now since my administration began. And I think that even our critics would agree that at the very least, we've been busy. (Laughter.) In just under three months, we've responded to an extraordinary set of economic

challenges with extraordinary action—action that's been unprecedented both in terms of its scale and its speed.

And I know that some have accused us of taking on too much at once. Others believe we haven't done enough. And many Americans are simply wondering how all of our different programs and policies fit together in a single, overarching strategy that will move this economy from recession to recovery and ultimately to prosperity.

So today, I want to step back for a moment and explain our strategy as clearly as I can. This is going to be prose, and not poetry. I want to talk about what we've done, why we've done it, and what we have left to do. I want to update you on the progress we've made, but I also want to be honest about the pitfalls that may still lie ahead.

Most of all, I want every American to know that each action we take and each policy we pursue is driven by a larger vision of America's future—a future where sustained economic growth creates good jobs and rising incomes; a future where prosperity is fueled not by excessive debt, or reckless speculation, or fleeting profits, but is instead built by skilled, productive workers, by sound investments that will spread opportunity at home and allow this nation to lead the world in the technologies and the innovation and discoveries that will shape the 21st century. That's the America I see. That's the America that Georgetown is preparing so many of you for. That is the future that I know that we can have.

Now, to understand how we get there, we first need to understand how we got here.

Recessions are not uncommon. Markets and economies naturally ebb and flow, as we've seen many times in our history. But this recession is different. This recession was not caused by a normal downturn in the business cycle. It was caused by a perfect storm of irresponsibility and poor decision-making that stretched from Wall Street to Washington to Main Street.

As has been widely reported, it started in the housing market. During the course of the decade, the formula for buying a house changed: Instead of saving their pennies to buy their dream house, many Americans found that suddenly they could take out loans that by traditional standards their incomes just could not support. Others were tricked into signing these subprime loans by lenders who were trying to make a quick profit. The reason these loans were so readily available was that Wall Street saw big profits to be made. Investment banks would buy and package together these questionable mortgages into securities, arguing that by pooling the mortgages the risks had somehow been reduced. And credit agencies that are supposed to help investors determine the soundness of various investments stamped the securities with their safest rating when they should have been labeled "Buyer Beware."

No one really knew what the actual value of these securities were, no one fully understood what the risks were. But since the housing market was booming and prices were rising, banks and investors just kept buying and selling them, always passing off the risk to someone else for a greater profit without having to take any of the ultimate responsibility. Banks took on more debt than they could handle.

The government-chartered companies Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, whose traditional mandate was to help support traditional mortgages, decided to get in on the action by buying and holding billions of dollars of these securities. AIG, the biggest insurer in the world that had a very traditional insurance business that was very profitable, decided to make profits suddenly by selling billions of dollars of complicated financial instruments that supposedly insured these securities. Everybody was making record profits—except the wealth created was real only on paper. And as the bubble grew, there was almost no accountability or oversight from anyone in Washington.

Then the housing bubble burst. Home prices fell. People began

families who rely on it.

The heart of this financial crisis is that too many banks and other financial institutions simply stopped lending money. In a climate of fear, banks were unable to replace their losses from some of those bad mortgages by raising new capital on their own, and they were unwilling to lend the money they did have because they were afraid that no one would pay it back. It's for this reason that the last administration used what they called the Troubled Asset Relief Program, or TARP, to provide these banks with temporary financial assistance in order to get them lending again.

Now, I understand that TARP is not popular, and I have to say that I don't agree with some of the ways the TARP program was managed, but I do agree with the broader rationale that we must provide banks with the capital and the confidence necessary to start lending again. That's the purpose of the stress tests that will soon tell us how much additional capital will be needed to support lending at our largest banks. Ideally, these needs will be met by private investors who are willing to put in money to these banks. But where that's not possible, and banks require substantial additional resources from the government, then we will hold accountable those who are responsible, we'll force the necessary adjustments, we'll provide the support to clean up those bank balance sheets, and we will assure the continuity of a strong and viable institution that can serve our people and our economy.

