

Transcript of Remarks by Senator Barack Obama
to the American Nurses Association's 2008 House of Delegates
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Senator Barak Obama (D-IL)
Presumptive Democratic nominee for President

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Senator Obama: (by telephone) Hi Becky this is Senator Barack Obama. Sounds like you have a pretty good crowd there. *(applause)*

President Patton: Well, what I was going to tell you is that I was trying to let them get it out of their system here, but they are an active, fired up group to hear from you today, so thank you for calling us.

We know that you are a friend and advocate for nursing and we appreciate that you are calling us today. We also would like to hear some words of hope, your vision of change and a new direction for this country. It truly is our honor -- mine in particular -- to introduce to this audience, the presidential candidate, Senator Barack Obama. *(applause)*

Senator Obama: Thank you so much Becky.

President Patton: Now I believe Senator, I will get this house to be extremely quite so they can listen to you.

Senator Obama: *(laughs)* First of all I want to say, good morning to everybody. I am so sorry I can't be with all of you in person, but thank you for letting me say a few words. And Becky I want to thank you for the great work you are doing. I want to acknowledge all my friend and allies in the Illinois Nurses Association, with whom I've worked for many years. *(applause)*

President Patton : They are on their feet right now applauding you.

Senator Obama: They have been great friends for a long, long time. When I was in the Illinois legislature, I was the Chair of the health care committee and we did a lot of great work together.

I am going to be up with Hillary Clinton in New Hampshire today campaigning and there are few more extraordinary leaders in our party or in our country than her so I am just thrilled to be campaigning with her. And you can rest assured that when we finally win the battle for affordable health care for all of this country, she's going to be central to that victory. *(applause)* I want all of you to know that we are moving in the direction of unity and we are going to be absolutely committed to not just winning this election but delivering on the promise of America.

A couple of week ago, some of you know, I spent the morning doing rounds in St. Louis with Kate Marder (?), a cardiac care nurse. I helped her when I could, but mostly I stayed out of the way and watched as she attended to her patients, and kept track of everything that was going on. I remember being worried that I would mix up stuff. She was calm, cool and collected - just watching her interact with her patients was extraordinary and they were wonderful people, but going through a really difficult time.

One of her patients was a former police officer, with a son in Iraq. His wife was holding down two jobs because of his shots - they cost \$6,000.00 a month and they were having trouble making ends meet. It reminded me of something that all of you see every single day. You know better than most the problems that Americans are facing in the health care system. For too long we've let the big drug companies and insurance companies dictate what kinds of health care ordinary Americans are getting in this country. We have spent billions of dollars over the last decade and haven't gotten the kind of health care that all Americans deserve, partly because of the big lobbyists spending billions of dollars lobbying and [making] campaign contributions.

It shouldn't be surprising that 47 million people are with out health insurance and why the premiums and co-pay and the cost of prescription drugs keeps going up and up. But instead of taking on the big lobbyists, the special interests, and actually helping solve the health care crisis, over the last 8 years during the Bush Administration, we have seen more of the same. Although I admire John McCain's service to our country, his plan is essentially the same plan that George Bush has proposed. It's going to help people who are wealthy and who are healthy enough to afford health care at any price. But it provides almost no relief to those who don't have any health insurance. In fact it leads to a situation where millions of poor people who get health insurance through their jobs could end up not having it. So not only does it fail to solve the problem, it could actually make things worse.

Senator Clinton and myself and most of the Democrats have a different vision. We believe in making certain that affordable quality care is available to everybody. We are not trying to reduce health care cost simply by putting the burden on health care providers, especially nurses. That's why my proposal has said that we are going to work with employers who provide health care for their employees, to lower premiums by up to \$2,500 per family per year. For those who don't have health care, we are going to set up a plan that's as good as the one that I have as a Member of Congress. We're going to make sure there is no exclusion for pre-existing conditions. We're going to work to emphasize prevention and make sure that we have a health care system instead of a disease care system. We are going to negotiate for the cheapest available price on prescription drugs. We are not going to do any of this 10 years from now or 20 years from now, but we are going to do this by the end of my first term as President of the United States. (*applause*)

President Patton: The group is acknowledging their desire to have that happen, too.

