

BARACK OBAMA: DEDICATED TO IMPROVING WOMEN'S LIVES

"From the first moment a woman dared to speak that hope - dared to believe that the American Dream was meant for her too - ordinary women have taken on extraordinary odds to give their daughters the chance for something else; for a life more equal, more free, and filled with more opportunity than they ever had. In so many ways we have succeeded, but in so many areas we have much work left to do."

[Speech in Washington, DC, 11/10/05]

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS

HEALTH CARE

Fixing the Nation's Health Care System: More than 19 million women are uninsured in this country, and women are more likely than men to delay or not get medical care because of high costs. Barack Obama is committed to ensuring that all Americans have health care coverage by the end of his first term in office. Obama's plan will encourage insurers and providers to adopt electronic claims systems, electronic medical records, and patient safety reporting systems. These improvements will reduce administrative costs and health care inefficiencies such as duplicative testing and medical errors, which in turn will reduce costly medical malpractice lawsuits. These common sense steps will cut overall health-care costs by up to 10 percent or more.

Empowering Women to Prevent HIV/AIDS: In the United States, the percentage of women diagnosed with AIDS has quadrupled over the last twenty years. Today, women account for more than one quarter of all new HIV/AIDS diagnoses. Women of color are especially hard hit: In 2004, HIV infection was the leading cause of death for African-American women between the ages of 25 and 34. Around the world, 7,000 women are infected with HIV every day. Barack Obama has been a leader in the global fight against AIDS. He introduced the Microbicide Development Act, which will accelerate the development of products that empower women in the battle against AIDS. Microbicides are a class of products currently under development that women apply topically to prevent transmission of HIV and other infections.

Supporting Research into Women's Health: Heart disease is the leading cause of death among women, accounting for nearly 39 percent of all female deaths. Studies show that after a first heart attack, women are less likely than men to receive diagnostic, therapeutic, and cardiac rehabilitation procedures, and are more likely to die or have a second heart attack. Women are also more likely than men to report having arthritis, asthma, autoimmune diseases, and depression. Health care disparities among minority and poor women are especially pervasive. Barack Obama has fought to maintain funding for the Centers of Excellence in Women's Health at the Department of Health and Human Services. He also supports legislation to encourage research that will examine gender and health disparities. The same legislation would establish community outreach programs in underserved areas to help women access health care and maintain healthy lifestyles.

Fighting Cancer: Ovarian cancer is the fourth-leading cause of cancer-related death among women in the United States. Because of the lack of early symptoms or a proven screening test, ovarian cancer also has the highest mortality of all cancers of the female reproductive system. Barack Obama is an original co-sponsor of Johanna's Law. Signed into law in January 2007, the law will educate women and increase awareness of ovarian cancer. Obama has also supported efforts to combat breast cancer, another leading cause of death among women. He helped pass legislation in the Illinois State Senate to expand insurance coverage for mammograms.

Reducing Health Risks Due to Mercury Pollution: More than five million women of childbearing age have high levels of toxic mercury in their blood and more than 630,000 newborns are born every year at risk. The EPA estimates that every year, more than one child in six could be at risk for developmental disorders because of mercury exposure in the mother's womb. Since the primary sources of mercury in fish are power plant

emissions that contaminate our water, regulation of utility emissions is essential to protecting the health of our children. Barack Obama introduced two pieces of legislation to significantly reduce the amount of mercury that is deposited in oceans, lakes, and rivers, which in turn would reduce the amount of mercury in fish.

Supporting Stem Cell Research: Barack Obama believes that we owe it to the American public to explore the potential of stem cells to treat the millions of people suffering from debilitating and life-threatening diseases. Obama is a co-sponsor of the Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act of 2007, which would allow research of human embryonic stem cells derived from embryos donated (with consent) from *in vitro* fertilization clinics. These embryos must be deemed in excess and created based solely for the purpose of fertility treatment.

REPRODUCTIVE CHOICE

Supports a Woman's Right to Choose: Barack Obama understands that abortion is a divisive issue, and respects those who disagree with him. However, he has been a consistent champion of reproductive choice and will make preserving women's rights under *Roe v. Wade* a priority as President. Barack Obama opposes late-term abortions, but believes that there must be exceptions for the life and health of the mother.

Opposes Constitutional Amendment: Barack Obama opposes any constitutional amendment to overturn the Supreme Court's abortion rights ruling in the *Roe v. Wade* case.

Preventing Unwanted Pregnancy: Barack Obama is an original co-sponsor of legislation to expand access to contraception, health information and preventive services to help reduce unintended pregnancies. Introduced in January 2007, the Prevention First Act will increase funding for family planning and comprehensive sex education that teaches both abstinence and safe sex methods. The Act will also end insurance discrimination against contraception, improve awareness about emergency contraception, and provide compassionate assistance to rape victims.

Protecting Against Violent Activists: Barack Obama supports the enactment and enforcement of laws that help prevent violence, intimidation and harassment directed at reproductive health providers and their patients.

