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Al Gore

*2008 Democratic National Convention Address*



Delivered 28 August 2008, INVESCO Field at Mile High Stadium, Denver, Colorado

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One of the greatest gifts of our democracy is the opportunity it offers us every four years to change course. It's not a guarantee; it's only an opportunity. The question facing us simply put is: Will we seize this opportunity for a change? That's why I came here tonight to tell you why I feel so strongly that we must seize this opportunity to elect Barack Obama President of the United States of America.

Eight years ago, some said there was not much difference between the nominees of the two major parties and it didn't really matter who became President. Our nation was enjoying peace and prosperity, and some assumed we would continue with both, no matter the outcome. But here we all are in 2008, and I doubt anyone would argue now that election didn't matter.

Take it from me. If it had ended differently, we would not be bogged down in Iraq; we would have pursued bin Laden until we captured him. We wouldn't be facing a self-inflicted economic crisis; we'd be fighting for middle-income families. We would not be showing contempt for the Constitution; we'd be protecting the rights of every American regardless of race, religion, disability, gender, or sexual orientation. And we would not be denying the climate crisis; we'd be solving the climate crisis.

Today, we face essentially the same choice we faced in 2000, though it may be even more obvious now, because John McCain, a man who has earned our respect on many levels, is now openly endorsing the policies of the Bush-Cheney White House and promising to actually continue them. The same policies, those policies, all over again? Hey, I believe in recycling, but that's ridiculous.



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With John McCain's support, President Bush and Vice President Cheney have led our nation into one calamity after another because of their indifference to facts, their readiness to sacrifice the long term to the short term, subordinate the general good to the benefit of the few, and short-circuit the rule of law. If you like the Bush-Cheney approach, John McCain's your man. If you believe it's time for a change, then vote for Barack Obama and Joe Biden. What a great speech Joe Biden gave last night.

Barack Obama is telling us exactly what he will do: launch a bold, new economic plan to restore America's greatness; fight for smarter government that trusts the market, but protects us against its excesses; enact policies that are pro-choice, pro-education, and pro-family; establish a foreign policy that is smart, as well as strong; provide health care for all and solutions for the climate crisis.

So why is this election so close? Well, I know something about close elections, so let me offer you my opinion. I believe this election is close today mainly because the forces of the status quo are desperately afraid of the change Barack Obama represents.

There is no better example than the climate crisis. As I have said throughout this land for many years, we are borrowing money from China to buy oil from the Persian Gulf to burn it in ways that destroy the future of human civilization. Every bit of that has to change.

Oil company profits, as you know, have soared to record levels, and gasoline prices have gone through the roof, and we are more dependent than ever on dirty and dangerous fossil fuels.

Many scientists predict shockingly that the entire north polar ice cap may be completely gone during summer months during the first term of the next president. Sea levels are rising; fires are raging; storms are stronger.

Military experts warn us our national security is threatened by massive waves of climate refugees destabilizing countries around the world. And scientists tell us the very web of life is endangered by unprecedented extinctions.

We are facing a planetary emergency, which, if not solved, would exceed anything we've ever experienced in the history of humankind.

In spite of John McCain's past record of open-mindedness and leadership on the climate crisis, he has now apparently allowed his Party to browbeat him into abandoning his support of mandatory caps on global warming pollution. And it just so happens that the climate crisis is intertwined with the other two great challenges facing our nation: reviving our economy and strengthening our national security. The solutions to all three require us to end our dependence on carbon-based fuels.

Instead of letting lobbyists and polluters control our destiny, we need to invest in American innovation. Almost a hundred years ago, Thomas Edison, our most famous inventor, said, quote, "I would put my money on the sun and solar energy. What a source of power," he continued. "I hope we don't have to wait until oil and coal run out before we tackle that."



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Well, now, in 2008, we have everything we need to start using the sun, the wind, geothermal power, conservation, and efficiency to solve the climate crisis -- everything, that is, except a President in the White House who inspires us to believe, "Yes, we can." And we know how to fix that.

So how did this no-brainer become a brain-twister? Because the carbon fuels industry -- big oil and coal -- have a 50-year lease on the Republican Party and they're drilling it for everything it's worth. And this same industry has spent a half a billion dollars this year alone trying to convince the public that they're actually solving the problem, when they're, in fact, making it worse every single day.

