

**Remarks of Senator Barack Obama  
Taking Our Government Back  
Manchester, New Hampshire  
Friday, June 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2007  
*As Prepared for Delivery***

Over one hundred years ago, around the turn of the last century, the Industrial Revolution was beginning to take hold of America, creating unimaginable wealth in sprawling metropolises all across the country.

As factories multiplied and profits grew, the winnings of the new economy became more and more concentrated in the hands of a few robber barons, railroad tycoons and oil magnates.

It was known as the Gilded Age, and it was made possible by a government that played along. From the politicians in Washington to the big city machines, a vast system of payoffs and patronage, scandal and corruption kept power in the hands of the few while the workers who streamed into the new factories found it harder and harder to earn a decent wage or work in a safe environment or get a day off once in awhile.

Eventually, leaders committed to reform began to speak out all across America, demanding a new kind of politics that would give government back to the people.

One was the young governor of the state of New York.

In just his first year, he had already begun to antagonize the state's political machine by attacking its system of favors and corporate giveaways. He also signed a workers' compensation bill, and fired a high-level official for taking money from the very industry he was supposed to be regulating.

None of this reform sat too well with New York's powerful party boss, who finally plotted to get rid of the governor by making sure he was nominated for the Vice Presidency that year.

What no one could have expected is that soon after the election, when President William McKinley was assassinated, the greatest fears of all the entrenched interests came true when that former governor became President of the United States.

His name, of course, was Teddy Roosevelt. And during his presidency, he went on to bust trusts, break up monopolies, and do his best to give the American people a shot at the dream once more.

Over a century later, America needs this kind of leadership more than ever. We need a President who sees government not as a tool to enrich well-connected friends and high-priced lobbyists, but as the defender of fairness and opportunity for every American.

That's what this country has always been about, and that's the kind of President I intend to be.

We cannot settle for a second Gilded Age in America. And yet we find ourselves once more in the midst of a new economy where more wealth is in danger of falling into fewer hands; where the average CEO now earns more in one day than an average worker earns in an entire year; where Americans are struggling like never before to pay their medical bills, or their kids' tuition, or high gas prices, all while the profits of the drug and insurance and oil industries have never been higher.

And once again, we are faced with a politics that makes all of this possible. In the last six years, our leaders have thrown open the doors of Congress and the White House to an army of Washington lobbyists who have turned our government into a game only they can afford to play – a game played on a field that's no longer level, but rigged to always favor their own narrow agendas.

From Jack Abramoff to Tom Delay, from briberies to indictments, the scandals that have plagued Washington over the last few years have been too numerous to recall.

But their most troubling aspect goes far beyond the headlines that focus on the culprits and their crimes. It's an entire culture in Washington – some of it legal, some of it not – that allows this to happen. Because what's most outrageous is not the morally offensive conduct on behalf of these lobbyists and legislators, but the morally offensive laws and decisions that get made as a result.

The drug and insurance industries spent \$1 billion in lobbying over the last decade. They got what they paid for when their friends in Congress broke the rules and twisted arms to push through a prescription drug bill that actually made it illegal for our own government to negotiate with the pharmaceutical companies for cheaper drug prices. Once it passed, those companies rewarded fifteen government officials and Congressmen who worked on the bill with cushy lobbying jobs that pay millions.

And yet, right now, there are parents and grandparents in this country who will walk into a drugstore and wonder how their Social Security check is going to cover a prescription that's more expensive than it was a month ago; who will be forced to choose between their medicine and their groceries because they can no longer afford both.

This isn't the government they deserve.

The oil companies were allowed to craft energy policy with Dick Cheney in secret while every other voice was silenced – including the NASA scientists who tried to warn us about the dangers of climate change. The industry got everything it wanted, and it even got one of its top lobbyists a job at the White House as an environmental watchdog – a job he used to fix reports that showed a link between carbon emissions and global warming.

Today, our planet is six years closer to a tipping point on climate change. Our country grows more dependent by the day on oil supplied by some of the world's most dangerous and defiant regimes. And in a year where Exxon reported the biggest annual profit of any U.S. corporation in history, our families are heading into a summer where they could pay up to four dollars a gallon for gasoline in some places.

This isn't the government we deserve.

At least eight top officials in our own Education Department have taken or had jobs in the student loan industry, including one who was fired for still owning \$100,000 worth of stock in that industry. These are the same private lenders and banks who have been caught actually bribing colleges to steer business their way – the same ones who charge taxpayers \$8 billion a year to provide student loans at inflated rates, instead of offering the loans directly and using the savings to help more kids. And we wonder why 200,000 students didn't go to college in one recent year for the simple reason that they couldn't afford it.

