

Remarks of Senator Barack Obama
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As Prepared for Delivery:

It is an honor to be here at Hampton University. It is a privilege to stand with so many ministers from across this country and we thank God and all His blessings for this wonderful day.

A few weeks ago, I attended a service at First A.M.E. Church in Los Angeles to commemorate the 15th anniversary of the LA Riots. After a jury acquitted 4 police officers of beating Rodney King—a beating that was filmed and flashed around the world— Los Angeles erupted. I remember the sense of despair and powerlessness in watching one of America's greatest cities engulfed in flames.

But in the middle of that desperate time, there was a miracle: a baby born with a bullet in its arm. We need to hear about these miracles in these desperate times because they are the blessings that can unite us when some in the world try to drive a wedge between our common humanity and deep, abiding faith. And this story, too, starts with a baby.

We learned about this child from a doctor named Andy Moosa. He was working the afternoon shift on April 30 at St. Francis Medical Center in Lynwood as the second day of violence was exploding in the streets.

He told us about a pregnant woman who had been wearing a white dress. She was in Compton and on her way to the supermarket. Where the bullet came from nobody knew. Her sister-in-law noticed a red spot in the middle of her white dress and said that I think you've been shot. The bullet had gone in, but it had not exited. The doctor described the ultrasound and how he realized that the bullet

was in the baby. The doctor said, "We could tell it was lodged in one of the upper limbs. We needed to get this baby out so we were in the delivery room."

And here's the thing: the baby looked great. Except for the swelling in the right elbow in the fleshy part, it hadn't even fractured a bone. The bullet had lodged in the soft tissue in the muscle. By God's grace, the baby was fine. It was breathing and crying and kicking. They removed the bullet, stitched up the baby's arm, and everything was fine. The doctor went on to say that there's always going to be a scar to remind that child how quickly she came into the world in very unusual circumstances.

I've been thinking and praying about that story. I've been thinking that there's always going to be a scar there, that doesn't go away. You take the bullet out. You stitch up the wound and 15 years later, there's still going to be a scar.

Many of the folks in this room know just where they were when the riot in Los Angeles started and tragedy struck the corner of Florence and Normandy. And most of the ministers here know that those riots didn't erupt over night; there had been a "quiet riot" building up in Los Angeles and across this country for years.

If you had gone to any street corner in Chicago or Baton Rouge or Hampton -- you would have found the same young men and women without hope, without miracles, and without a sense of destiny other than life on the edge -- the edge of the law, the edge of the economy, the edge of family structures and communities.

Those "quiet riots" that take place every day are born from the same place as the fires and the destruction and the police decked out in riot gear and the deaths.

They happen when a sense of disconnect settles in and hope dissipates. Despair takes hold and young people all across this country look at the way the world is and believe that things are never going to get any better. You tell yourself, my school will always be second rate. You tell yourself, there will never be a good job waiting for me to excel at. You tell yourself, I will never be able to afford a place that I can be proud of and call my home. That despair quietly simmers and makes it impossible to build strong communities and neighborhoods. And then

one afternoon a jury says, "Not guilty" -- or a hurricane hits New Orleans -- and that despair is revealed for the world to see.

Much of what we saw on our television screens 15 years ago was Los Angeles expressing a lingering, ongoing, pervasive legacy—a tragic legacy out of the tragic history this country has never fully come to terms with. This is not to excuse the violence of bashing in a man's head or destroying someone's store and their life's work. That kind of violence is inexcusable and self-defeating. It does, however, describe the reality of many communities around this country.

And it made me think about our cities and communities all around this country, how not only do we still have scars from that riot and the "quiet riots" that happen every day—but how in too many places we haven't even taken the bullet out.

Look at what happened in New Orleans and along the Gulf Coast when Katrina hit. People ask me whether I thought race was the reason the response was so slow. I said, "No. This Administration was colorblind in its incompetence." But everyone here knows the disaster and the poverty happened long before that hurricane hit. All the hurricane did was make bare what we ignore each and every day which is that there are whole sets of communities that are impoverished, that don't have meaningful opportunity, that don't have hope and they are forgotten. This disaster was a powerful metaphor for what's gone on for generations.

Of course, the federal response after Katrina was similar to the response after the riots in Los Angeles. People in Washington wake up and are surprised that there's poverty in our midst, and that others were frustrated and angry. Then there are panels and there are hearings. There are commissions. There are reports. Aid dollars are approved but they can't seem to get to the people. And then nothing really changes except the news coverage quiets down.

