



## BARACK OBAMA: FIGHTING FOR AMERICA'S NURSES

*"What we have to make real today is the idea that in this country, we value the labor of every American. That we're willing to respect that labor and reward it with a few basic guarantees - wages that can raise a family, health care if we get sick, a retirement that's dignified, working conditions that are safe. . . . This is the legacy you inherit today. It's a legacy of courage, a legacy of action, a legacy of achieving the greatest triumphs amidst the greatest odds. It's a story as American as any - that at the edge of despair, in the shadow of hopelessness, ordinary people make the extraordinary decision that if we stand together, we rise together."*

[Barack Obama, Speech in Chicago, IL, 8/07/06]

## BARACK OBAMA SUPPORTS AMERICAN NURSES

Barack Obama has been a consistent champion of America's nurses. As an Illinois state senator, Barack Obama chaired the Senate Committee on Public Health and helped lead efforts to protect Illinois nurses and improve the quality of health care throughout Illinois. As a U.S. senator, Obama serves on the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee where he has continued his long record of advocacy for America's nurses.

### **NURSES' RIGHTS**

**Oppose Mandatory Overtime:** Barack Obama believes supporting nurses in the workplace leads to better health care outcomes. Numerous reports have demonstrated the importance of proper workplace protections for nurses and other medical professionals for ensuring that patients receive the highest-quality care and reducing preventive medical errors. In the Illinois State Senate, Obama worked to ensure that nurse-staffing levels and work conditions were subject to public review so that hospitals and other facilities implemented strong pro-nurse, pro-patient policies. In the U.S. Senate, Obama is a cosponsor and advocate of the Safe Nursing and Patient Care Act of 2007 which would limit mandatory overtime to true emergency situations. As president, Obama will sign this legislation into law.

**Ensure Safe and Adequate Staffing Levels:** As chairman of the Illinois State Senate Committee on Public Health, Obama led efforts in Illinois to ensure that health care facilities implement safe staffing levels for nurses and adequate nurse-to-patient ratios. Obama's Hospital Report Card Act, which provided requirements on safe staffing levels, was signed into Illinois law. In the U.S. Senate, Obama built on his record of success and introduced the Hospital Quality Report Card Act, a bill that requires reporting of staffing levels for nurses which will help to ensure that the number of nurses is consistent with the types of care needed by the patients and the capabilities of the staff. Obama's universal health plan also includes a provision requiring health care facilities to monitor issues such as nurse-patient ratios. Obama's health care reform plan supports inclusion and expanded reimbursement for advanced practice registered nurses.

**Protect Nurses' Labor Rights:** Barack Obama has fought the Bush National Labor Relations Board's (NLRB's) efforts to strip workers of their right to organize. He is a cosponsor and strong advocate of the Re-Empowerment of Skilled and Professional Employees and Construction Tradeworkers (RESPECT) Act, which

will overturn the NLRB's "Kentucky River" trilogy of decisions classifying hundreds of thousands of nurses, construction and professional workers as "supervisors" who are not protected by federal labor law. Obama also believes that the Bush NLRB's decisions could put too many nurses – over 800,000 nurses cross the country – at risk of losing their rights to organize and bargain collectively simply because they participate in modern managerial approaches like team production or direct others' work as part of their professional responsibilities. The RESPECT Act reaffirms Congress' original intent to exclude from the National Labor Relation Act's protections only supervisors truly vested with managerial responsibilities.

**Bring More Americans into the Nursing Profession:** The nursing workforce shortage ranks as one of the most pressing issues facing our health care system. Nurses play a critical role in every aspect of patient care and also serve as administrators and executives in clinical and policy settings. Yet, too many young adults are choosing not to enter the nursing profession, and a significant number of current nurses are switching careers or retiring early. Barack Obama will improve working conditions including limiting mandatory overtime, improving nurse-to-patient ratios, providing additional support to training and incentive programs, and continuing to recognize and support nurses' right to organize. In addition, Obama supports reauthorization of Title VIII training programs with greater financial incentives for students and nurse faculty, including scholarships and loan repayment. Obama also supports adequate funding of the Nurse Reinvestment Act. In the Illinois State Senate, Obama sponsored legislation and voted to increase funding for nursing scholarships.

**Implement Assistive Patient Handling Technology to Improve Nurse Safety:** Six of the top ten occupations at highest risk for back injuries are in health care, according to the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics. Nurses are at high risk for sustaining back injuries, which are most likely to occur when moving a patient. Barack Obama believes it is critically important to implement "safe lift" and other assistive technologies to protect nurses from preventable injury. Barack Obama will expand and accelerate research to identify novel and innovative technologies and determine which are the most effective for various medical settings. He will also provide federal financial and technical assistance to hospitals, nursing and long-term care facilities to employ effective assistive technologies and will direct the Occupational Health and Safety Administration to implement meaningful standards that protect nurses from injury related to patient care.

## **HEALTH CARE REFORM**

**Provide Universal Health Care Access and Lower Health Costs:** 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; requiring that employers contribute to the health coverage of their employees; modernizing the U.S. health care system to contain spiraling health care costs and improve the quality of patient care; and promoting prevention and strengthening public health to prevent disease and protect against natural and man-made disasters.

**Foster Healthy Communities:** How a community is designed – including the layout of its roads, buildings and parks – has a huge impact on the health of its residents. For instance, nearly one-third of Americans live in neighborhoods without sidewalks and less than half of our country's children have a playground within walking distance of their homes. This lack of a safe place to walk and play is a major contributor to the growing numbers of overweight children. Barack Obama introduced legislation, the Healthy Places Act of 2006 and the Healthy Communities Act of 2005, to identify and address problems in communities that are at high risk from environmental contaminants, and to assess and support improvements to the environment. He has also sponsored legislation to address environmental health concerns for disadvantaged populations.