Of course, there are some who differ with our approach. On the one hand, there are some who argue that the government should stand back and simply let these banks fail—especially since in many cases it was their bad decisions that helped create the crisis in the first place. But whether we like it or not, history has shown repeatedly that when nations do not take early and aggressive action to get credit flowing again, they have crises that last years and years instead of months and months—years of low growth, years of low job creation, years of low investment, all of which cost these nations far more than a course of bold, upfront action.

And although there are a lot of Americans who understandably think that government money would be better spent going directly to families and businesses instead of to banks—one of my most frequent questions in the letters that I get from constituents is, "Where's my bailout?"—and I understand the sentiment. It makes sense intuitively, and morally it makes sense, but the truth is that a dollar of capital in a bank can actually result in $8 or $10 of loans to families and businesses. So that's a multiplier effect that can ultimately lead to a faster pace of economic growth. That's why we have to fix the banks.

Now, on the other hand, there have been some who don't dispute that we need to shore up the banking system, but they suggest that we've been too timid in how we go about it. This is essentially the nationalization argument that some of you may have heard. And the argument says that the federal government should have already preemptively stepped in and taken over major financial institutions the way that the FDIC currently intervenes in smaller banks, and that our failure, my administration's failure to do so, is yet another example of Washington coddling Wall Street —"Why aren't you tougher on the banks?"

So let me be clear: The reason we have not taken this step has nothing to do with any ideological or political judgment we've made about government involvement in banks. It's certainly not because of any concern we have for the management and shareholders whose actions helped to cause this mess. Rather, it's because we believe that preemptive government takeovers are likely to end up costing taxpayers even more in the end, and because it's more likely to undermine than create confidence.

Governments should practice the same principle as doctors: First, do no harm. So rest assured—we will do whatever is necessary to get credit flowing again, but we will do so in ways that minimize risks to taxpayers and to the broader economy. To that end, in addition to the program to provide capital to the banks, we've launched a plan that will pair government resources

with private investment in order to clear away the old loans and securities—the so-called toxic assets—that are also preventing our banks from lending money.

Now, what we've also learned during this crisis is that our banks aren't the only institutions affected by these toxic assets that are clogging the financial system. AIG, for example, is not a bank, it's an insurance company, as I mentioned—and yet because it chose to insure billions of dollars worth of risky assets, essentially creating a hedge fund on top of an insurance company, its failure could threaten the entire financial system and freeze lending even more. And that's why, as frustrating as it is—and I promise you, nobody is more frustrated than me with AIG—(laughter)—I promise—we had to provide support for AIG, because the entire system, as fragile as it is, could be profoundly endangered if AIG went into a liquidation bankruptcy.

It's also why we need new legal authority so that we have the power to intervene in such financial institutions, the same way that bankruptcy courts currently do with businesses that hit hard times but don't pose systemic risks—and that way we can restructure these businesses in an orderly way that doesn't induce panic in the financial system—and, by the way, will allow us to restructure inappropriate bonus contracts without creating a perception the government can just change compensation rules on a whim.

This is also why we're moving aggressively to unfreeze markets and jumpstart lending outside the banking system, where more than half of all lending in America actually takes place. To do this, we've started a program that will increase guarantees for small business loans and unlock the market for auto loans and student loans. And to stabilize the housing market, we've launched a plan that will save up to four million responsible homeowners from foreclosure and help many millions more to refinance their homes.

In a few weeks, we will also reassess the state of Chrysler and General Motors, two companies with an important place in our

history and a large footprint in our economy—but two companies that have also fallen on hard times.

Late last year, the companies were given transitional loans by the previous administration to tide them over as they worked to develop viable business plans. Unfortunately, the plans they developed fell short, so we've given them some additional time to work these complex issues through. And by the way, we owed that not to the executives whose bad bets contributed to the weakening of their companies, but to the hundreds of thousands of workers whose livelihoods hang in the balance—entire towns, entire communities, entire states are profoundly impacted by what happens in the auto industry.