This isn't to diminish the extraordinary generosity of the American people at the time. Our churches and denominations were particularly generous during this time, sending millions of dollars, thousands of volunteers and countless prayers down to the Gulf Coast.

But despite this extraordinary generosity, here we are 19 months later – or 15 years later in the case of LA -- and the homes haven't been built, the businesses haven't returned, and those same communities are still drowning and smoldering under the same hopelessness as before the tragedy hit.

And so God is asking us today to remember that miracle of that baby. And He is asking us to take that bullet out once more.

If we have more black men in prison than are in our colleges and universities, then it's time to take the bullet out. If we have millions of people going to the emergency room for treatable illnesses like asthma; it's time to take the bullet out. If too many of our kids don't have health insurance; it's time to take the bullet out. If we keep sending our kids to dilapidated school buildings, if we keep fighting this war in Iraq, a war that never should have been authorized and waged, a war that's costing us \$275 million dollars a day and a war that is taking too many innocent lives -- if we have all these challenges and nothing's changing, then every minister in America needs to come together -- form our own surgery teams -- and take the bullets out.

So what's stopping us? What's stopping us from taking these bullets out and rebuilding our families, our communities, our nation and our faith in one another? What's stopping us from seeing the light and the way and the faith that unites us?

Well, I've been on a journey trying to get at the truth of that question.

That journey started a long time ago in Hawaii, but it got interesting when I moved to Chicago. I moved there when I was just a year out of college, and a group of churches offered me a job as a community organizer so I could help rebuild neighborhoods that had been devastated by the closing of steel plants.

They didn't pay me much, but they gave me enough to live on plus something extra to buy an old, beat-up car, and so I took the job and drove out to Chicago, where I didn't know a soul. And during the time I was there, we worked to set up job training programs for the unemployed and after school programs for kids.

It was also there – at Trinity United Church of Christ on the South Side of Chicago – that I met Rev. Jeremiah A. Wright Jr., who took me on another journey and introduced me to a man named Jesus Christ. It was the best education I ever had. At Trinity and working in the South Side, I learned that when church folks come together, they can achieve extraordinary things.

After three years, I went back across this country to law school. I left there with a degree and a lifetime of debt, but I turned down the corporate job offers so I could come back to Chicago and organize a voter registration drive. I also started a civil rights practice, and began to teach constitutional law.

After a few years, people started coming up to me and telling me I should run for state Senate. So I did what every man does when he's faced with a big decision – I prayed on it, and I asked my wife. And after consulting those two higher powers, I decided to get in the race.

Everywhere I'd go, I'd get two questions. First, they'd ask, "Where'd you get that funny name, Barack Obama?" Because people just couldn't pronounce it. They'd call me "Alabama," or they'd call me "Yo Mama." And I'd tell them that my father was from Kenya, and that's where I got my name. And my mother was from Kansas, and that's where I got my accent from.

And the second thing people would ask me gets back to the question about why we can't seem to take the bullet out in this country and do the works and the deeds and unite this country.

They'd say, "You seem like a nice young man. You've done all this great work. You've been a community organizer, and you teach law school, you're a civil rights attorney, you're a family man – why would you wanna go into something dirty and nasty like politics?"

And I understand the question, and the cynicism. We all understand it.

We understand it because we get the sense today that politics has become a business and not a mission. The leaders in Washington have forgotten President

Kennedy's call to remember that "here on Earth God's work must truly be our own."

In the last several years, we have seen Washington become a place where driving the wedge to further divide us and keeping score of who's up and who's down is more important than who's working on behalf of the sick and the hungry and the lonely.

We have been told that our mounting debts don't matter, that the economy is doing great, and that people's anxieties about rising health care costs and disappearing pensions aren't a big deal. We've been told that climate change is a hoax, that our broken schools cannot be fixed, and that we are destined to send millions of dollars a day to Mideast dictators for their oil.

And when it comes to faith, we've been told that all that matters is what divides us – Evangelicals from Mainline Protestants, the Black church from the White church, Catholics from Protestants from Muslims from Jews.

And when we try to have an honest debate about the crises we face, whether it's from the pulpit or the campaign trail, the pundits don't want us to find common ground, they want us to find someone to blame. They want to divide us into Red States and Blue States, and tell us to always point the finger at somebody else – the other party, or gay people, or people of faith, or immigrants.