PREVENTING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Reducing Domestic Violence: One in four women will experience domestic violence in her lifetime. Family violence accounted for 11 percent of all violence between 1998 and 2002. Barack Obama introduced legislation to combat domestic violence by providing \$25 million a year for partnerships between domestic violence prevention organizations and Fatherhood or Marriage programs to train staff in domestic violence services, provide services to families affected by domestic violence, and to develop best practices in domestic violence prevention.

Strengthening Domestic Violence Laws: Approximately 1,400 women a year – four every day – die in the United States as a result of domestic violence. And 132,000 women report that they have been victims of a rape or attempted rape, and it is estimated that an even greater number have been raped, but do not report it. Senator Obama co-sponsored and helped reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act. Signed into law in January 2006, the bill funds and helps communities, nonprofit organizations, and police combat domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking. The legislation establishes a sexual assault services program and provides education grants to prevent domestic violence.

Fighting Gender Violence Abroad: The genocide in Darfur has had particularly devastating consequences for women. Tens of thousands of women have been killed, raped, and displaced since the conflict began in 2003. Barack Obama has been a leading voice in Washington urging the end of genocide in Sudan. He worked with Senator Sam Brownback (R-KS) on the Darfur Peace and Accountability Act, a version of which was signed

into law. Obama has traveled to the United Nations to meet with Sudanese officials and visited refugee camps on the Chad-Sudan border to raise international awareness of the ongoing humanitarian disaster there. He also worked with Senator Harry Reid (D-NV) to secure \$20 million for the African Union peacekeeping mission.

ECONOMIC ISSUES

Fighting for Pay Equity: Despite decades of progress, women still make only 77 cents for every dollar a man makes. A recent study estimates it will take another 47 years for women to close the wage gap with men at Fortune 500 corporate offices. Barack Obama believes the government needs to take steps to better enforce the Equal Pay Act, fight job discrimination, and improve child care options and family medical leave to give women equal footing in the workplace.

Expanding Paid Medical Leave: Today, three-out-of-four low-wage workers have no paid sick leave. It is fundamentally unfair that a single mom playing by the rules can get fired or lose wages because her child gets sick. Barack Obama supports efforts to guarantee workers seven days of paid sick leave per year, a moderate proposal that should not impose too onerous a burden on employers.

Investing in Women-Owned Small Businesses: Women are majority owners of more than 28 percent of U.S. businesses, but head less than 4 percent of venture-capital-backed firms. Women business owners are more likely than white male business owners to have their loan applications denied. Barack Obama encourages investing in women-owned businesses, providing more support to women business owners and reducing discrimination in lending.

Expanding Women's Share of Federal Contracts: Thirteen years ago, Congress set a goal that women-owned small businesses receive 5 percent of the federal contract dollars that are awarded. Since then, the closest we have come is 2.89 percent. In order to reach this goal, Barack Obama will increase special outreach to women-owned businesses and set-aside programs.

Protecting Social Security: Americans are increasingly at risk of working their entire lives only to face retirement in poverty. Barack Obama believes we need to preserve the character of Social Security by stopping any efforts to privatize social security. Obama also will work in a bipartisan way to maintain Social Security's solvency for future generations.

Encouraging Retirement Saving: The personal saving rate is at its lowest level since the Great Depression. Only 55 percent of Americans working full-time hold a job with a retirement savings plan; the percentage is even lower for women. As of March 2005, less than half of the 60 million wage and salaried women working in the United States participated in a retirement plan. Barack Obama wants to make retirement saving easier, cheaper, and more automatic for middle-class and working people who get only minor tax benefits to save and who are the ones that really need the money. Obama co-sponsored with Senator Jeff Bingaman (D-NM) the Save More for Retirement Act, which provides incentives for automatic enrollment in 401Ks. One study has found that, among employees with less than 15 months tenure, automatic enrollment increased participation from 12 percent to 79 percent for workers with annual earnings of less than \$20,000.

Improving Child Support Collection: Less than half of parents collecting child support receive the full payments they are due. More than \$11 billion in child support goes unpaid every year. Barack Obama introduced legislation to increase child support enforcement by an additional \$4.9 billion over 10 years, a measure that will collect nearly \$20 billion in payments from men who don't fulfill their parental responsibilities. The bill also makes sure that states pass through 100 percent of collected child support payments to families.

NATIONAL SECURITY

Ending the War in Iraq: There are 202,000 women serving on active duty and 64,000 serving in the Guard and Reserves. Scores of female troops have died in Iraq and hundreds more have been injured. Barack Obama opposed the war from the beginning and has introduced legislation that would begin a phased withdrawal starting May 2007, with a goal of removing all of our combat troops by March of 2008. Realizing there can be no military solution in Iraq, Obama's plan focuses instead on reaching a political solution in Iraq, protecting our interests in the region, and bringing this war to a responsible end.

Caring for Women Veterans: There are 1.7 million women veterans today, a number that is increasing every day. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) that was built to care for World War II veterans is not ready to handle the influx of women veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan. As a member of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, Barack Obama has introduced legislation to force the Pentagon and VA to better track the newest generation of veterans – including the number of women veterans – so that the VA can better plan their care. Obama also introduced legislation to fight homelessness among veterans, with a special focus on treating women who may have been victims of sexual trauma. Along with Senator Claire McCaskill, Obama has also co-sponsored legislation to provide funding for additional caseworkers and mental health counselors, a women's mental health treatment program, and a comprehensive mental health study of returning soldiers. As president, Barack Obama will fight to ensure that women can get the care they deserve at the VA.

