



BARACK OBAMA: THE EXPERIENCE AMERICA NEEDS

Washington pundits think the only experience that matters is the years spent in Washington. Recent history suggests otherwise. Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld had two of the longest resumes in Washington and they led us into the worst foreign policy fiasco in our history. Time served doesn't guarantee good judgment. A resume says nothing about character.

Barack Obama brings a different kind of experience to this race. Barack Obama has been fighting for regular Americans for more than two decades, as a community organizer, a civil rights lawyer, a constitutional law lecturer, a state senator, and a U.S. senator. He has brought Republicans and Democrats together to expand health care for 150,000 Illinoisans and put \$100 million worth of tax cuts in the pockets of working families. He reached across the aisle to pass a law securing dangerous weapons in the old Soviet Union. He stood up to the special interests to pass the first Illinois ethics reform in 25 years and took on both parties to pass legislation that will finally require Washington lobbyists to disclose who they're raising money from and who in Congress they're funneling it to.

Obama opposed the war in Iraq from the beginning. At the time, conventional thinking in Washington lined up to support the war. While conventional Washington failed to ask the tough questions, Barack Obama had the judgment to correctly predict the disaster they failed to foresee.

Obama might not have the experience Washington insiders like, but he has the experience America needs.

U.S. SENATOR

Work Across Party Lines: Since he was elected as a U.S. Senator in 2004, Obama has helped pass major measures that combat the international trafficking of nuclear weapons, promote the use of renewable fuels and open up the budget process to greater public scrutiny. As a member of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Obama has traveled to Iraq to see the war first-hand, to Russia to strengthen arms control and to Africa to address AIDS, corruption and genocide.

- **Iraq:** 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. As the nation debates how to move forward in Iraq, Obama has laid out his plan to end the war. Obama would 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 next year. 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. Obama would surge our diplomacy with all of the nations of the region on behalf of a new regional security compact. And Obama would take immediate steps to confront the humanitarian disaster in Iraq and to hold accountable any perpetrators of potential war crimes.

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- **Ethics Reform:** In January 2007, Obama and Senator Russ Feingold (D-WI) set the bar for real reform by taking on both parties and proposing ethics legislation that Fred Wertheimer from the leading government reform group Democracy 21 called the “gold standard” for reform. Obama and Feingold pushed a series of amendments that were successfully incorporated into the final Senate bill. It was because of leadership by Senators Obama and Feingold that ending subsidized corporate jet travel, mandating disclosure of lobbyists’ bundling of contributions, and strong new restrictions of lobbyist sponsored trips became part of the final ethics bill that was signed into law. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) praised Obama for his role in the ethics reform saying, “The face of this early on was Barack Obama. I selected him to be the person that would go forward on this in a public way. And he did a great job.” *The Washington Post* wrote in an editorial, “The final package is the strongest ethics legislation to emerge from Congress yet.”
- **Weapons Smuggling:** Obama worked with Senator Dick Lugar (R-IN) to expand the successful program that has destroyed Soviet nuclear warheads and to help stop the smuggling of nuclear material and keep conventional weapons out of terrorists’ hands. Martin Schramm of *Scripps Howard* wrote, “This is a homeland security sort of bill that America urgently needs to become law.” The initiative was signed into law in 2007.
- **Making Government Transparent:** Every American has the right to know how the government spends her tax dollars, but for too long that information has been largely hidden from public view. That’s why Obama and Senator Tom Coburn teamed up to pass a law that will lift the veil of secrecy in Washington by creating a Google-like search engine that will allow regular people to track approximately \$1 trillion in federal grants, contracts, earmarks, and loans online. *The Chicago Sun-Times* wrote, “It would enable the public to see where federal money goes and how it is spent. It’s a brilliant idea.”
- **Renewable Energy:** Obama has worked on numerous efforts in the Senate to increase access to and use of renewable fuels. Obama passed legislation with Senator Jim Talent (R-MO) to give gas stations a tax credit for installing E85 ethanol refueling pumps. The tax credit covers 30 percent of the costs of switching one or more traditional petroleum pumps to E85, which is an 85 percent ethanol/15 percent gasoline blend. Obama also sponsored an amendment that became law providing \$40 million for commercialization of a combined flexible fuel vehicle/hybrid car within five years.
- **Education:** Obama has made education a priority of his in the Senate. Because students lose an average of two months or more worth of math facts and skills during the summer, Obama passed legislation creating a competitive state grant program to support summer education programs that emphasize mathematics and problem solving. Obama has also passed legislation making predominantly black colleges eligible for federal grant money, to create mentorship programs to support women and underrepresented groups, and ensuring minority and female participation on federal science and technology boards.
- **Military Families:** Too many service members returning home from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have come back with serious injuries. In 2007, Obama passed a bill in the Senate to relieve the strain on the families of these service members, by providing 12 months of job protection when families need leave to care for loved ones with injuries.
- **Veterans Benefits:** After news reports that veterans in Illinois were receiving less in disability benefits than those nearly anywhere else in the country, Obama led efforts to correct the problems that created these disparities. As a result, the VA opened an investigation into the matter, agreed to hire more disability claims specialists for the Chicago regional office and agreed to re-examine the claims of Illinois veterans who felt they had been treated unfairly. *The Chicago Sun-Times* wrote in an editorial, “Sen. Barack Obama and Sen. Dick Durbin have been in the forefront, once this problem was exposed by the *Sun-Times*... What

