



## BARACK OBAMA: WORKING FOR THE ASIAN AMERICAN AND PACIFIC ISLANDER COMMUNITY

*"As the child of a black man and a white woman, someone who was born in the racial melting pot of Hawaii, with a sister who's half Indonesian but who's usually mistaken for Mexican or Puerto Rican, and a brother-in-law and niece of Chinese descent...I've never had the option of restricting my loyalties on the basis of race, or measuring my worth on the basis of tribe. Moreover, I believe that part of America's genius has always been its ability to absorb newcomers, to forge a national identity out of the disparate lot that arrived on our shores."*  
[The Audacity of Hope]

### BARACK OBAMA AND ASIAN AMERICANS AND PACIFIC ISLANDERS

#### EDUCATION

**Reform and Fund No Child Left Behind:** There are 2.4 million Asian American and Pacific Islander children enrolled in K-12 schools. The goal of the No Child Left Behind Act is the right one – ensuring that all children can meet high standards – but the law has significant flaws that need to be addressed. Unfulfilled funding promises, inadequate implementation by the Department of Education, and shortcomings in the design of the law itself have limited its effectiveness and undercut its support among many people who care deeply about our schools and our students. Barack Obama would reform and fund No Child Left Behind.

**Improve Opportunities for English-Language Learners:** One in every ten public school students is an English language learner. Of the ten most commonly spoken languages in America's schools, six of them are Asian. There is a substantial need for programs and funding to assist the many AAPI students who must learn English as they learn other subjects. This student population faces significant hurdles to a quality education, and states are not adequately keeping track of their progress. Barack Obama will ensure schools monitor the progress of students learning English and will hold schools accountable for making sure these students complete school.

**Support Learning Opportunities for Immigrants:** Under current law, students who were brought to the United States years ago as undocumented immigrant children and who have stayed and excelled in and out of school have no hope of attending college with affordable in-state tuition. Barack Obama has been a cosponsor and longtime supporter of the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act, which would allow states to provide in-state college tuition to undocumented students who grew up in the United States. Barack Obama wants to see the DREAM Act become law so every child can have access to a quality, affordable education.

**Give More High Schoolers Access to College Courses:** Students who participate in Advanced Placement (AP) programs and take college-level courses in high school are much more likely to succeed in college. While enrollment in AP courses has nearly tripled over the past decade, many minority students attend schools that do not offer AP classes. Barack Obama introduced legislation to allow exceptional students who do not have access to college-level courses at their high schools to seek college credit elsewhere with need-based grants.

**Make College More Affordable:** Barack Obama will make college affordable for all Americans by creating a new American Opportunity Tax Credit. This fully refundable credit will ensure that the first \$4,000 of a college education is completely free for most Americans and will cover two-thirds of the cost of tuition at the average public college or university. And by making the tax credit fully refundable, Obama's credit will help low-income families that need it the most. Obama will also ensure that the tax credit is available to families at the time of enrollment by using prior year's tax data to deliver the credit at the time that tuition is due, rather than a year or more later when tax returns are filed. Recipients of this credit will be required to conduct 100 hours of public service a year, either during the school year or over the summer months.

## **ECONOMY**

**Support Job Creation:** AAPIs make up 5 percent of the population, and are one of the fastest growing ethnic groups in America. While AAPIs have a much lower unemployment rate than the general population, the real median household income for Asian American and Pacific Islander families has fallen \$2,157 since 2000. At the same time, the number of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders living in poverty has grown by 244,000 people. Barack Obama will invest in a strong economy for all Americans. He will 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. As president, Obama will make long-term investments in education, language 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 global economy.

**Invest in Small Businesses:** More than 1.1 million small businesses are owned by Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. Asian Americans are more likely than any other ethnic group to own a small business. Barack Obama will support entrepreneurship and spur job growth by creating a national network of public-private business incubators. Business incubators facilitate the critical work of entrepreneurs in creating start-up companies by offering help designing business plans, identifying and addressing problems affecting all small businesses within a given community, and giving advice on a wide range of business practices. Business incubators will engage the expertise and resources of local institutions of higher education and successful private sector businesses to help ensure that small businesses have both a strong plan and the resources for long-term success. Barack Obama will also strengthen Small Business Administration programs that provide capital to minority-owned businesses and work to reduce duplicative, complicated and unnecessary regulations that adversely affect small businesses.