Now, it is our fervent hope that in the coming weeks, Chrysler will find a viable partner and GM will develop a business plan that will put it on a path to profitability without endless support from American taxpayer. In the meantime, we're taking steps to spur demand for American cars and provide relief for autoworkers and their communities. And we will continue to reaffirm this nation's commitment to a 21st-century American auto industry that creates new jobs and builds the fuel-efficient cars and trucks that will carry us toward a clean-energy future.

Finally, to coordinate a global response to this global recession, I went to the meeting of the G20 nations in London the other week. Each nation has undertaken significant stimulus to spur demand. All agreed to pursue tougher regulatory reforms. We also agreed to triple the lending capacity of the International Monetary Fund—which, as many of you know, is an international financial institution supported by all the major economies—so that they can provide direct assistance to developing nations and vulnerable populations. That's not just charity; because America's success depends on whether other nations have the ability to buy what we sell, it's important that we pay attention to these emerging markets.

We pledged to avoid the trade barriers and protectionism that

hurts us all in the end. And we decided to meet again in the fall to gauge our progress and take additional steps if necessary.

So that's where we've been, that's what we've done in the last three months. All of these actions—the Recovery Act, the bank capitalization program, the housing plan, the strengthening of the non-bank credit market, the auto plan, and our work at the G20—all have been necessary pieces of the recovery puzzle. They've been designed to increase aggregate demand to get credit flowing again to families and businesses and to help families and businesses ride out the storm. And taken together, these actions are starting to generate signs of economic progress.

Because of our recovery plan, schools and police departments have cancelled planned layoffs; clean energy companies and construction companies are re-hiring workers to build everything from energy-efficient windows to new roads and highways. Our housing plan has helped lead to a spike in the number of homeowners who are taking advantage of historically low mortgage rates by refinancing, which is like putting a $2,000 tax cut in your pocket. Our program to support the market for auto loans and student loans has started to unfreeze this market and securitize more of this lending in the last few weeks. And small businesses are seeing a jump in loan activity for the first time in months.

Now, this is all welcome and encouraging news. It does not mean the hard times are over; 2009 will continue to be a difficult year for America's economy, and obviously, most difficult for those who've lost their jobs. The severity of this recession will cause more job loss, more foreclosures, and more pain before it ends. The market will continue to rise and fall. Credit is still not flowing nearly as easily as it should. The process for restructuring AIG and the auto companies will involve difficult and sometimes unpopular choices; we are not finished yet on that front. And all of this means that there's much more work to be done. But all of this also means that you can continue to expect an unrelenting, unyielding, day-

to their actual job performance—a novel concept—(laughter); rules that protect typical American families when they buy a home, get a credit card or invest in a 401(k). So we've already begun to work with Congress to shape this comprehensive new regulatory framework—and I expect a bill to arrive on my desk for my signature before the year is out.

The second pillar of this new foundation is an education system that finally prepares our workers for a 21st-century economy. You know, in the 20th century, the G.I. Bill helped send a generation to college. For decades we led the world in educational attainment, and as a consequence we led the world in economic growth. But in this new economy, we've come to trail the world's leaders in graduation rates, in educational achievement, in the production of scientists and engineers. That's why we have set a goal that will greatly enhance our ability to compete for the high-wage, high-tech jobs of the 21st century: By 2020, America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world. That is the goal that we have set and we intend to do. (Applause.)

To meet that goal, we have to start early. So we've already dramatically expanded early childhood education. (Applause.) We are investing in innovative programs that have proven to help schools meet high standards and close achievement gaps. We're creating new rewards that tie teachers' performance and new pathways for advancement. And I've asked every American to commit to at least one year or more of higher education or career training, and we have provided tax credits to make a college education more affordable for every American, even those who attend Georgetown. (Applause.)

And, by the way, one of the changes that I would like to see—and I'm going to be talking about this in the weeks to come—is once again seeing our best and our brightest commit themselves to making things—engineers, scientists, innovators. (Applause.) For so long, we have placed at the top of our pinnacle folks who can manipulate numbers and engage in complex financial calculations.

And that's good, we need some of that. (Laughter.) But you know what we can really use is some more scientists and some more engineers, who are building and making things that we can export to other countries. (Applause.)