better advocates could vets hope for than Durbin and Obama? Dick Durbin is the Democratic whip, an energetic senator who has done much for the state. Barack Obama is a rising star whose future is limitless... It's about fairness to 1 million Illinois vets, fairness which they have earned and is long overdue."

STATE LEGISLATOR

Accomplished Illinois State Legislator: In 1996, Obama was elected to the Illinois State Senate, where he served for eight years. In 1997, Obama was awarded the Best Freshman Legislator Award from Independent Voters of Illinois-Independent Precinct Organization for his work in bringing Illinois into compliance with the National Voter Registration Act, and in 1998, he received Outstanding Legislator Awards from Campaign for Better Health Care and the Illinois Primary Health Care Association.

- **Campaign Finance:** In 1998, Obama joined forces with former U.S. Sen. Paul Simon to pass the toughest campaign finance law in Illinois history. The legislation banned the personal use of campaign money by Illinois legislators and banned most gifts from lobbyists. Before the law was passed, Common Cause, a nonprofit dedicated to ethics reform ranked Illinois worst among 50 states for its campaign finance regulations. The Obama bill also made it illegal to hold fundraisers near the capital or take contributions on state property.
- **Welfare Reform:** Obama sponsored Illinois' welfare reform law that combined work requirements and time limits with significant investments in child care, job training and transportation. As a result, thousands of Illinoisans were employed, and Illinois led the nation in the biggest reduction in welfare caseload. But he also worked to soften its blow, ensuring that work requirements for recipients were coupled with increased spending on child care, job training and transportation, and sponsored a bill that called for Illinois to share data with researchers so they could study the law's effects.
- **Health Insurance:** In 2003, Obama passed legislation to expand and make permanent Kidcare, the State Children's Health Insurance Program, extending health care coverage to 70,000 additional children. It also expanded FamilyCare, a program providing health insurance to uninsured parents whose children are insured under Medicaid or KidCare, to an additional 84,000 Illinois parents.
- **Death Penalty Reform:** After 13 death row inmates in Illinois were found innocent, Obama broke through political gridlock to enact serious death penalty reform. Obama brought prosecutors and the police to the table, getting them to agree to require police to record all interrogation of homicide suspects. Law enforcement agreed that recording interrogations would help the prosecution's chances when confessions are genuine, while reducing the likelihood of coerced and false confessions.
- **Tax Relief for Working Families:** Obama created the Illinois Earned Income Tax Credit for low-income working families in 2000 and successfully sponsored a measure to make the credit permanent in 2003. The law offered about \$105 million in tax relief over three years.
- **Racial Profiling:** Obama was the chief sponsor for racial profiling legislation that required Illinois law enforcement to record the race, age and gender of all drivers they stop for traffic violations, so that data could be analyzed for evidence of racial profiling. *The Chicago Defender* wrote in an editorial, "Barack Obama (D-Chicago) led the fight in Springfield for passage of the legislation, which among other things will identify arrests and stops of minority citizens in mostly white neighborhoods."

