

Remarks of Senator Barack Obama – as prepared for delivery
Joint Event with Senator Hillary Clinton
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New York City, NY

Thank you, Hillary. And thanks to all of you for joining us here today.

I want to start by saying a few words about the woman you just heard from. As someone who took the same historic journey as Senator Clinton – who shared a stage with her many times over those sixteen months – I know firsthand how tough she is, how passionate she is, how committed she is to the causes that bring us here today. I know that what drives her today – and every day – is exactly what led her to the Children’s Defense Fund years ago; it’s what led her to reform struggling schools in Arkansas and fight for health care as First Lady; it’s what has made her an outstanding Senator from New York and a historic candidate for the presidency – an unyielding desire to improve the lives of ordinary Americans.

And you can rest assure that when we finally win the battle for universal health care in this country, it will be because of her tireless work. When we finally transform our energy policy, and lift our children out of poverty, and make our economy work for working families again, it will be because she helped make it happen.

I’ve admired her as a leader, I’ve learned from her as a candidate, I am proud to call her my friend, and I know how much we’ll need both Hillary Clinton and Bill Clinton as a party and a country in the months and years to come.

Hillary and I may have started with separate goals in this campaign, but together, we shattered barriers that have stood firm since the founding of this nation. Of course, we all know that one election can’t erase the biases and outdated attitudes we’re still wrestling to overcome. And we know there were times during this campaign when those biases emerged. But while this campaign has shown us how far we have to go, we also know that because of what Hillary accomplished, my daughters and yours look at themselves a little differently today. They’re dreaming a little bigger and setting their sights a little higher today.

And the question we face now is, what kind of future are we going to build for them? It’s a question I ask not just as a candidate for President, but as a father thinking about the challenges my girls will face as they start careers and families of their own. It’s a question I ask as a son, a grandson, and a husband who’s seen some of the women I love most in the world confront so many of these challenges themselves.

I saw my mother, a young, single mom, put herself through school, and follow her passion for helping others while raising me and my sister. But I also saw how she struggled to provide for us, worrying at times about how she’d pay the bills.

I saw my grandmother, who helped raise me, work her way up from a secretary at a bank to become one of the first women bank vice presidents in the state. But I also saw how she ultimately hit a glass ceiling – how men no more qualified than she was kept moving up the corporate ladder ahead of her.

And I’ve seen my wife, Michelle, the rock of the Obama family, juggle jobs and parenting with more skill and grace than anyone I know. But I’ve also seen how it tears at her. How sometimes, when she’s with the girls, she’s worrying about work – and when she’s at work, she’s worrying about the girls. It’s a feeling I share every day – especially these days, when I’m away so much out on the campaign trail.

It’s something I hear all the time from working parents, especially working women – many of whom are working more than one job to make ends meet. And then there are the jobs you have once the workday ends: whether it’s cleaning the house or paying the bills or buying the groceries, helping with that science project or enforcing those bedtimes. The jobs you don’t get paid for, but that hold our families together. Jobs that still, even in the year 2008, far too often fall to women.

But let’s be clear: these issues – equal pay, work/family balance, childcare – these are by no means just women’s issues. When a job doesn’t offer family leave, that also hurts men who want to help care for a new baby or an ailing parent. When there’s no affordable childcare or afterschool programs, that hurts children who wind up in second rate care, or spending afternoons alone in front of the TV. When women still make just 77 cents for every dollar men make – black and Latina women even less – that doesn’t just hurt women, it hurts families who find themselves with less income, and have to work even harder just to get by.

So you’d think solving these problems would be one of our highest national priorities. But while some politicians in

Washington make a lot of noise about family values, when it comes to what people actually need to support their families, and care for their families, and spend time with their families – they get awfully quiet, don't they? And year after year, it just gets harder for working parents – especially working women – to make a living while raising their kids.

We take it for granted that women are the backbone of our families, but we too often ignore the fact that women are also the backbone of our middle class. And we won't truly have an economy that puts the needs of the middle class first until we ensure that when it comes to pay and benefits at work, women are treated like the equal partners they are.

As the son, grandson and husband of hard-working mothers, I don't accept an America that makes women choose between their kids and their careers. It's unacceptable that women are denied jobs or promotions because they've got kids at home. It's unacceptable that 22 million working women don't have a single paid sick day. It's unacceptable that millions of working mothers could actually be fired for taking maternity leave – and that 78 percent of workers who have family leave can't afford to take it because it's not paid.