Now, the third pillar of this new foundation is to harness the renewable energy that can create millions of new jobs and new industries. We all know that the country that harnesses this new energy source will lead the 21st century. Yet we've allowed other countries to outpace us on this race to the future. I don't know about you, but I do not accept a future where the jobs and industries of tomorrow take root beyond our borders. I think it's time for America to lead again.

So the investments we made in the Recovery Act will double this nation's supply of renewable energy in the next three years. (Applause.) And we are putting Americans to work making our homes and buildings more efficient so that we can save billions on our energy bills and grow our economy at the same time.

Now, the only way that we can truly spark the transformation that's needed is through a gradual, market-based cap on carbon pollution, so that clean energy is the profitable kind of energy. (Applause.)

There are those who've argued that we shouldn't attempt, we shouldn't even be thinking, we shouldn't even be talking about such a transition until the economy recovers. And they are right that we have to take into account the costs of transition. Transitioning to a clean energy economy will not be easy. But we can no longer delay putting a framework for a clean energy economy in place. That needs to be done now. (Applause.)

If businesses and entrepreneurs know today that we are closing this carbon pollution loophole, they'll start investing in clean energy now. And pretty soon, we'll see more companies constructing solar panels, and workers building wind turbines, and car companies manufacturing fuel-efficient cars. Investors will put some money into a new energy technology, and a small business

will open to start selling it. That's how we can grow this economy, enhance our security, and protect our planet at the same time.

Now, the fourth pillar of our new foundation is a 21st-century health care system where families, businesses and government budgets aren't dragged down by skyrocketing insurance premiums. (Applause.) One and a half million Americans could lose their homes this year just because of a medical crisis. Major American corporations are struggling to compete with their foreign counterparts. Small businesses are closing their doors. We can't allow the cost of health care to continue strangling our economy.

And that's why our Recovery Act will invest in electronic health records with strict privacy standards that can save money and lives and reduce medical error. That's why we've made the largest investment ever in preventive care, because that's one of the best ways to keep costs under control. And included in the budgets that just passed Congress is an historic commitment to reform that will finally make quality health care affordable for every American. (Applause.) So I'm looking forward in the next few months to working with both parties in Congress to make this reform a reality. We can get this done—and we have to get it done.

Now, fixing our health care system will—will require resources; it's not going to be free. But in my budget we've made a commitment to fully pay for reform without increasing the deficit, and we've identified specific savings that will make the health care system more efficient and reduce costs for us all.

In fact, we've undertaken an unprecedented effort to find this kind of savings in every corner of the budget, because the final pillar in building our new foundation is restoring fiscal discipline once this economy recovers.

Already we've identified $2 trillion in deficit reductions over the next decade. We need to do more, but we've already done that. We've announced procurement reform that will greatly reduce no-bid contracts and save the government $40 billion. We need to do

more, but that's an important start. Secretary Gates recently announced a courageous set of reforms that go right at the hundreds of billions of dollars in waste and cost overruns that have bloated our defense budget without making America safer. We need to do more, but that proposal by Secretary Gates is right on target. We will end education programs that don't work, we will root out waste and fraud and abuse in our Medicare program.

Altogether, this budget will reduce discretionary spending for domestic programs as a share of the economy by more than 10 percent over the next decade to the lowest level we've seen since we began keeping records nearly half a century ago. And as we continue to go through the federal budget line by line, we will be announcing additional savings, secured by eliminating and consolidating programs that we don't need so we can make room for the things that we do need.

That's what we're doing now. Of course, I realize that for some, this isn't enough. I know there's a criticism out there that my administration has been spending with reckless abandon, pushing a liberal social agenda while mortgaging our children's future. You've heard the argument.

Well, let me make three points. First, as I said earlier, the worst thing that we could do in a recession this severe is to try to cut government spending at the same time as families and businesses around the world are cutting back on their spending. So as serious as our deficit and debt problems are—and they are very serious—major efforts to deal with them have to focus on the medium and long-term budget picture, not on the short term. And that's exactly what we've done.

