

## **SENATOR BARACK OBAMA**

### **NATIONAL PRIORITIES:**

#### **1. Iraq**

**How many US troops and contractors would you leave in Iraq, if any, as part of your disengagement plan, and what would their mission be? Do you see any reason to continue combat operations?**

Let me be clear: there is no military solution in Iraq, and there never was. The best way to protect our security and to pressure Iraq's leaders to resolve their civil war is to immediately begin to remove our combat troops. Not in six months or one year - now.

We should enter into talks with the Iraqi government to discuss the process of our drawdown. We must get out strategically and carefully, removing troops from secure areas first, and keeping troops in more volatile areas until later. But our drawdown should proceed at a steady pace of one or two brigades each month. If we start now, all of our combat brigades should be out of Iraq by the end of next year.

We will need to retain some forces in Iraq and the region. We'll continue to strike at al Qaeda in Iraq. We'll protect our forces as they leave, and we will continue to protect U.S. diplomats and facilities. If - but only if - Iraq makes political progress and their security forces are not sectarian, we should continue to train and equip those forces. But we will set our own direction and our own pace, and our direction must be out of Iraq. The future of our military, our foreign policy, and our national purpose cannot be hostage to the inaction of the Iraqi government.

**What are the basic elements of an effective diplomatic and humanitarian strategy for Iraq and the broader Middle East?**

President Bush likes to warn of the dire consequences of ending the war. He warns of rising Iranian influence, but that has already taken place. He warns of growing terrorism, but that has already taken place. And he warns of huge movements of refugees and mass sectarian killing, but that has already taken place. These are not the consequences of a future withdrawal. They are the reality of Iraq's present. They are a direct consequence of waging this war. Two million Iraqis are displaced in their own country. Another two million Iraqis have fled as refugees to neighboring countries. This mass movement of people is a threat to the security of the Middle East and to our common humanity. We have a strategic interest - and a moral obligation - to act.

The President would have us believe there are two choices: keep all of our troops in Iraq or abandon these Iraqis. I reject that choice. We cannot continue to put this burden on our troops alone. I'm tired of this notion that we either fight foolish wars or retreat from the world. We are better than that as a nation.

There's no military solution that can reunite a family or resettle an orphaned child. It's time to

form an international working group with the countries in the region, our European and Asian friends, and the United Nations. The State Department says it has invested \$183 million on displaced Iraqis this year -- but that is not nearly enough. We can and must do more. We should up our share to at least \$2 billion to support this effort; to expand access to social services for refugees in neighboring countries; and to ensure that Iraqis displaced inside their own country can find safe-haven.

Iraqis must know that those who engage in mass violence will be brought to justice. We should lead in forming a commission at the U.N. to monitor and hold accountable perpetrators of war crimes within Iraq. We must also put strict conditions on U.S. assistance to direct our support to those who want to hold Iraq together - not those who are tearing it apart. The risk of greater atrocities in the short-term cannot deter us from doing what we must to minimize violence in the long-term. Yet as we drawdown, we must declare our readiness to intervene with allies to stop genocidal violence.

We must also keep faith with Iraqis who kept faith with us. One tragic outcome of this war is that the Iraqis who stood with America - the interpreters, embassy workers, and subcontractors - are being targeted for assassination. An Iraqi named Laith who worked for an American organization told a journalist, "Sometimes I feel like we're standing in line for a ticket, waiting to die." And yet our doors are shut. In April, we admitted exactly one Iraqi refugee - just one.

That is not how we treat our friends. That is not how we take responsibility for our own actions. That is not who we are as Americans. It's time to at least fill the 7,000 slots that we pledged to Iraqi refugees and to be open to accepting even more Iraqis at risk. It's also time to go to our friends and allies - and all the members of our original coalition in Iraq - to find homes for the many Iraqis who are in desperate need of asylum.