This journey teaches us that they are going to keep driving that wedge; they are going to keep the distraction going. They are going to keep our faiths separate until we shout from the mountain top, "Our Father who art in heaven, we are going to take the bullets out. We believe in your will and your way."

Right here in this room, we believe that God is big enough to overcome the smallness of our politics; that He is big enough to overcome our doubts and our cynicism and our worries; that He is big enough to love children of every color and creed and political label.

Ministers, it's time to unite behind our faith and help all of God's children around the world and here at home realize that we are all surgeons. Our faith, the word and his will are the instruments we need to take the bullets out.

Let's start with fighting poverty.

There are 37 million Americans who are poor. Most work. Most are single mothers and children. And most are forgotten by leaders in Washington. It's time to take the bullet out and lift the poor out of despair and into the middle class of America.

That's why throughout my years in the Illinois State Senate and every day of this campaign, I've been fighting to expand the EITC, create a living wage, put a qualified teacher and more math and science teachers in our struggling schools, increase Pell Grants so more people can go to college, build more homes people can afford, go after predatory lenders, and make sure we rebuild New Orleans and the Gulf. We've been working hard to take those bullets.

But we need to do more to fight poverty in this country. I need your support to do that. And I want to tell you quickly about a few new ideas I have today.

We can diminish poverty if we approach it in two ways: by taking mutual responsibility for each other as a society, and also by asking for some more individual responsibility to strengthen our families.

If we want to stop the cycle of poverty, then we need to start with our families.

We need to start supporting parents with young children. There is a pioneering Nurse-Family Partnership program right now that offers home visits by trained registered nurses to low-income mothers and mothers-to-be. They learn how to care for themselves before the baby is born and what to do after. It's common sense to reach out to a young mother. Teach her about changing the baby. Help her understand what all that crying means, and when to get vaccines and check-ups.

This program saves money. It raises healthy babies and creates better parents. It reduced childhood injuries and unintended pregnancies, increased father

involvement and women's employment, reduced use of welfare and food stamps, and increased children's school readiness. And it produced more than \$28,000 in net savings for every high-risk family enrolled in the program.

This works and I will expand the Nurse-Family Partnership to provide at-home nurse visits for up to 570,000 first-time mothers each year. We can do this. Our God is big enough for that.

We need to give our young people some real choices out there so they move away from gangs and violence and connect them with growing job sectors. That is why I am also going to create a 5-E Youth Service Corps. The "E's" stand for energy efficiency, environmental education and employment. This program would directly engage disconnected and disadvantaged young people in energy efficiency and environmental service opportunities to strengthen their communities while also providing them with practical skills and experience in important and growing career field. We can do this. When it comes to bringing hope and real job opportunities to our young people, we can take the bullet out. Our God is big enough for that.

We know what works. We know that supporting ex-offenders and their families keeps our men out of prison. That makes a difference in our families and can stop the cycle of poverty. That is why I will expand federal programs that help ex-offenders and sign the Second Chance Act into law.

As president, I will do more to strengthen support to state correctional systems so that ex-offenders can meet their parole requirements without worrying about losing their jobs. I will create a prison-to-work incentive program, modeled on the successful Welfare-to-Work program. It would create strong ties with employers, job training agencies and ex-offenders to improve job retention rates. And I will reach out to all the Reverends and engage faith-based organizations to provide support for ex-offenders and their families, both during incarceration and after. We can do that for our families. Our God is a forgiving God. He's certainly big enough for that.

But we need to do a better job making sure that there are jobs in our communities. We need to provide economic opportunity in every corner of our country if we want to take the bullet out.

We know that we have to invest in transitional jobs too. When there are people who are homeless, veterans struggling with post-traumatic stress disorder from this war in Iraq, and thousands of children aging out of foster care, we can't expect them to have all the skills they need for work. They may need help with basic skills—how to show up to work on time, wear the right clothes, and act appropriately in an office. We have to help them get there. That's why I have called for \$50 million to begin innovative new job training and workforce development programs.

But what good are these efforts if men and women can't afford the bus fare or the subway fare or the car insurance to get to the training center or new job. That is why, as president, I will invest in transportation.

We know that three-quarters of welfare recipients live in areas that are poorly served by public transportation and low-income workers spend up to 36% of their incomes on transportation. That is why I will fight to ensure that the federal Jobs Access and Reverse Commute program provides grants to improve low-income access to transportation. And that additional federal public transportation dollars flow to the highest-need communities. No one should be denied work in this country because they can't find public transportation in their neighborhood.