**Provide a Tax Cut for Working Families:** Barack Obama will restore fairness to the tax code and provide 150 million workers the tax relief they deserve. Obama will create a new "Making Work Pay" tax credit of up to \$500 per person, or \$1,000 per working family. This refundable income tax credit will provide direct relief to American families who face the regressive payroll tax system. It will offset the payroll tax on the first \$8,100 of their earnings while still preserving the important principle of a dedicated revenue source for Social Security. The "Making Work Pay" tax credit will completely eliminate income taxes for 10 million Americans. The tax credit will also provide relief to self-employed small business owners who struggle to pay both the employee and employer portion of the payroll tax. The "Making Work Pay" tax credit offsets some of this self-employment tax as well.

**Raise the Minimum Wage:** 1.25 million Asian Americans live below the poverty level. Barack Obama believes that people who work full time should not live in poverty. Before the Democrats took back Congress, the minimum wage had not changed in 10 years. Even though the minimum wage will rise to \$7.25 an hour by 2009, the minimum wage's real purchasing power will still be below what it was in 1968. As president, Obama will further raise the minimum wage to \$9.50 an hour by 2011, index it to inflation, and increase the Earned Income Tax Credit to make sure that full-time workers can earn a living wage that allows them to raise their families and pay for basic needs such as food, transportation, and housing -- things so many people take for granted.

**Protect Social Security:** More than 31 percent of married AAPI couples receiving Social Security rely on the monthly benefits for 90 percent or more of their income. Obama will be honest with the American people about the long-term solvency of Social Security and the ways we can address the shortfall. Obama will protect Social Security benefits for current and future beneficiaries alike. And he does not believe it is necessary or fair to hardworking seniors to raise the retirement age. Obama is strongly opposed to privatizing Social Security. Obama believes that the first place to look for ways to strengthen Social Security is the payroll tax system. Currently, the Social Security payroll tax applies to only the first \$97,500 a worker makes. Obama has consistently said that we may want to include a “donut hole” to ensure that lifting the payroll tax cap does not ensnare any middle class Americans. Obama he will work with Congress and the American people to choose a payroll tax reform package that will keep Social Security solvent for at least the next half century.

**Eliminate Income Taxes for Seniors Making Less Than \$50,000:** Lower and middle income seniors are struggling as their expenses on health and energy skyrocket while their incomes do not keep pace. Barack Obama will eliminate all income taxation of seniors making less than \$50,000 per year. This will eliminate any income tax for nearly 7 million seniors at a savings of roughly \$1,400 each year. For many seniors, this will eliminate the need to hire a tax preparer, resulting in even larger savings.

### **PROTECT HOMEOWNERSHIP**

**Create a New FHA Housing Security Program:** One of the biggest problems associated with the crisis in the housing market is the decline in house values, which is putting people’s mortgages underwater, meaning that their mortgage is worth more than their houses. Many people who find themselves in this situation simply walk away, worsening the foreclosure problem. At a time when costs are rising for energy, food, health care and education, Barack Obama believes we must ensure that the American dream of homeownership can continue. Obama strongly supports the efforts of Senate Banking Committee Chair Chris Dodd (D-CT) to create a new Federal Housing Administration (FHA) program that will provide meaningful incentives for lenders to buy or refinance existing mortgages and convert them into stable 30-year fixed mortgages. This plan will provide a federal guarantee for lenders to reduce the outstanding principal amount of loans that are currently unaffordable in order to enable new, affordable mortgages for homeowners. Neither the lenders nor the borrowers will receive a windfall from this proposal.

**Create Fund to Help Homeowners Avoid Foreclosures:** Obama has called for the immediate creation of a \$10 billion Foreclosure Prevention Fund to help people refinance their mortgages and provide comprehensive supports to innocent homeowners. The fund will also assist individuals who purchased homes that are simply too expensive for their income levels by helping them sell their homes. The fund will help offset costs of selling a home, including helping low-income borrowers get additional time and support to pay back any losses from the sale of their homes and waiving certain state and local income taxes that result from an individual selling his home to avoid foreclosure. These steps will ensure that individuals who have to sell their homes will be able to quickly regain stable financial footing. The fund will be partially paid for by Obama’s increased penalties on lenders who acted irresponsibly and committed fraud.