## 2. America's Role in the World

**When, if ever, is "regime change" a justifiable policy, whether through overt or covert means? And how does the case of Iran fit into your thinking?**

The world must prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. If America does not lead, Iran could trigger regional arms races that could accelerate nuclear proliferation on a global scale and create a dangerous nuclear flashpoint. In pursuit of this goal, we must never take the military option off the table. But our first line of offense here must be sustained, direct and aggressive diplomacy.

**What principles will guide your decisions to intervene in the face of future humanitarian crises?**

No President should ever hesitate to use force – unilaterally if necessary – to protect ourselves and our vital interests when we are attacked or imminently threatened. But when we use force in situations other than self-defense, we should make every effort to garner the clear support and participation of others – the kind of burden-sharing and support President George H.W. Bush mustered before he launched Operation Desert Storm.

And when we do send our men and women into harm's way, we must also clearly define the

mission, prescribe concrete political and military objectives, seek out advice of our military commanders, evaluate the intelligence, plan accordingly, and ensure that our troops have the resources, support, and equipment they need to protect themselves and fulfill their mission.

We must take these steps with the knowledge that while sometimes necessary, force is the costliest weapon in the arsenal of American power in terms of lives and treasure. And it's far from the only measure of our strength.

**Do you favor more Free Trade Agreements, and if so, what would you do to mitigate the risks they pose?**

I will only sign trade agreements that have meaningful labor and environmental standards. Moreover, to mitigate the risks of these deals, it is absolutely critical that the federal government strengthens its program to assist American workers who lose their good jobs to trade-related forces.. My plan will extend trade adjustment assistance to service industries and provide retraining assistance for workers in sectors of the economy vulnerable to dislocation before they lose their jobs. I will also establish a program to provide comprehensive supports to entire communities that have been hard-hit by the loss of a major employer.

**3. Climate Change**

**What mechanisms do you believe would most significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions during your presidency?**

Putting a price on carbon is the most important step we can take to reduce emissions. As president, my first priority to combat global warming will be enacting an economy-wide market-based cap-and-trade system to reduce U.S. carbon emissions by 80 percent by 2050. I will also devote significant resources from a permit auction toward accelerating the development and deployment of low carbon technologies, addressing the economic challenges imposed on key industrial sectors, and providing meaningful incentives for action by developing countries.

Another top priority for my energy and global warming agenda will be changing the cars we drive and the fossil fuels we burn. This is not simply an important part of the next president's environmental agenda. Reducing our dependence on foreign oil is equally critical to our national security. I will increase fuel efficiency standards by 4% per year, and lift the 60,000-per-manufacturer cap on buyer tax credits to encourage more Americans to buy ultra-efficient vehicles; and encourage automakers to make fuel-efficient hybrid vehicles. Domestic automakers will get either assistance shouldering their health care legacy costs in exchange for investing 50 percent of the savings into technology to produce more fuel-efficient vehicles or generous tax incentives for retooling assembly plants.

To further change the fuels we burn, I proposed a National Low Carbon Fuel Standard that will reduce the lifecycle greenhouse gas emissions of passenger vehicle fuels sold in the U.S. by 10 percent in 2020 and require additional reductions of 1% annually thereafter.

**What is your proposal to protect the poor from potentially expensive strategies for mitigating climate change?**

I believe that tackling global climate change is not only one of the most serious challenges our

world faces, but also a significant opportunity for America to revitalize our national economy for the benefit of all Americans. I support a market-based cap-and-trade system to reduce carbon emissions by 80 percent by 2050. This cap-and-trade system will include an initial partial auction of pollution credits to raise money that will be invested to upgrade our energy infrastructure, create hundreds of thousands of new, high-wage jobs, and make America truly energy independent. My plan will target investments to industries, workers and consumers that are hardest hit by the emissions regulations and the effects of global warming.

I also believe that low-income communities should be at the forefront of energy efficiency and new technologies – they should not be left behind. I have called for the creation of the 5-E (“Energy Efficiency, Environmental Education and Employment”) Disconnected Youth Service Corps. This program will directly engage disconnected and disadvantaged youth in energy efficiency and environmental service opportunities to strengthen their communities while also providing them with practical skills and experience in important career fields of expected high-growth employment. The program will also encourage summer high school students to stay in school, and provides GED help and other wrap-around social services for drop-outs.