But we should do just as much if not more to invest in minority-owned businesses in our neighborhoods so people don't need to travel miles away in the first place. Right now, less than one percent of the \$250 billion in venture capital dollars that we invest nationwide each year has been directed to the country's 4.4 million minority business owners. And in recent years, there has been a significant decline in the share of the Small Business Investment Company financings that have gone to minority-owned and women-owned businesses. We are going to change that and strengthen the Small Business Administration to provide more capital minority-owned businesses. We can do that.

And here's one final idea today that will help break the cycle of poverty – affordable health care for every American. Our God is big enough for that now.

The other day I met a couple who owns a small business in northern Iowa that hundreds of people in their community count on every day to get their internet access. But today they are on the verge of bankruptcy – and it's all because of their health care costs.

Seventeen years ago the husband had cancer. He's recovered now, but every year since then, his family's premiums have gone up, and they can't find anyone else who will insure them. They now pay forty percent of their income in health care premiums, they haven't been able to save a dime for their kids' college education, and they're having trouble paying for things like clothes and gas.

When the loan officer first uttered the word "bankruptcy," it was one of the worst days of their life. They said, "We have done everything right. We have done everything we were supposed to do. This is not who we are." This is not who we are.

I have a health care plan that will cover every American and cut the cost of every family's premiums by up to \$2500 a year. If you don't have health care, this plan will offer you coverage that's similar to the kind federal employees and members of Congress give themselves. If you do have health care, it will bring down your premiums by investing in information technology, and preventive care, and by stopping the drug companies from price-gouging when patients need their medicine. It will help business and families shoulder the burden of catastrophic care so that an illness doesn't lead to a bankruptcy. And I promise you this – this health care plan will be signed into law by the end of my first term in office as President.

Before we can start that work, we need to end this war in Iraq. We are spending \$275 million a day in Iraq. Those dollars could go a long way to ending poverty in this country. This war should never have been authorized and waged. I opposed it from the very start, back in 2002 when it wasn't popular to be against this war. I opposed it because I believed strongly that it could lead to the disaster we find

ourselves in today, with our brave young service men and women mired in the middle of a civil war.

That's why I introduced a plan in January that would have brought them home by March 31st, while forcing the Iraqi government to meet its obligations. We need 16 Republican votes in the Senate to force this President to change course. This is the only chance we have to truly end the war. It's not symbolic; this is real. Sixteen votes and we can turn the page on this war. Sixteen votes and we can start bringing our men and women home. Our God is big enough for that. Our God is calling on us to do that.

We all know that our faith will be tested and challenged. It happens to each and every one of us. As some of you know, during the 2004 U.S. Senate General Election I ran against a gentleman named Alan Keyes. Mr. Keyes is well-versed in the Pat Robertson style of rhetoric that often labels progressives as both immoral and godless.

Indeed, Mr. Keyes announced toward the end of the campaign that, "Jesus Christ would not vote for Barack Obama. Christ would not vote for Barack Obama because Barack Obama has behaved in a way that it is inconceivable for Christ to have behaved." Jesus Christ would not vote for Barack Obama.

It nagged at me in that campaign because I did not respond with the full force of what I found that Sunday morning at Trinity United Church of Christ: that our faith can never be used as a driving force to divide us. That with a big God, with a loving and forceful God we need to unite in His name to finish His work on earth.

It reminds me of a simple truth: a truth I learned all those years ago as an organizer in Chicago—a truth you speak of in your churches every Sunday. In the face of impossible odds, people who love their country can change it. With a uniting faith, with a God powerful enough to empower us—we can take the bullets out.

We know how the doctors do it. We watch some of these TV shows like ER and Gray's Anatomy. The doctors are in the operating room. You've got a head

surgeon, and one's got the scalpel, but others are watching the monitors and administering the IV. The nurses are on the job. The orderlies are on the job. There was a team that got the bullet out of that baby girl 15 years ago. She's got a scar on her arm, always will, but she survived.

America is going to survive. We won't forget where we came from. We won't forget what happened 19 months ago, 15 years ago, thousands of years ago. We know who the head surgeon is, and we're on the case. We're going to pull out bullet after bullet. We're going to stitch up arm after arm. We're going to wear those scars for justice. We're going to usher in a new America the way that newborn child was ushered in.

We're never going to forget there is always hope -- there is always light in the midst of desperate days -- that a baby can be born even with a bullet in her arm. And we can come together as one people and transform this nation. Our God is big enough for that.

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