Second, in tackling the deficit issue, we simply cannot sacrifice the long-term investments that we so desperately need to generate long-term prosperity. That's the argument that some critics have made: Well, you're proposing health care reform, you shouldn't be doing that; you're proposing education investments, you shouldn't be doing that, that adds to the deficit.

Look, just as a cash-strapped family may cut back on all kinds of luxuries, but will still insist on spending money to get their children through college, will refuse to have their kids drop out of college and go to work in some fast-food place, even though that might bring in some income in the short term, because they're thinking about the long term—so we as a country have to make current choices with an eye for the future. (Applause.)

If we don't invest now in renewable energy, if we don't invest now in a skilled workforce, if we don't invest now in a more affordable health care system, this economy simply won't grow at the pace it needs to in two or five or 10 years down the road. If we don't lay this new foundation now, it won't be long before we're right back where we are today. And I can assure you that chronically slow growth will not help our long-term budget situation. That's the second point.

Third point, the problem with our deficit and debt is not new. It has been building dramatically over the past eight years, largely because big tax cuts combined with increased spending on two wars and the increased costs of government health care programs have pushed it ever upwards. This structural gap in our budget, between the amount of money that's coming in and the amount of money that's going out, will only get worse as the baby boomers age, and will in fact lead us down an unsustainable path.

But let's not kid ourselves and suggest that we can solve this problem by trimming a few earmarks or cutting the budget for the National Endowment for the Arts. That's just not true. (Applause.) Along with defense and interest on the national debt, the biggest cost drivers in our budget are entitlement programs like Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security—all of which get more and more expensive every year. So if we want to get serious about fiscal discipline, and I do, then we're going to not only have to trim waste out of our discretionary budget—which we've already begun —we will also have to get serious about entitlement reform.

Now, nothing will be more important to this goal than passing

Memorial Day Speech

May 25, 2009

Thank you, Admiral Mullen, for that generous introduction and for your sterling service to our country. To members of our armed forces, to our veterans, to honored guests, and families of the fallen—I am deeply honored to be with you on Memorial Day.

Thank you to the superintendent, John Metzler, Jr., who cares for these grounds just as his father did before him; to the Third Infantry Regiment who, regardless of weather or hour, guard the sanctity of this hallowed ground with the reverence it deserves—we are grateful to you; to service members from every branch of the military who, each Memorial Day, place an American flag before every single stone in this cemetery—we thank you as well. (Applause.) We are indebted—we are indebted to all who tend to this sacred place.

Here lie Presidents and privates; Supreme Court justices and slaves; generals familiar to history, and unknown soldiers known only to God.

A few moments ago, I laid a wreath at their tomb to pay tribute to all who have given their lives for this country. As a nation, we have gathered here to repeat this ritual in moments of peace, when we pay our respects to the fallen and give thanks for their sacrifice. And we've gathered here in moments of war, when the somber notes of Taps echo through the trees, and fresh grief lingers in the air.

Today is one of those moments, where we pay tribute to those

who forged our history, but hold closely the memory of those so recently lost. And even as we gather here this morning, all across America, people are pausing to remember, to mourn, and to pray.

Old soldiers are pulling themselves a little straighter to salute brothers lost a long time ago. Children are running their fingers over colorful ribbons that they know signify something of great consequence, even if they don't know exactly why. Mothers are re-reading final letters home and clutching photos of smiling sons or daughters, as youthful and vibrant as they always will be.

They, and we, are the legacies of an unbroken chain of proud men and women who served their country with honor; who waged war so that we might know peace; who braved hardship so that we might know opportunity; who paid the ultimate price so we might know freedom.

Those who rest in these fields fought in every American war. They overthrew an empire and gave birth to revolution. They strained to hold a young union together. They rolled back the creeping tide of tyranny, and stood post through a long twilight struggle. And they took on the terror and extremism that threatens our world's stability.

Their stories are the American story. More than seven generations of them are chronicled here at Arlington. They're etched into stone, recounted by family and friends, and silently observed by the mighty oaks that have stood over burial after burial.

To walk these grounds then is to walk through that history. Not far from here, appropriately just across a bridge connecting Lincoln to Lee, Union and Confederate soldiers share the same land in perpetuity.