#### **4. Immigration**

**What would you add to the recent immigration proposal in Congress? What elements do you support, and what elements do you oppose? How would you achieve political consensus for your policy?**

We need comprehensive immigration reform that creates a system that is fair, consistent, compassionate, and emphasizes both maintaining the rule of law and the security of our borders while working to keep families together. I will not stop pushing Congress to pass comprehensive reform this year.

In the most recent immigration debate on the U.S. Senate floor, I fought to improve and pass amendments to put greater emphasis on keeping immigrant families together and to revisit a controversial new points system that never received a proper public hearing. On security, comprehensive reform has to mean gaining operational control of our borders by using better technology, improving infrastructure, and making smart choices about where we deploy resources on the Southern and Northern borders. These actions can strengthen our security while discouraging people from taking the risk of crossing the border illegally. And at the workplace, we need a simple, but mandatory electronic system that enables employers to verify the legal status of the people they hire.

If President Bush cannot lead on this issue, I will, by reviving our national discussion on comprehensive reform in my first year in the White House and working diligently toward a solution rooted in pragmatism, the rule of law, and our history as a nation of immigrants.

#### **5. New Orleans**

**What role should the federal government play in the restoration of New Orleans to ensure that all of its people benefit?**

As president, I will keep the broken promises made by President Bush to rebuild New Orleans and the Gulf Coast. And I will take steps to ensure that the federal government will never again allow such catastrophic failures in emergency planning and response to occur. And we have to make sure that local communities have the federal resources they need to ensure that all New Orleans residents can return to their homes, have adequate opportunities for employment in the reconstruction of New Orleans, have safe and productive schools, access to medical facilities, and live in safe neighborhoods.

I will ensure that New Orleans residents fulfill their right to return to their homes by increasing funding for the Road Home Program and establishing a process for approving all Road Home applications within two months. I'll also work to increase the supply of rental property, which is particularly important in New Orleans where 57 percent of pre-Katrina residents were renters. And I'll fight so that more Katrina-related recovery or reconstruction activities can be done by local residents. These measures would ensure that Gulf Coast residents, and not big corporations, will rebuild their communities.

I will also help communities in the Gulf make necessary school infrastructure investments so all kids from all backgrounds have safe and supportive environments to learn. In addition, I will rebuild broken medical facilities and provide incentives, such as loan forgiveness, to lure medical professionals back to the region. It is critical that we establish a major medical complex in downtown New Orleans that will serve the entire community.

Finally, I will finish rebuilding the region's criminal justice system so that we do not have to rely on the National Guard to patrol city streets. I will establish a special "COPS for Katrina" program to allow communities impacted by the storm to hire and retain new officers and community prosecutors, develop community-based crime fighting strategies, and rebuild their lost infrastructure. And I will strengthen Drug Enforcement Administration efforts to stop the reestablishment of drug gangs across the region and help local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies come together to establish an integrated regional crime control partnership so that each police chief and sheriff doesn't have to face these crime problems alone.

## **6. Urban Revitalization**

**What strategies should the federal government use to preserve and uplift working and middle-class communities in our inner cities? How would you empower these communities to actively participate in their development, rather than being the targets of top-down approaches?**

As a former community organizer who worked closely with working families on the South Side of Chicago, I understand firsthand the importance of empowering individuals to change their communities. I have always believed that real change happens from the bottom up, and that ordinary people can do extraordinary things when they come together and organize.

As president, I will build off of my experiences working on the ground by implementing and increasing funding for grant programs that local communities organize to apply for and take the reins in designing programs that suit their unique needs. I will fully fund the Community

Development Block Grant program and create an Affordable Housing Trust Fund. I will increase funding for local and state-based transitional jobs and career pathways programs and I'll provide greater supports for community programs that help ex-offenders and their families. I will also create the first White House Office of Urban Policy and the newly-created Director of Urban Policy will report directly to me precisely because urban revitalization will be a high priority in an Obama administration.