**Create a New Mortgage Interest Tax Credit for Those Who Don’t Itemize:** Barack Obama will provide a greater number of Americans with the financial assistance they need to purchase or keep their own home. Many middle class Americans do not receive the existing mortgage interest tax deduction because they do not itemize their taxes. As a result, the benefits of this tax incentive are often greatest for wealthy families with the most expensive homes. Obama will ensure that middle-class Americans get the financial assistance they need to purchase or keep their own home by creating a 10 percent universal mortgage credit that gives tax relief to all Americans who have a home mortgage. This will, effectively, cut 10 percent off the interest rate paid by 10 million homeowners, most of whom earn under \$50,000 per year. This tax cut will provide direct relief to many homeowners who are struggling to maintain their mortgage payments.

**Combat Mortgage Fraud and Predatory Subprime Loans:** Barack Obama has been closely monitoring the subprime mortgage situation for years, and introduced comprehensive legislation nearly two years ago to fight mortgage fraud and protect consumers against abusive lending practices. Obama's STOP FRAUD Act provides the first federal definition of mortgage fraud, increases funding for federal and state law enforcement programs, creates new criminal penalties for mortgage professionals found guilty of fraud, and requires industry insiders to report suspicious activity. Obama will also create a Homeowner Obligation Made Explicit (HOME) score, which will provide potential borrowers with a simplified, standardized borrower metric (similar to APR) for home mortgages. The HOME score will allow Americans to easily compare various mortgage products and understand the full cost of the loan. The HOME score would also help borrowers understand their long-term obligations and would be required to include mandatory taxes and insurance.

## **IMMIGRATION**

Barack Obama believes the immigration issue has been exploited by politicians to divide the nation rather than find real solutions. This divisiveness has allowed the illegal immigration problem to worsen, with borders that are less secure than ever and an economy that depends on millions of workers living in the shadows. Obama believes we must rise above divisive politics and act in the interests of our national and economic security. Obama has played a leading role in crafting comprehensive immigration reform and believes that our broken immigration system can only be fixed by putting politics aside and offering a solution that strengthens our security while reaffirming our heritage as a nation of immigrants.

**Improve Legal Immigration:** The overwhelming majority of immigrants, both legal and undocumented, come to this country with the hope that hard work and sacrifice will secure a better life for their children. Every year, an estimated 500,000-800,000 people enter the country illegally or illegally overstay their visa. Another million enter legally. Barack Obama believes we must address illegal immigration by strengthening border security and fixing the dysfunctional bureaucracy to balance the needs of American workers and the U.S. economy.

That includes creating legal avenues for people to work here. Barack Obama believes immigrant workers should have legal protections to avoid abuse and downward pressure on American wages and working conditions.

Obama believes that we have to fix our immigration system to increase the number of people we allow into the country legally to a level that unites families and meets the demand for workers for jobs employers cannot fill.

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services has decided to raise fees on applications to as much as \$2,400 for a family of four. Obama joined Rep. Luis Gutierrez (D-IL) to introduce the Citizenship Promotion Act to ensure that immigration application fees are both reasonable and fair. This bill reverses large fee increases for legal immigrants seeking to become citizens and provides grants to states to help educate and promote citizenship.

A key choke point in the process of becoming a legal permanent resident or a U.S. citizen is the FBI name/security check. Many law-abiding legal immigrants see their immigration applications delayed by months and often years as the overwhelmed FBI completes their background check. Obama introduced legislation that passed the Senate to improve the speed and accuracy of these background checks.

**Safeguard and Streamline the Family Reunification Process:** Many AAPI families rely on family reunification policies to assist them build better lives in the United States. However, AAPI families have some of the longest immigration backlogs. In the most recent immigration debate on the U.S. Senate floor, Obama fought to improve and pass a comprehensive bill. Obama introduced amendments to put greater emphasis on keeping immigrant families together and to revisit a controversial new points system that would dramatically alter U.S. immigration policy.

**Reform H-1B Visas:** Immigrants have helped create wealth in America's economy. Barack Obama supports comprehensive immigration reform that includes improvement in our visa programs, including the H-1B

program, to attract some of the world's most talented people to America. However, Barack Obama would like to see immigrant workers less dependent on their employers for their right to stay in the country and would hold accountable employers who abuse the system and their workers.

**Bring People Out of the Shadows:** America has always been a nation of immigrants. There are millions of people living in the shadows who would like to fully embrace our values and become full members of our democracy. For the millions living here illegally but otherwise playing by the rules, we must encourage them to come out of hiding and get right with the law. Barack Obama supports a system that requires undocumented immigrants who are in good standing to pay a fine, learn English, not commit crimes, and go to the back of the line for citizenship. After all those conditions are met, they would be granted the opportunity to stay in the United States.