Just down the sweeping hill behind me rest those we lost in World War II, fresh-faced GIs who rose to the moment by unleashing a fury that saved the world. Next week, I'll visit Normandy, the place where our fate hung on an operation unlike any ever attempted, where it will be my tremendous honor to

address some of the brave men who stormed those beaches 65 years ago.

And tucked in a quiet corner to our north are thousands of those we lost in Vietnam. We know for many the casualties of that war endure—right now, there are veterans suffering and families tracing their fingers over black granite not two miles from here. They are why we pledge anew to remember their service and revere their sacrifice, and honor them as they deserve.

This cemetery is in and of itself a testament to the price our nation has paid for freedom. A quarter of a million marble headstones dot these rolling hills in perfect military order, worthy of the dignity of those who rest here. It can seem overwhelming. But for the families of the fallen, just one stone stands out—one stone that requires no map to find.

Today, some of those stones are found at the bottom of this hill in Section 60, where the fallen from Iraq and Afghanistan rest. The wounds of war are fresh in Section 60. A steady stream of visitors leaves reminders of life: photos, teddy bears, favorite magazines. Friends place small stones as a sign they stopped by. Combat units leave bottles of beer or stamp cigarettes into the ground as a salute to those they rode in battle with. Perfect strangers visit in their free time, compelled to tend to these heroes, to leave flowers, to read poetry—to make sure they don't get lonely.

If the fallen could speak to us, what would they say? Would they console us? Perhaps they might say that while they could not know they'd be called upon to storm a beach through a hail of gunfire, they were willing to give up everything for the defense of our freedom; that while they could not know they'd be called upon to jump into the mountains of Afghanistan and seek an elusive enemy, they were willing to sacrifice all for their country; that while they couldn't possibly know they would be called to leave this world for another, they were willing to take that chance to save the lives of their brothers and sisters in arms.

What is thing, this sense of duty? What tugs at a person until

he or she says "Send me"? Why, in an age when so many have acted only in pursuit of the narrowest self-interest, have the soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines of this generation volunteered all that they have on behalf of others? Why have they been willing to bear the heaviest burden?

Whatever it is, they felt some tug; they answered a call; they said "I'll go." That is why they are the best of America, and that is what separates them from those of us who have not served in uniform—their extraordinary willingness to risk their lives for people they never met.

My grandfather served in Patton's Army in World War II. But I cannot know what it is like to walk into battle. I'm the father of two young girls—but I can't imagine what it's like to lose a child. These are things I cannot know. But I do know this: I am humbled to be the Commander-in-Chief of the finest fighting force in the history of the world. (Applause.)

I know that there is nothing I will not do to keep our country safe, even as I face no harder decision than sending our men and women to war—and no moment more difficult than writing a letter to the families of the fallen. And that's why as long as I am President, I will only send our troops into harm's way when it is absolutely necessary, and I will always provide them with the equipment and support they need to get the job done. (Applause.)

I know that military families sacrifice more than we can understand, and feel an absence greater than we can comprehend. And that's why Michelle and I are committed to easing their burden.

And I know what a grateful nation owes to those who serve under its proud flag. And that's why I promise all our servicemen and women that when the guns fall silent, and you do return home, it will be to an America that is forever here for you, just as you've been there for us. (Applause.)

With each death, we are heartbroken. With each death, we grow more determined. This bustling graveyard can be a restless

place for the living, where solace sometimes comes only from meeting others who know similar grief. But it reminds us all the meaning of valor; it reminds us all of our own obligations to one another; it recounts that most precious aspect of our history, and tells us that we will only rise or fall together.

So on this day of silent remembrance and solemn prayer, I ask all Americans, wherever you are, whoever you're with, whatever you're doing, to pause in national unity at 3:00 this afternoon. I ask you to ring a bell, or offer a prayer, say a silent "thank you." And commit to give something back to this nation—something lasting—in their memory; to affirm in our own lives and advance around the world those enduring ideals of justice, equality, and opportunity for which they and so many generations of Americans have given that last full measure of devotion.

God bless you, God bless the fallen, and God bless the United States of America. (Applause.)