Billions of no-bid, no-strings-attached contracts have been handed out in New Orleans and Iraq and at Walter Reed Medical Center on the sole basis of who you know and the favors you've done, and yet we're somehow surprised when the families in the 9<sup>th</sup> Ward are still living in trailers, or our soldiers don't have the body armor they need, or our veterans are forced to come home to squalor and neglect.

This isn't the government they deserve. This isn't the America we believe in. And this is the kind of politics that will end when I am President.

Americans of every background and belief are hungry for a new kind of politics – a people's politics that reconnects them with their government; one that offers not just a vote at the ballot box, but a voice in Washington and an assurance that the leaders we send there will hear it.

The people I've met across this country don't just want reform for reform's sake, they want reform that will help pay their doctor's bills, or ensure that their tax dollars are spent wisely, or put us on the path to energy independence. They want real reform and they're tired of the lobbyists standing in the way.

Look, we can't begrudge businesses for trying to make a profit. That's how the free market works. And every American – rich or poor – has the right to lobby their government. That's perfectly fine. But it's time we had a President who tells the drug companies and the oil companies and the insurance industry that while they get a seat at the table in Washington, they don't get to buy every chair. Not anymore.

I know that in every campaign, politicians make promises about cleaning up Washington. And most times, you end up disappointed when it doesn't happen. So it's easy to become cynical – to believe that change isn't possible; that the odds are too great; that this year is bound to be no different from the last.

But I also know what I've seen and what I've done. I know that for me, reform isn't just the rhetoric of a campaign; it's been a cause of my career.

When I arrived in Springfield a decade ago as a state Senator, people said it was too hard to take on the issue of money in politics. Illinois actually had a law that allowed politicians to pocket the money in their campaign accounts for personal use; that allowed any lobbyist or special interest to shower lawmakers with unlimited gifts.

It was obvious that as long as this went on, the people's business would never come first. I knew it was going to be tough, and that I wasn't going to make myself the most popular guy in town – or even in my own party.

But we had the people of Illinois on our side, and that there were folks on both sides of the aisle who were willing to listen, and so we were finally able to pass the first major ethics reform in twenty-five years.

When I arrived in Washington eight years later, the need for change was equally clear. Big money and lobbyists were clearly drowning out the aspirations of the American people. So when my party made me the point person on ethics, I was determined to pass the strongest reform possible. The first time around, Congress came up with a watered-down version. And I was proud to vote against it.

So we came back the second time, and in our bill, we banned gifts and meals and put an end to subsidized travel on corporate jets. We made sure that the American people could see all the pet projects that lawmakers were trying to pass before they were voted on.

And we did something more. Over the objections of powerful voices in both parties, we shined a bright light on how lobbyists help fill the campaign coffers of members of Congress. And we made sure those lobbyists will have to disclose who they're raising campaign money from, and who in Congress they're funneling it to.

As a candidate for President, I've tried to lead by example, turning down all contributions from federal lobbyists and the political action committees that the special interests use to pass out campaign money.

Now, it's true that all of this represents a step forward when it comes to reconnecting people with their government. But it's also true that a step forward isn't good enough. Too often in Washington, special interests still exercise an effective veto on our progress, on issues from health care reform and drug costs to energy independence and global warming.

We saw how this happens during the debate over the energy bill this week. In the face of furious lobbying, Congress brushed aside incentives for the production of more renewable fuels in favor of more tax breaks for the oil and gas companies. And while we

made some progress on fuel economy standards, we didn't get the bold, long-lasting solution that America needs to break its dependency on foreign oil.

So there's more cleaning up to do in Washington and Congress needs to start doing it so we can finally take action on the big challenges that demand solutions.

But we need to clean up both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue. I believe that the responsibility for a people's politics begins with the person who sits in the Oval Office. That is why on my very first day as President, I will launch the most sweeping ethics reform in history to make the White House the people's house and send the Washington lobbyists back to K Street.

**First**, we will close the revolving door that has allowed people to use their Administration job as a stepping stone to further their lobbying careers.

This Administration tried to fill the top job at the Consumer Product Safety commission with a lobbyist from the same manufacturing industry it's supposed to regulate. If Michael Baroody had taken that job, and he faced a complaint over an unsafe product, whose interest would he have served – the mother worried about the lead in her child's toy, or the former boss who gave him a special \$150,000 severance package on his way out the door?