POVERTY

Fighting Poverty: Of the 37 million Americans living below the poverty line, approximately 14.6 million are women — a staggering number equal to the combined populations of Iowa, Indiana, and Wisconsin. And nearly 13 million children are living in poverty, a rise of 1.3 million since 2000. Barack Obama is committed to a renewed effort to tackle the underlying problems that cause poverty.

Raising the Minimum Wage: Barack Obama believes that people who work full time should not live in poverty. The minimum wage hasn't been changed in nine years and has less purchasing power in real dollars than it did in 1955. Women are the largest group of beneficiaries from a minimum wage increase: 60 percent of the workers who would benefit from an increase to \$7.25 are women. As President, Barack Obama would raise the minimum wage, index it to inflation, and increase the Earned Income Tax Credit to make sure that full-time workers have a living wage.

Helping Low-Income Workers: Transitional jobs are a promising way to help chronically unemployed people break into the workplace. This approach places participants into temporary, subsidized wage-paying jobs. It also offers mentoring and social services designed to address the work-blocking problems like personal and family conflicts. Once they find entry-level work, low-income workers often are unable to break into middle-class jobs. Bridge programs can help by partnering the federal government with employers and community-based organizations to identify job opportunities, develop customized training programs, and place low-income employees in better jobs. Barack Obama introduced legislation to devote \$50 million for transitional and bridge employment programs for hard-to-employ groups like homeless veterans, children aging out of foster care, and people returning to communities after serving time in prison.

Supporting Low-Income Families: Barack Obama has a long history of helping working families achieve economic self-sufficiency. As a State Senator, Obama sponsored and passed the Illinois Earned Income Tax Credit for the working poor, one of the most effective tools devised to move people out of poverty. As a U.S. Senator, Obama worked with Senator Olympia Snowe (R-WA) to introduce legislation lowering the Child Tax Credit's income limit so that 600,000 more families can benefit. The Child Tax Credit allows parents to receive \$1,000 per child and has been an important financial resource for working families. Unfortunately, the credit is

skewed so that many families who need it the most cannot get it. Because of artificially high income limits that are indexed to inflation every year, parents that work full-time at minimum wage are not eligible for the credit. As a result, nearly 17 million low-income children get less than the full credit. Barack Obama has also introduced legislation that would provide immediate tax relief to low-income working families from the Hurricane Katrina disaster areas by enhancing the refundable portion of the Child Tax Credit.

Improving Afterschool and Daycare Opportunities: Millions of American families are struggling to juggle job and family responsibilities. Many low-income parents struggle to maintain employment and afford childcare. Barack Obama has sponsored legislation in the Illinois Senate to establish grants for after-school programs. He believes in increasing federal support for after-school programs with proven records of success at helping children avoid crime and drugs.

EDUCATION

Protecting Title IX: Barack Obama supports eliminating gender discrimination in American schools. For 35 years, Title IX has been a bulwark against sex discrimination against students and employees at all levels of education. Obama will fight to make sure women have equal opportunities and access from pre-kindergarten through graduate school.

Expanding Early Childhood Education: Research shows that half of low-income children start school up to two years behind their peers in preschool skills and that these early achievement gaps continue throughout elementary school. Barack Obama supports increasing funding for the Head Start program to provide preschool children with critically important learning skills, and supports the necessary role of parental involvement in the success of Head Start. He has also called on states to replicate the Illinois model of Preschool for All.

Promoting Women in Math and Science: Women constitute 45 percent of the workforce in the U.S., but hold just 12 percent of science and engineering jobs in business and industry. Women also make up just 9 percent of the recipients of engineering-related bachelor's degrees. Barack Obama believes that every student should have equal access to education in math, science, and technology in order to compete on a global scale.

Improving Our Schools: Barack Obama introduced a plan to support school districts that try new methods to improve student achievement and reward effective teachers and school leaders. Under his initiative, 20 districts across the country will get grants to develop innovative plans in consultation with their teacher unions. High-performing teachers, and those who take on new responsibilities such as mentoring new teachers, will be eligible for pay increases beyond their base salary. Effective school leadership and effective teaching can improve both the work environment for teachers and learning environment for students. These innovation districts will show results that can be replicated in other school districts.

Making College More Affordable: College tuition rates are rising almost 10 percent a year. Because of these rising prices, over 200,000 students were priced out of college altogether in 2004. Across the country, 5.3 million students use Pell Grants to help finance their college educations. Two decades ago, the maximum grant covered 55 percent of costs at a public four-year college, compared with only 32 percent today. The first bill Barack Obama introduced in the U.S. Senate would help make college more affordable. The bill would increase the maximum Pell Grant from the current limit of \$4,050 to a new maximum of \$5,100. In February 2007, Congress passed and President Bush signed into law legislation to increase federal Pell Grants to \$4,310. Barack Obama will continue to fight for ways to make a college education more accessible and affordable.