



****EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY****
REMARKS BY JOHN MCCAIN IN COLUMBUS,
OHIO

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Thursday, May 15, 2008

ARLINGTON, VA -- U.S. Senator John McCain will deliver the following remarks as prepared for delivery at the Greater Columbus Convention Center, in Columbus, OH, today at 10:00 a.m. EDT:

Thank you. The hectic but repetitive routine of presidential campaigns often seems to consist entirely of back and forth charges between candidates, punctuated by photo ops, debates and the occasional policy speech, followed by another barrage of accusations and counter accusations, formulated into the soundbites preferred by cable news producers. It is a little hypocritical for candidates or reporters to criticize these deficiencies. They are our creation. Campaigns and the media collaborated as architects of the modern presidential campaign, and we deserve equal blame for the regret we feel from time to time over its less than inspirational features. Voters, however, even in this revolutionary communications age, with its 24 hour news cycle, can be forgiven their uncertainty about what the candidates actually hope to achieve if they have the extraordinary privilege of being elected President of the United States. We spend too little time and offer too few specifics on that most important of questions. We make promises, of course, about what kind of policies we would pursue in office. But they often are obscured, mischaracterized and forgotten in the heat and fog of political battle.

Next January, the political leadership of the United States will change significantly. It is important that the candidates who seek to lead the country after the Bush Administration define their objectives and what they plan to achieve not with vague language but with clarity.

So, what I want to do today is take a little time to describe what I would hope to have achieved at the end of my first term as President. I cannot guarantee I will have achieved these things. I am presumptuous enough to think I would be a good President, but not so much that I believe I can govern by command. Should I forget that, Congress will, of course, hasten to remind me. The following are conditions I intend to achieve. And toward that end, I will focus all the powers of the office; every skill and strength I possess; and seize every opportunity to work with members of Congress who put the national interest ahead of partisanship, and any country in the world that shares our hopes for a more peaceful and prosperous world.

By January 2013, America has welcomed home most of the servicemen and women who have sacrificed terribly so that America might be secure in her freedom. The Iraq War has been won. Iraq is a functioning democracy, although still suffering from the lingering effects of decades of

tyranny and centuries of sectarian tension. Violence still occurs, but it is spasmodic and much reduced. Civil war has been prevented; militias disbanded; the Iraqi Security Force is professional and competent; al Qaeda in Iraq has been defeated; and the Government of Iraq is capable of imposing its authority in every province of Iraq and defending the integrity of its borders. The United States maintains a military presence there, but a much smaller one, and it does not play a direct combat role.

The threat from a resurgent Taliban in Afghanistan has been greatly reduced but not eliminated. U.S. and NATO forces remain there to help finish the job, and continue operations against the remnants of al Qaeda. The Government of Pakistan has cooperated with the U.S. in successfully adapting the counterinsurgency tactics that worked so well in Iraq and Afghanistan to its lawless tribal areas where al Qaeda fighters are based. The increase in actionable intelligence that the counterinsurgency produced led to the capture or death of Osama bin Laden, and his chief lieutenants. There is no longer any place in the world al Qaeda can consider a safe haven. Increased cooperation between the United States and its allies in the concerted use of military, diplomatic, and economic power and reforms in the intelligence capabilities of the United States has disrupted terrorist networks and exposed plots around the world. There still has not been a major terrorist attack in the United States since September 11, 2001.

The United States and its allies have made great progress in advancing nuclear security. Concerted action by the great democracies of the world has persuaded a reluctant Russia and China to cooperate in pressuring Iran to abandon its nuclear ambitions, and North Korea to discontinue its own. The single greatest threat facing the West -- the prospect of nuclear materials in the hands of terrorists -- has been vastly diminished.

The size of the Army and Marine Corps has been significantly increased, and are now better equipped and trained to defend us. Long overdue reforms to the way we acquire weapons programs, including fixed price contracts, have created sufficient savings to pay for a larger military. A substantial increase in veterans educational benefits and improvements in their health care has aided recruitment and retention. The strain on the National Guard and reserve forces has been relieved.

After efforts to pressure the Government in Sudan over Darfur failed again in the U.N. Security Council, the United States, acting in concert with a newly formed League of Democracies, applied stiff diplomatic and economic pressure that caused the government of Sudan to agree to a multinational peacekeeping force, with NATO countries providing logistical and air support, to stop the genocide that had made a mockery of the world's repeated declaration that we would "never again" tolerate such inhumanity. Encouraged by the success, the League is now occupied with using the economic power and prestige of its member states to end other gross abuses of human rights such as the despicable crime of human trafficking.