This Administration and the special interests who control it lock, stock, and barrel after barrel have performed this same sleight-of-hand on issue after issue. Some of the best marketers have the worst products, and this is certainly true of today's Republican Party. The Party itself has on its rolls men and women of great quality. But the last eight years demonstrate that the special interests who have come to control the Republican Party are so powerful that serving them and serving the national well-being are now irreconcilable choices.

So what can we do about it? We can carry Barack Obama's message of hope and change to every family in America and pledge that we'll be there for him, not only in the heat of this election, but in the aftermath, as we put his agenda to work for our country.

We can tell Republicans and Independents, as well as Democrats, exactly why our nation so badly needs a change from the approach of Bush, Cheney, and McCain.

After they wrecked our economy, it's time for a change. After they abandoned the search for the terrorists who attacked us and redeployed the troops to invade a nation that did not attack us, it's time for a change.

After they abandoned the principle first laid down by General George Washington, when he prohibited the torture of captives because it would bring, in his words, "shame, disgrace and ruin" to our nation, it's time for a change.

When as many as three Supreme Court justices could be appointed in the first term of the next President, and John McCain promises to appoint more Scalias and Thomases and end a woman's right to choose, it is time for a change.

Many people have been waiting for some sign that our country is ready for such a change. How will we know when it's beginning to take hold? I think we might recognize it as a sign of such change if we saw millions of young people getting involved for the first time in the political process. This election is actually not close at all among younger voters. You are responding in unprecedented numbers to Barack Obama's message of change and hope.

You recognize that he represents a clean break from the politics of partisanship and bitter division. You understand that the politics of the past are exhausted, and you're tired -- we're all tired -- of appeals based on fear.



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You know that America is capable of better than what we have seen in recent years. And you're hungry for a new politics based on bipartisan respect for the ageless principles embodied in the United States Constitution.

There are times in the history of our nation when our very way of life depends upon awakening to the challenge of a present danger, shaking off complacency, and rising, clear-eyed and alert, to the necessity of embracing change.

A century-and-a-half ago, when America faced our greatest trial, the end of one era gave way to the birth of another. The candidate who emerged victorious in that election is now regarded by most historians as our greatest President. Before he entered the White House, Abraham Lincoln's experience in elective office consisted of eight years in his state legislature in Springfield, Illinois, and one term in Congress, during which he showed courage and wisdom to oppose the invasion of another country in a war that was popular when it was started, but later condemned by history.

The experience that Lincoln's supporters valued most in that race was his powerful ability to inspire hope in the future at a time of impasse. He was known chiefly as a clear thinker and a great orator, with a passion for justice and a determination to heal the deep divisions of our land. He insisted on reaching past partisan and regional divides to exalt our common humanity.

In 2008, once again, we find ourselves at the end of an era with a mandate from history to launch another new beginning. And once again, we have a candidate whose experience perfectly matches an extraordinary moment of transition.

Barack Obama had the experience and wisdom to oppose a popular war based on faulty premises.

His leadership experience has given him a unique capacity to inspire hope in the promise of the American dream of a boundless future.

His experience has also given him genuine respect for different views and humility in the face of complex realities that cannot be squeezed into the narrow compartments of ideology.

His experience has taught him something that career politicians often overlook: that inconvenient truths must be acknowledged if we are to have wise governance.

And the extraordinary strength of his personal character -- and that of his wonderful wife, Michelle -- who gave such a magnificent address and will be such a wonderful First Lady for our country -- their strength of character is grounded in the strengths of the American community.

Barack Obama's vision and his voice represent the best of America. His life experience embodies the essence of our motto, *E pluribus unum*, -- "out of many, one."



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That is the linking identity at the other end of all the hyphens that pervade our modern political culture. It is that common American identity which Barack Obama exemplifies, heart and soul, that enables us as Americans to speak with moral authority to all of the peoples of the world, to inspire hope that we as human beings can transcend our limitations to redeem the promise of human freedom.

Late this evening, our convention will end with a benediction. As we bow in reverence, remember the words of the old proverb, "When you pray, move your feet." And then let us leave here tonight and take that message of hope from Denver to every corner of our land, and do everything we can to serve our nation, our world, and our children and their future, by electing Barack Obama President of the United States of America.