I have also called for the creation of a new grant program that empowers local communities to replicate the success of the Harlem Children's Zone – an all-encompassing, all-hands-on-deck anti-poverty effort that is literally saving a generation of children in a neighborhood where they were never supposed to have a chance. As president, an important part of my plan to combat poverty will be to replicate the Harlem Children's Zone in twenty cities across the country. These "Promise Neighborhoods" will focus on addressing concentrated, intergenerational poverty in our cities. Each community will draw up their own detailed plans in consultation with local community leaders, residents and small businesses and the federal government will provide half of the funding so the local communities have a large stake in the success of each project as well.

I also believe the federal government has the responsibility to level the playing field for working and middle-class families by reforming our federal tax code, which has become increasingly unfair and increasing the minimum wage and Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) benefits. It's fundamentally unfair that while CEO pay has been skyrocketing, average worker's wages have stayed essentially flat. As president, I will take on wealthy and corporate special interests which have received countless tax breaks and favorable regulations because of their ability to spend billions on high-priced lobbyists. In an Obama administration, all Americans will have equal access to the decision-making table.

## 7. Economic Security

**What steps will you take to protect working and middle class Americans from economic insecurity caused by globalization and catastrophic debt? What role should organized labor play in a global economy?**

As president, I will fight to modernize our government's policies and practices to secure and expand the middle class in an era of decentralizing workplaces, a changing workforce, and global labor markets. I will fight to assure that incomes rise and inequality narrows; that workers are prepared to compete in global competition but do not suffer from undue risk shifting; that workers have the flexibility to navigate work and family; that workplaces are fair and safe and welcome every worker's contributions; and that international labor rights are strong and enforced. I will fight to guarantee that all Americans have affordable access to health care, to protect workers' pensions, to expand retirement security, fair and sensible mortgage options, and to assure that our children receive a quality public school education.

I believe we need an aggressive strategy to retain and create good, middle-class jobs. We must double federal funding for basic research, expand the deployment of broadband technology, and make the research and development tax credit permanent so that businesses can invest in innovation and create high-paying, secure jobs. I will also make long-term investments in education, training, and workforce development so that Americans can leverage our strengths – our ingenuity and entrepreneurialism – to create new, high-wage jobs and prosper in a world economy. And I will invest in making college education affordable for working families so that every child can reach the limits of his or her capacity.

I will also modernize the existing system of trade adjustment assistance by improving and extending such help to service industries, creating flexible education accounts that workers could use to retrain, and providing retraining assistance for workers in sectors of the economy vulnerable to dislocation before they lose their jobs. Perhaps most importantly, I would stop our government's practice of enriching companies with billions of dollars in tax giveaways when they move their operations overseas. I will fight to ensure that public contracts are awarded to companies that are committed to American workers.

Organized labor give workers a voice in the workplace, our political process, and our public policy debates. Simply, unions give workers a voice in deciding their future. For these reasons, they are essential to our democracy and our economy. I co-sponsored the Employee Free Choice Act because I firmly believe that workers should choose whether they want to join a union without fear of intimidation, coercion, or threats to their livelihoods. As president, I would work to assure its passage and sign it into law. EFCA is a starting point, but there is more to do. I will use the bully pulpit of the presidency to educate our country about the important role of unions. And I will use my power to appoint members of the National Labor Relations Board who understand the situation of working families and respect their desire to organize.

## 8. Healthcare

**Do you support a national single payer health care system, and if not, what is your alternative? What role would private and/or employer sponsored health insurance play? How would you overcome the political obstacles to your plan?**

I believe that every American has the right to affordable, comprehensive and portable health coverage. My plan will guarantee coverage for every American through partnerships among employers, private health plans, the federal government, and the states. My plan both builds on and improves our current insurance system, which most Americans continue to rely upon, and leaves Medicare intact for older and disabled Americans. Under my plan, Americans will be able to maintain their current coverage if they choose to, and will see the quality of their health care improve and their costs go down. My plan also addresses the large gaps in coverage that leave 45 million Americans uninsured. Specifically, my plan will: (1) establish a new public insurance program, available to Americans who neither qualify for Medicaid or SCHIP nor have access to insurance through their employers, as well as to small businesses that want to offer insurance to their employees; (2) create a National Health Insurance Exchange to help Americans and businesses that want to purchase private health insurance directly; (3) require all employers to contribute towards health coverage for their employees or towards the cost of the public plan ; (4) mandate that all children have health care coverage; (5) expand eligibility for the Medicaid and SCHIP programs; and (6) allow flexibility for state health reform plans.