**Secure our Borders:** Barack Obama wants to preserve the integrity of our borders to reduce illegal immigration. He supports additional personnel, infrastructure, and technology on the border and at our ports of entry. Obama believes we need additional Customs and Border Protection agents equipped with better technology and real-time intelligence.

**Remove Incentives to Enter U.S. Illegally:** To remove incentives to enter the country illegally, we need to crack down on employers who hire undocumented immigrants. Barack Obama has championed a proposal with Senators Charles Grassley (R-IA), Ted Kennedy (D-MA), and Max Baucus (D-MT) to create a new employment eligibility verification system so employers could verify that their employees are legally eligible to work in the U.S., making the system fair to legal workers and tougher on employers.

## **HEALTH CARE**

Rising health care costs are a tremendous drain on our economy, making American companies less competitive than those in other nations with better health systems.

**Increase Access and Lower Health Costs:** There are nearly 2.4 million Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders without health insurance and about 13 percent of Asian American and Pacific Islander children are uninsured. Barack Obama is committed to signing universal health legislation by the end of his first term in office that ensures all Americans have high-quality, affordable health care coverage. His plan will save a typical American family up to \$2,500 every year on medical expenditures by providing affordable, comprehensive, and portable health coverage for every American; modernizing the U.S. health care system to contain spiraling health care costs and improve the quality of patient care; promoting prevention; and strengthening public health to prevent disease and protect against natural and man-made disasters.

**Fight Health Disparities:** Tackling minority health disparities is a top priority for Barack Obama. His universal health care plan expands coverage to all Americans, addressing a major cause of health disparities: insurance coverage. The Obama plan promotes research into combating health care disparities, conducts educational and health outreach to minorities, increases the diversity of healthcare professionals, and improves the delivery of health care to minorities. Finally, the Obama plan also requires health providers to inform the public about disparities and take steps to reduce those disparities. In the U.S. Senate, Obama helped write the Kennedy-Cochran-Obama *Minority Health Improvement and Health Disparity Elimination Act*. This bill puts new emphasis on disparity research by directing the Department of Health and Human Services to collect and report health care data by race and ethnicity, as well as by geographic and socioeconomic status and level of health literacy.

**Increase the Cultural Competence of Health Care Workers:** Language and cultural barriers have been identified as major reasons that Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders have been unable to access health care services. Lack of appropriate language services result in an impaired exchange of information and a lower level of preventive care. Without interpreters, physicians may order inappropriate tests, and patients may not

understand their diagnosis, medication instructions, or follow-up care plans. Barack Obama supports efforts to get more AAPIs to enter the medical profession and will expand outreach and educational efforts to improve the language and cultural skills of hospitals to better care for the growing Asian American and Pacific Islander community.

## **VETERANS**

**Honor our AAPI Troops:** AAPIs, especially Pacific Islanders, play a vital role in our nation's armed forces. There are 313,000 AAPI veterans of our armed forces. Barack Obama is committed to creating a VA that provides sufficient support to today's veteran population. Obama will ensure that the Department of Defense works closely with the Department of Veterans Affairs, to help new veterans transition from active duty to civilian life. He will develop a 21<sup>st</sup>-century VA that anticipates the needs of today's veterans and provides them with the health care, benefits and support they have earned. Obama also believes that legal immigrants who have fought for us overseas should have expedited procedures towards citizenship.

**Celebrate and Support Filipino Veterans of World War II:** Approximately 250,000 Filipino troops joined American forces to fight in World War II. However, our country has yet to recognize the sacrifice that these veterans have made for our country. Barack Obama is a cosponsor and advocate of the Filipino Veterans Equity Act of 2007, which will fulfill America's promise to recognize and support these brave veterans.