No matter what you do for living – I think we can all agree that raising our children and caring for our loved ones is the most important job we have. And it's time we started making that job a little bit easier, especially for working women.

That means giving working parents tax credits to help with childcare and providing afterschool and summer learning programs and early childhood education to keep our kids safe and ensure they start school ready to learn.

It means dramatically expanding the Family and Medical Leave Act to reach millions of people who aren't covered today – and ensuring people can take leave not just to stay home with a new baby, but also to care for elderly parents and participate in school activities like parent-teacher conferences and assemblies.

It means standing up for paid leave, and paid sick leave, because no one should be punished for getting sick or dealing with a family crisis.

And it means fighting for equal pay for women. In 2008, when 62 percent of working women in America earn half – or more than half – of their family's income, you'd think the pay gap would be a thing of the past. Or that we'd at least be united in our determination to guarantee that women are paid fairly for their work.

But Senator McCain and I have a real difference on this issue. He thinks the Supreme Court got it right last year when they handed down the *Ledbetter* decision that makes it more difficult for women to challenge pay discrimination at work. He opposed legislation that I co-sponsored to reverse that decision. He suggested that the reason women don't have equal pay isn't discrimination on the job – it's because they need more education and training.

Well let's be clear: the problem in these kinds of cases isn't that women are somehow unqualified or unprepared for higher-paying positions. The problem is that some employers aren't paying women fairly. The problem is that too many women aren't able to challenge employers who are underpaying them. And the solution is to finally close that gap and pay women what they've earned, nothing less.

This isn't just an economic issue for millions of Americans and their families. It's a question of who we are as a country – of whether we're going to live up to our values as a nation.

And let's be clear, the Supreme Court's ruling on equal pay is just the tip of the iceberg in terms of what's at stake in this election. Usually, when we talk about the Court, it's in the context of reproductive rights and *Roe v. Wade*. And make no mistake about it, that's a critical issue in this election. Senator McCain has made it abundantly clear that he wants to appoint justices like Roberts and Alito – and that he hopes to see *Roe* overturned. Well, I stand by my votes against confirming Justices Roberts and Alito. And I've made it equally clear that I will never back down in defending a woman's right to choose.

But the Supreme Court also affects women's lives in so many other ways – from decisions on equal pay, to workplace discrimination, to Title IX, to domestic violence, to civil rights and workers' rights. And the question we face in this election is whether we'll have judges who demonstrate sound judgment and empathy, who understand how law operates in our daily lives, who are committed to upholding the values at the core of our Constitution – or judges who put ideology before justice, with our fundamental rights as the first casualty.

And that's just the beginning. In this election, we also face questions about the fundamental issues that will shape the world in which our sons and daughters live.

We face questions about whether we'll allow the divide between Main Street and Wall Street to grow as our economy continues to struggle – or build an economy that works for all our families, where our prosperity is once again the tide that lifts every boat.

Whether we'll continue to spend ten billion dollars a month in Iraq and leave our troops there for the next twenty years, or fifty years, or one hundred years – or start bringing them home, refocusing on al Qaeda in Afghanistan, rebuilding our military, and taking care of our veterans.

Whether we'll continue to stand by as health care costs push more people into bankruptcy and the number of uninsured keeps rising – or finally guarantee quality, affordable coverage to every single American.

Whether we'll watch a generation of children graduate without the skills they need to compete in a global economy – or give all our children a world class education, from early childhood all the way to college.

Whether we'll keep depending on dictators for our energy, giving billions in tax breaks to oil companies, and destroying our planet in the process – or decide that solving our energy crisis will be the great project of this generation.

These are the choices in this election. This is what I think about when I get the chance to tuck my girls in at night. How I want my daughters – and all our daughters – to have no limits on their dreams, no obstacles to their achievement, no opportunities beyond their reach. How I want them to have opportunities their mother and grandmother never could've imagined.

We've come so much closer to fulfilling that goal because of the extraordinary woman with whom I shared a stage so many times during this campaign as an opponent – and now have the privilege of doing so as a partner – my friend, Senator Hillary Clinton.

And I'm honored that all of you are joining us as we finish this journey. Together, we'll turn the page on the failed policies of the past. We'll bring new energy and new ideas to meet the challenges we face. We'll ensure that our daughters have the same rights, the same dreams, the same freedom to pursue their version of happiness as our sons. And we won't just win an election – we will transform this nation.

Thank you.

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