The United States has experienced several years of robust economic growth, and Americans again have confidence in their economic future. A reduction in the corporate tax rate from the second highest in the world to one on par with our trading partners; the low rate on capital gains; allowing business to deduct in a single year investments in equipment and technology, while eliminating tax loopholes and ending corporate welfare, have spurred innovation and productivity, and encouraged companies to keep their operations and jobs in the United States. The Alternate Minimum Tax is being phased out, with relief provided first to middle income families. Doubling the size of the child exemption has put more disposable income in the hands of taxpayers, further stimulating growth.

Congress has just passed by a single up or down vote a tax reform proposal that offers Americans a choice of continuing to file under the rules of the current complicated and burdensome tax code or use a new, simpler, fairer and flatter tax, with two rates and a generous deduction. Millions of taxpayers are expected to file under the flat tax, and save billions in the cost of preparing their returns.

After exercising my veto several times in my first year in office, Congress has not sent me an appropriations bill containing earmarks for the last three years. A top to bottom review of every federal bureaucracy has yielded great reductions in government spending by identifying programs that serve no important purpose; and instigating far reaching reforms of procurement and operating policies that have for too long extravagantly wasted money for no better purpose than to increase federal payrolls.

New free trade agreements have been ratified and led to substantial increases in both exports and imports. The resulting growth in prosperity in countries from South America to Asia to Africa has greatly strengthened America's security and the global progress of our political ideals. U.S. tariffs on agricultural imports have been eliminated and unneeded farm subsidies are being phased out. The world food crisis has ended, inflation is low, and the quality of life not only in our country, but in some of the most impoverished countries around the world is much improved.

Americans, who through no fault of their own, lost jobs in the global economy they once believed were theirs for life, are assisted by reformed unemployment insurance and worker retraining programs. Older workers who accept lower paying jobs while they acquire new skills are provided assistance to make up a good part of the income they have lost. Community colleges and technical schools all over the country have developed worker retraining programs suited to the specific economic opportunities available in their communities and are helping millions of workers who have lost a job that won't come back find a new one that won't go away.

Public education in the United States is much improved thanks to the competition provided by charter and private schools; the increase of quality teachers through incentives like merit pay and terrific programs that attract to the classroom enthusiastic and innovative teachers from many disciplines, like Teach for America and Troops to Teachers. Educational software and online teaching programs endorsed by qualified non profits are much more widely in use, bringing to the smallest classrooms in America some of the greatest math, English, and science teachers in the country. This revolution in teaching methods has especially benefited rural America. Test scores and graduation rates are rising everywhere in the country.

Health care has become more accessible to more Americans than at any other time in history. Reforms of the insurance market; putting the choice of health care into the hands of American families rather than exclusively with the government or employers; walk in clinics as alternatives to emergency room care; paying for outcome in the treatment of disease rather than individual procedures; and competition in the prescription drug market have begun to wring out the runaway inflation once endemic in our health care system. More small businesses offer their employees health plans. Schools have greatly improved their emphasis on physical education and nutritional content of meals offered in school cafeterias. Obesity rates among the young and the disease they engender are stabilized and beginning to decline. The federal government and states have cooperated in establishing backstop insurance pools that provide coverage to people hard pressed to find insurance elsewhere because of pre-existing illness.

The reduction in the growth of health care costs has begun to relieve some of the pressure on Medicare; encouraging Congress to act in a bipartisan way to extend its solvency for twenty-five years without increasing taxes and raising premiums only for upper income seniors. Their success encouraged a group of congressional leaders from both parties to work with my administration to fix Social Security as well, without reducing benefits to those near retirement. The reforms include some form of personal retirement accounts in safe and reliable index funds, such as have been available to government employees since their retirement plans were made solvent a quarter century ago.

The United States is well on the way to independence from foreign sources of oil; progress that has not only begun to alleviate the environmental threat posed from climate change, but has greatly improved our security as well. A cap and trade system has been implemented, spurring great innovation in the development of green technologies and alternative energy sources. Clean coal technology has advanced considerably with federal assistance. Construction has begun on twenty new nuclear reactors thanks to improved incentives and a streamlined regulatory process.

Scores of judges have been confirmed to the federal district and appellate courts, including the U.S. Supreme Court, who understand that they were not sent there to write our laws but to enforce them and make sure they are consistent with the Constitution. They are judges of exceptional character and quality, who enforce and do not make laws, and who respect the values of the people whose rights, laws and property they are sworn to defend.