I have a proven record on expanding access to affordable health care. . In the Illinois State Senate, I spearheaded successful legislation to extend health care coverage to 70,000 additional children and 84,000 additional parents. We are not short on ideas to address the problem, but what we have lacked is consensus and political will. Solving our health care crisis depends on transforming our politics.

## 9. National Debt

**What would you do to reduce near-record debt and deficits that threaten our national economic security?**

I will put America back on track to fiscal responsibility by repealing the Bush tax cuts for the wealthiest of Americans, ending abuse of corporate tax havens and tax shelters, cutting wasteful federal spending including excessive pork barrel projects, and reinstating federal pay-as-you-go (PAYGO) budget rules which ensures that all government commitments and tax cuts are paid for. I will also work to fix our tax system to help the middle-class, which includes increasing access to the child tax credit, permanently reforming the AMT and examining reforms to the payroll tax. My priorities will not increase the deficit. I will pay for each of the investments I call for by either cutting other spending or finding new revenue sources. If in the end I can't find enough offsets to fund all of my priorities, I will prioritize them. I will protect the tax cuts for the middle class, but I will repeal the unnecessary tax cuts for oil and gas companies and for the wealthiest Americans.

## 10. Civil Rights/Civil Liberties

**Does a national security crisis justify the use of secret detention facilities, extraordinary rendition, suspension of habeas corpus, and violations of international standards of interrogation? If not, what would you do to reverse these departures from the rule of law?**

When I am President, America will reject torture without exception. America is the country that stood against that kind of behavior, and we will do so again. I also will reject a legal framework that does not work. There has been only one conviction at Guantanamo. It was for a guilty plea on material support for terrorism. The sentence was 9 months. There has not been one conviction of a terrorist act. As president, I will close Guantanamo, reject the Military Commissions Act (which I voted against), and adhere to the Geneva Conventions. Our Constitution and laws such as our Uniform Code of Military Justice provide an adequate legal framework for dealing with the terrorists. Finally, I will restore the ancient right of habeas corpus.

The next president will have to show that, in America, law is not subject to the whims of stubborn rulers, and that justice is not arbitrary. That The Administration has put forward a false choice between adhering to domestic and international law and providing security to the American people. These legal regimes exist precisely to keep us safe, and I will make clear that my Administration has faith in the rule of law.

**Do you support same sex marriage (as opposed to civil unions)? If not, please explain the reason(s) for your opposition.**

I believe civil unions should include the same legal rights that accompany a marriage license. I support the notion that all people – gay or straight – deserve the same rights and responsibilities to assist their loved ones in times of emergency, deserve equal health insurance and other employment benefits currently extended to traditional married couples, and deserve the same property rights as anyone else.

However, I do not support same-sex marriage. Marriage has religious and social connotations, and I consider marriage to be between a man and a woman. If I was President, however, I would oppose any effort to stifle a state's ability to decide this question on its own. Whether it was a Constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage or a bill like the Defense of Marriage Act, I would oppose such efforts. I think the President should do all he or she can to advance strong families. Whatever the make-up of the family, it is the President's role to provide policies and leadership that enable the family to thrive.