## **FOREIGN POLICY**

**Bring the War in Iraq to a Responsible End:** Nearly 39,000 Asian and Pacific Islander Americans have been deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan since September 2001. Barack Obama opposed the war in Iraq from the beginning. In 2002, as the conventional thinking in Washington lined up for war, Obama had the judgment and courage to speak out against the war. He said the war would lead to "an occupation of undetermined length, with undetermined costs and undetermined consequences." In January 2007, Obama introduced legislation to responsibly end the war in Iraq, with a phased withdrawal of troops engaged in combat operations. Today, Obama has a plan to immediately begin to pull out troops engaged in combat operations at a pace of one or two brigades every month, to be completed by the end of 2008. He would call for a new constitutional convention in Iraq, convened with the United Nations, which would not adjourn until Iraq's leaders reach a new accord on reconciliation. He would use presidential leadership to surge our diplomacy with all of the nations of the region on behalf of a new regional security compact. And he would take immediate steps to confront the humanitarian disaster in Iraq.

**Reestablish U.S. Moral Leadership:** Obama will restore America's standing, reputation, and authority in the world by respecting civil liberties, ending torture, restoring habeas corpus, making the U.S. electoral processes fair and transparent, and fighting corruption at home.

**Build Framework for East Asian Cooperation:** In Asia, the emergence of an economically vibrant, more politically engaged China offers new opportunities for prosperity and cooperation. Barack Obama will forge a new and lasting framework for collective security in Asia that goes beyond bilateral agreements, occasional summits, and ad-hoc arrangements like the six-party talks. As president, he would work to develop a more effective regional framework with the countries in the region to promote stability and confront transnational threats.

**South Asia is Key to America's Interests:** Barack Obama has long recognized that South Asia is critical to U.S. interests and will ensure that strong U.S. relations in the region are a top foreign policy priority. Countries in this vital region are key partners in the war on terrorism. Also, we share fundamental and important values, including with the world's largest democracy, India. Further, the South Asian region can be a key future trade and economic partner with the United States, which will mutually benefit all of us. Barack Obama seeks a strong South Asian region, which in turn will strengthen the U.S. and its international interests.

**Help Prevent an Avian Flu Pandemic:** Barack Obama was one of the first legislators to recognize the dangers of a potential avian influenza pandemic, and was successful in securing \$25 million that U.S. agencies in Southeast Asia are currently using to combat and contain widespread outbreaks of avian flu. He also worked with other Senators to provide \$4 billion in funding to the Centers for Disease Control to combat avian flu which included more than \$3 billion to build a stockpile of antiviral drugs that had been in short supply.

## **EQUAL RIGHTS**

**End Racial Profiling and Expand Hate Crimes Statutes:** Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are often targets of racially motivated hate crimes. For example, violence against South Asians rose after the Sept. 11 attacks. Barack Obama cosponsored legislation that would expand federal jurisdiction to reach violent hate crimes perpetrated because of race, color, religion, national origin, sexual orientation or physical disability. Obama also cosponsored the End Racial Profiling Act (ERPA), which defined racial profiling and prohibited law enforcement from using race or ethnicity as a basis for routine or spontaneous law enforcement. As a state senator, Obama passed tough legislation that made hate crimes and conspiracy to commit them against the law.

**Protect Voting Rights:** Barack Obama was a leader in the effort to reauthorize the Voting Rights Act. In early 2006 he joined Representatives Melvin L. Watt, John Lewis, John Conyers and members of the Senate and House leadership and Judiciary Committees to introduce bipartisan, bicameral legislation to extend the VRA for 25 years and update a number of its provisions. Obama also supports fully funding the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) to enforce critical requirements like statewide registration databases and to ensure that polling equipment is distributed equitably and that the equipment works.

## **PACIFIC ISLANDS**

As a native of Hawaii, Barack Obama understands firsthand the unique concerns of the Pacific Islands in the United States. As president, he will make sure these issues are addressed with full federal government commitment.

**Protect the Environment:** Global climate change threatens disastrous consequences to the fragile and unique ecosystems of the Pacific. Barack Obama will address manmade contributions to global climate change by cutting greenhouse gas emissions. Obama supports implementation of a market-based cap-and-trade system that would reduce carbon emissions 80 percent by 2050. The cap-and-trade system will include an initial partial auction of pollution credits to raise money that would be invested to upgrade our energy infrastructure; create hundreds of thousands of new, high-wage jobs; reinvest in environmental protection efforts; and make America truly energy independent.

**Safeguard the Pacific Islands from Disasters:** Barack Obama supports efforts to strengthen the federal government's Pacific Tsunami Warning Center. He also has been a vigorous advocate of bolstering our nation's ability to respond to acts of terrorism and natural disasters in a swift and effective manner. As president, he will work to ensure that the Pacific Islands are adequately prepared for disasters.