Border state governors have certified and the American people recognize that after tremendous improvements to border security infrastructure and increases in the border patrol, and vigorous prosecution of companies that employ illegal aliens, our southern border is now secure. Illegal immigrants who broke our laws after they came here have been arrested and deported. Illegal immigration has been finally brought under control, and the American people accepted the practical necessity to institute a temporary worker program and deal humanely with the millions of immigrants who have been in this country illegally.

Voluntary national service has grown in popularity in part because of the educational benefits used as incentives, as well as frequent appeals from the bully pulpit of the White House, but mostly because the young Americans, no less than earlier generations, understand that true happiness is much greater than the pursuit of pleasure, and can only be found by serving causes greater than self-interest. Scores of accomplished private sector leaders have joined the ranks of my administration for a dollar a year and have instituted some of the most innovative reforms of government programs ever known, often in partnership with willing private sector partners. A sense of community, a kinship of ideals, has invigorated public service again.

This is the progress I want us to achieve during my presidency. These are the changes I am running for President to make. I want to leave office knowing that America is safer, freer, and wealthier than when I was elected; that more Americans have more opportunities to pursue their dreams than at any other time in our history; that the world has become less threatening to our interests and more hospitable to our values; and that America has again, as she always has, chosen not to hide from history but to make history.

I am well aware I cannot make any of these changes alone. The powers of the presidency are rightly checked by the other branches of government, and I will not attempt to acquire powers our founders saw fit to grant Congress. I will exercise my veto if I believe legislation passed by Congress is not in the nation's best interests, but I will not subvert the purpose of legislation I

have signed by making statements that indicate I will enforce only the parts of it I like. I will respect the responsibilities the Constitution and the American people have granted Congress, and will, as I often have in the past, work with anyone of either party to get things done for our country.

For too long, now, Washington has been consumed by a hyper-partisanship that treats every serious challenge facing us as an opportunity to trade insults; disparage each other's motives; and fight about the next election. For all the problems we face, if you ask Americans what frustrates them most about Washington, they will tell you they don't think we're capable of serving the public interest before our personal and partisan ambitions; that we fight for ourselves and not for them. Americans are sick of it, and they have every right to be. They are sick of the politics of selfishness, stalemate and delay. They despair when every election -- no matter who wins -- always seems to produce four more years of unkept promises and a government that is just a battleground for the next election. Their patience is at an end for politicians who value ambition over principle, and for partisanship that is less a contest of ideas than an uncivil brawl over the spoils of power. They want to change not only the policies and institutions that have failed the American people, but the political culture that produced them. They want to move this country forward and stake our claim on this century as we did in the last. And they want their government to care more about them than preserving the privileges of the powerful.

There are serious issues at stake in this election, and serious differences between the candidates. And we will argue about them, as we should. But it should remain an argument among friends; each of us struggling to hear our conscience, and heed its demands; each of us, despite our differences, united in our great cause, and respectful of the goodness in each other. That is how most Americans treat each other. And it is how they want the people they elect to office to treat each other.

If I am elected President, I will work with anyone who sincerely wants to get this country moving again. I will listen to any idea that is offered in good faith and intended to help solve our problems, not make them worse. I will seek the counsel of members of Congress from both parties in forming government policy before I ask them to support it. I will ask Democrats to serve in my administration. My administration will set a new standard for transparency and accountability. I will hold weekly press conferences. I will regularly brief the American people on the progress our policies have made and the setbacks we have encountered. When we make errors, I will confess them readily, and explain what we intend to do to correct them. I will ask Congress to grant me the privilege of coming before both houses to take questions, and address criticism, much the same as the Prime Minister of Great Britain appears regularly before the House of Commons.

We cannot again leave our problems for another unluckier generation of Americans to fix after they have become even harder to solve. I'm not interested in partisanship that serves no other purpose than to gain a temporary advantage over our opponents. This mindless, paralyzing rancor must come to an end. We belong to different parties, not different countries. We are rivals for the same power. But we are also compatriots. We are fellow Americans, and that shared distinction means more to me than any other association. I intend to prove myself worthy of the office; of our country; and of your respect. I won't judge myself by how many elections I've won. I won't spend one hour of my presidency worrying more about my re-election than keeping my promises to the American people. There is a time to campaign, and a time to govern. If I'm elected President, the era of the permanent campaign will end. The era of problem solving will begin. I promise you, from the day I am sworn into office until the last hour of my presidency, I will

work with anyone, of either party, to make this country safe, prosperous and proud. And I won't care who gets the credit.

Thank you.