**What would you do to restore the integrity of our election system? Do you think electronic voting is inherently unreliable, and what is your view on current legislation?**

I think we need to do everything we can to regain the trust and confidence in our electoral system that has been lost in recent years, and voter-verification should be a top priority in that effort. I think we should require the use of accessible paper trail systems at every polling place that uses electronic voting machines. I also believe that a paper trail requirement will be most effective if we combine it with a system of reasonable manual audits. I am cosponsor of legislation in the Senate that would implement these systems within the next few years

In addition to restoring voter confidence in the accuracy of our elections, we have to make sure that the fundamental right to vote remains open to everyone – so that all Americans have equal, unfettered access to the polls. For too many elections, misinformation and intimidation have kept thousands of Americans from voting. During the 2006 election, for example, thousands of Latino voters in Orange County, California received letters telling them that immigrants who voted would be jailed - implying that this even applied to naturalized citizens. In Maryland, voters received fabricated sample Democratic ballots that featured Republican candidates for governor and senator. And in Virginia, voters were phoned by a fraudulent "Virginia Elections Commission" claiming they were ineligible to vote. These tactics most often target vulnerable communities, such as minorities, the elderly, and the disabled.

That's why I introduced the Deceptive Practices and Voter Intimidation Act. The bill, which recently passed the Senate Judiciary Committee, will make voter intimidation and election misinformation punishable by law, and contains strong penalties for those who commit these crimes. Furthermore, it would establish a process for providing misinformed voters with accurate information so they can cast their votes in time.

#### **DC PRIORITIES:**

**If the DC House Voting Rights Act passes the Senate, will you commit to join a bipartisan delegation to meet President Bush and urge him to sign the bill?**

Yes. I am a co-sponsor of the Senate bill that will provide the District of Columbia with voting representation in the House of Representatives. I consider passage of this bill to be an important step toward justice. In our great democracy, it's a shame that residents of the District who pay taxes, fight in wars, and enjoy the same rights as every other American have no voting representation in our nation's capital. I will continue to champion this issue.

**If the DC House Voting Rights Act does not pass or has not yet come up for a vote in the Senate, will you commit to meet with at least one senator who is undecided on the DC House Voting Rights Act to persuade him/her to support the bill?**

Yes.

#### **LEADERSHIP:**

**Describe the most significant achievement of your life, something that demonstrates your ability to lead large numbers of people in the accomplishment of important goals.**

My tenure in the Illinois State Senate demonstrates my ability to bring people together to achieve lasting change. In so doing, I was able to pass the toughest ethics reform law in 25 years, reform a broken death penalty system, provide health care to over 150,000 children and their parents, and give working families over \$100 million of tax relief in the form of the Earned Income Tax Credit.

**Do you call yourself a progressive? If so, what values make you one? What are your proudest achievements in progressive politics?**

I am proud to call myself a progressive. I believe that, while it can't solve all of our problems, government has an important role to play in opening up opportunity to all Americans. At the heart of my progressivism is a belief that we are connected as one people. This notion, as I said in my 2004 DNC Convention speech, is best expressed in the notion that "I am my brother's keeper, I am my sister's keeper." As a consequence of these values, I strongly believe that government has a vital role to play in addressing the critical problems that plague our nation: the lack of universal health care, poverty, global warming, the energy crisis, or the need to fix our education system.

**Name the qualities that make you appealing to independents and moderate Republicans.**

Like Democrats, Republicans and Independents are hungry for change. They too are tired of the same old partisan fights and re-litigation of decades-old battles. And they are just as hungry for a politics that puts the people's interests above special interests. For these reasons, I think the same qualities that make my candidacy appealing to Democrats will make me attractive to Republicans. And one of those qualities is a willingness to listen to opposing sides when people disagree with me – and not belittle or demagogue their concerns. I have demonstrated this quality throughout my career and have learned that what unites us is far more substantial than what divides us. That's why I was able to work with Republicans in Illinois to pass the most significant ethics reform in our state's history. That's why I was able to extend health care to 154,000 children and adults. And that's why I was able to cross party lines to reform a broken death penalty system and to create an Earned Income Tax Credit to help working families throughout my home state. For me, I don't just talk the talk about the need to build consensus and work across party lines in pursuit of a progressive agenda. I have done just that throughout my career, and I will continue to do the same as president.