When you're on Dick Cheney's energy task force and you know that a multimillion dollar job as an oil lobbyist could be waiting for you, whose interests are you going to serve – the oil companies that are asking for more tax breaks or the scientists and energy experts who say we need to invest in renewable fuels?

When I am President, I will make it absolutely clear that working in an Obama Administration is not about serving your former employer, your future employer, or your bank account – it's about serving your country, and that's what comes first. When you walk into my administration, you will not be able to work on regulations or contracts directly related to your former employer for two years. And when you leave, you will not be able to lobby the Administration throughout the remainder of my term in office.

A lot of people have told me this is pretty tough, but I refuse to accept the Washington logic that you cannot find thousands of talented, patriotic Americans willing to devote a few years to their country without the promise of a lucrative lobbying job after they're done. I know we can find them, and in my administration, we will.

**Second**, I will end the abuse of no-bid contracts in my administration. In the last six years, the unprecedented use of these contracts has wasted billions of taxpayer dollars and outsourced critical government services to friends and supporters who are more connected than they are qualified. That's why, in the Senate, I worked with Republican Senator Tom Coburn to pass legislation that restricts the use of no-bid contracts when it comes to rebuilding the Gulf Coast.

But we need to do more. When our government gives Halliburton \$7 billion in taxpayer dollars to put out Iraqi oil fires that don't exist; when we hand over Katrina contracts to more of George Bush's FEMA friends, it doesn't just violate the American people's trust, it takes away the tax dollars they've earned and the valuable services they need. It's wrong, and when I am President, it will end.

**Third**, we will institute an absolute gift ban so that no registered lobbyist can curry favor and build relationships with members of my administration based on how much they can spend. When the American people have a concern about the high cost of health care or college tuition, they can't afford to take a White House staffer out to a fancy dinner or an expensive sporting event, and lobbyists shouldn't get to either.

**Fourth**, when it comes to hiring people in my administration, the litmus test we'll apply will not be based on party or ideology, but qualification and experience. This has been the most politicized White House in history, and the American people have suffered as a result. Presidents obviously want to surround themselves with those who share their views and their beliefs, but the days of firing eight qualified U.S. attorneys because of their politics is over. The days of using the White House as another arm of the Republican National Committee are over. And the days of Michael Brown, Arabian Horse Judge, are over.

**Finally**, we will return government to the people by bringing government to the people – by making it open and transparent so that anyone can see that our business is the people's business.

As Justice Louis Brandeis once said, sunlight is the greatest disinfectant. The more people know about how federal laws, rules and regulations are made, and who's making them, the less likely it is that critical decisions will be hijacked by lobbyists and special interests.

I think the current administration knows that, too, which is why it's been the most defiantly secretive government in modern times.

It's time to change that.

When there is a bill that ends up on my desk as President, you will have five days to look online and find out what's in it before I sign it. When there are meetings between lobbyists and a government agency, we won't be going to the Supreme Court to keep it secret like Dick Cheney and his energy task force, we'll be putting them up on the Internet for every American to watch. And instead of allowing lobbyists to slip big corporate tax breaks into bills during the dead of night, we will make sure every single tax break and earmark is available to every American online. This builds on the "Google for Government" law I passed in Congress, which already allows you to see every contract, every grant, every dime of federal spending online.

It's time to renew a people's politics in this country – to ensure that the hopes and concerns of average Americans speak louder in Washington than the hallway whispers of high-priced lobbyists.

In 2004, over \$2.1 billion was spent lobbying the federal government. That amounts to over \$3.9 million per Member of Congress. \$3.9 million so that oil companies can still run our energy policy and pharmaceutical companies can still inflate our drug prices and special interests can still waste our tax dollars.

The American people don't have that kind of money to spend on Washington.

But they shouldn't have to. In our democracy, the price of access and influence should be nothing more than your voice and your vote. That should be enough for health care reform. That should be enough for a real energy policy. That should be enough to ensure that our government is still the defender of fairness and opportunity for every American.

That's the country we're working towards right now. And that's the country I'll fight for every day as your President.

Early in his presidency, Teddy Roosevelt gave a famous speech before farmers and factory workers that laid out his vision of what government at its best should be. He said, "The welfare of each of us is dependent fundamentally upon the welfare of all of us, and therefore in public life, that man is the best representative...whose endeavor it is not to represent any special class or interest, but to represent all...by working for our common country."

It's time to get to work once more for our common country. It's time we had a politics that reflected that commitment. And it's time we had a President who can get it done. I look forward to being that President, and working with all of you to make this America happen. Thank you.