Senator Obama: Absolutely. Part of the reason that I think that all of you understand this is because you are on the front lines of health care. Just a quick story - when I was in the hospital with my wife waiting for the arrival of my first daughter - our ob/gyn was one of my best friends, but the truth is we saw her for about 10 minutes during the delivery, but the other 4 or 5 hrs it was nurses who were taking care of her. *(applause)* When my younger daughter got sick, one of the most terrifying days of my life. when she was 3 months old, she got meningitis and we went to the hospital. The doctors were terrific, but the fact was it was the nurses who were sitting with us explaining what was happening and assuring Michelle and me that everything was going to be okay. So I know how hard all of you work; and I know how important it is to make sure that we provide you with the kind of work environment and the kind of training and the kind of support that you so desperately need.

As I was doing rounds with Kate in that hospital, I thought if only Washington knew how demanding all of your jobs really are, then we might make some policies that actually give you the support that you need. That's not only making sure that prevention services are properly funded, it's also making sure that nurses are properly paid. That Medicare and Medicaid reimbursements are there, especially in rural hospitals. It means that we're paying nursing professor so that we're training more nurses here in the U.S. *(applause)* It means providing scholarships because the cost of a nursing education has just gotten exorbitant. That's why I want to provide a \$4,000 tuition credit to every student every year so that nurses don't go deeply into debt - so they can go to school and get trained in a profession they'll end up loving. And it means giving full scholarships to nurses who are willing to work in underserved hospitals and underserved communities. So there are just so many things we can do - to offer scholarships and loan repayment programs to make sure that we are creating the kind of nursing workforce that's going to be so important.

And one other thing that we've been saying: because of the nursing shortage -- this thing I worked on in Illinois - is that it unfairly and regularly forces you to work endless hours of overtime. That not only deters young people from becoming nurses, not only takes a toll on you, but it takes a toll on the patients as well - so creating a high quality work environment for all of you is absolutely critical for long term patient care. You guys do your part each and every day.

President Patton: Well, Senator thank you so much, we agree with probably almost all, if not all of what you have said, related to what needs to be done in this country to impact our health care system, because it's broken.

Senator Obama: Well, it's absolutely broken. And you do your part each and every day to look after patients, and it's time that Washington gives you the respect you deserve, the support you need. It's time that we monitor nurse patient ratios. It's time we adopt health information technology to streamline the burdens of paperwork, assistive technology to keep you safe on the job. That's why we need to limit mandatory overtime. I supported that bill in the Senate and that's why I am going to sign that bill into law when I am President of the United States. *(applause)*

President Patton: Thank you very much for that. The audience is rising to their feet to show you our feelings about this.

Senator Obama: So let me close by saying this. You guys have an extraordinary choice in this election. There is a stark contrast between the candidates. We've got a great chance of winning, but our fight is not going to be easy. That's why I am asking for your support. If all of you are in a caring profession, you got into nursing not to get rich but because you know there is nothing more important in life than to make sure you are helping other. If you will stand with me in these next 4 1/2 months and reach out to your fellow nurses, talk to your neighbors, friends and family members. If you will march with me and knock on doors with me, and make phone calls with me and vote for me, I promise you this, we're not just going to just win this election, we are going to change our health care system, we are going to make working conditions for nurses all across the country better, and we're going to attract new young people into the profession. And you and I together, we are going to change America. We're going to change this world. Thank you very much everybody. I appreciate you guys. (*applause*)

President Patton: Thank you Senator, thank you very much. Thank you for calling in this morning. The audience is rising to their feet again.

Senator Obama: Thank you Becky, I look forward to seeing you all in person on Inauguration Day.

President Patton: Thank you. We will be there. (*telephone connection terminated*) I would like to thank the House for allowing me to have that dialogue with the Senator. I wasn't sure how we should end that call - we'll be in touch? Have your people call my people?

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Note: Remarks begin at 24:00 and end at 36:50 on ANA Disc 2, Friday, July 27, 2008.