ORGANIZER, CIVIL RIGHTS ATTORNEY, LAW LECTURER

Worked with Low-Income Communities as a Community Organizer: From 1985 to 1988, Obama served as

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director for the Developing Communities Project, a church-based social action group in Chicago. Together with a coalition of ministers, Obama set out to improve living conditions in poor neighborhoods plagued by crime and high unemployment. Obama also helped form a tenants' rights group in the housing projects that successfully forced the city and federal governments to clear asbestos from pipes in more than 1,200 apartments

Led the Harvard Law Review: From 1988 to 1991, Obama attended Harvard Law School. He was elected by his peers to become the first African-American president of the Harvard Law Review, one of the nation's most prestigious legal journals. Constitutional law expert Lawrence Tribe called Obama "among the most intellectually creative and energetic students I can recall." Obama graduated magna cum laude in 1991.

Registered 150,000 New Voters: In 1992, Obama headed Project Vote, a voter registration effort in Chicago. Project Vote was responsible for signing up many of the 150,000 new African American voters, the highest number ever registered in a single local effort. *Crain's Chicago Business* named him one of "40 under 40" outstanding young leaders in Chicago, saying "Obama galvanized Chicago's political community, as no seasoned politico had before." Alderman Sam Burrell said, "Under Barack's leadership, we had the most successful, cost-effective and orderly voter registration drive I've ever been involved with." *The Chicago Tribune* also named him as one of "25 Chicagoans on the road to making a difference."

Civil Rights Lawyer and Constitutional Law Lecturer: After law school, Obama joined the Chicago-based law firm of Davis, Miner, Barnhill, & Galland, where he was named a partner in 1996. Obama specialized in civil rights and voting rights litigation, employment law and the representation of not-for-profit and community development corporations. In 1994, Obama received the Monarch Award for Outstanding Public Service from a foundation that salutes African American men in the Chicago area. From 1993 to 2004, Obama was a Senior Lecturer on constitutional law at the University of Chicago, focusing on equal protection and due process.

PRAISE FOR BARACK OBAMA'S EXPERIENCE

In some respects, Mr. Obama is far more experienced than other presidential candidates. His experience as an antipoverty organizer in Chicago, for example, gives him a deep grasp of a crucial 21st-century challenge — poverty in America — that almost all politicians lack...In foreign policy as well, Mr. Obama would bring to the White House an important experience that most other candidates lack: he has actually lived abroad... He has consistently shown great instincts....What sets Mr. Obama apart is the way his training has been at the grass-roots rather than in the treetops. And that may be the richest kind of background of all, yielding not just experience, but also wisdom.

[Nicholas Kristof, *New York Times*, 03/06/07]

Obama's life experience in particular equips him to understand the kinds of ways in which we need to bring a very diverse set of people and interests together around a fundamental group of values—compassion, generosity and tolerance.

[Marshall Ganz, Professor, Harvard University, 04/10/07]

With his racially mixed background (his father was from Kenya; his mother was a white American), his international upbringing (he spent part of his youth in Indonesia before returning to Hawai'i, where he was born), and his penchant for work among the downtrodden and disaffected, Obama has spent his life struggling against those eager to discredit or exclude him. He's already faced tests of character and endurance.

In his years as a community organizer in Chicago, Obama had to unite disparate and mutually suspicious communities, and he eked out small victories over politics-as-usual, finding out the hard way that lasting change isn't easy. Later, in the Illinois Statehouse (not known as a nurturing environment for new-minted politicians), Obama earned a reputation as a guy who could get things done. The conservative Chicago Tribune endorsed Obama in his 2004 Senate run, praising his "significant accomplishments" and "shrewd negotiation." The Tribune credited Obama with "legislative feats," including laws requiring that police videotape interrogations in murder cases, laws creating tax credits for the working poor and "laws to track racial profiling by law enforcement, prohibit public officials from accepting lobbyists' gifts (and) expand health insurance coverage for children of the working poor and their families.

[Rosa Brooks, *Los Angeles Times*, 12/15/06]

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