

Remarks of President-Elect Barack Obama - As prepared for delivery

Inaugural Whistle Stop Tour

Baltimore, Maryland

January 17, 2009

We began this train trip in Philadelphia earlier today. It is fitting that we did so - because it was there that our American journey began. It was there that a group of farmers and lawyers, merchants and soldiers, gathered to declare their independence and lay claim to a destiny that they were being denied.

It was a risky thing, meeting as they did in that summer of 1776. There was no guarantee that their fragile experiment would find success. More than once in those early years did the odds seem insurmountable. More than once did the fishermen, laborers, and craftsmen who called themselves an army face the prospect of defeat.

And yet, they were willing to put all they were and all they had on the line - their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor - for a set of ideals that continue to light the world. That we are equal. That our rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness come not from our laws, but from our maker. And that a government of, by, and for the people can endure. It was these ideals that led us to declare independence, and craft our constitution, producing documents that were imperfect but had within them, like our nation itself, the capacity to be made more perfect.

A few decades after the framers met in Philadelphia, our new union faced its first true test. The White House was in flames, and the British were advancing on Baltimore. That's when the fate of our nation fell to the troops at Fort McHenry. They were a varied lot, these troops: sailors, militiamen, and even a runaway slave. But on one long and rainy night, they beat back the greatest navy that the world had ever known. And when that night was over, they raised a flag in triumph, inspiring an onlooker to compose a poem that became the Star-Spangled Banner.

We are here today not simply to pay tribute to those patriots who founded our nation in Philadelphia or defended it in Baltimore, but to take up the cause for which they gave so much. The trials we face are very different now, but severe in their own right. Only a handful of times in our history has a generation been confronted with challenges so vast. An economy that is faltering. Two wars, one that needs to be ended responsibly, one that needs to be waged wisely. A planet that is warming from our unsustainable dependence on oil.

And yet while our problems may be new, what is required to overcome them is not. What is required is the same perseverance and idealism that those first patriots displayed. What is required is a new declaration of independence, not just in our nation, but in our own lives - from ideology and small thinking, prejudice and bigotry - an appeal not to our easy instincts but to our better angels.

That is the reason I launched my campaign for the presidency nearly two years ago. I did so in the belief that the most fundamental American ideal, that a better life is in store for all those willing to work for it, was slipping out of reach. That Washington was serving the interests of the

few, not the many. And that our politics had grown too small for the scale of the challenges we faced.

But I also believed something else. I believed that our future is our choice, and that if we could just recognize ourselves in one another and bring everyone together - Democrats, Republicans, and Independents, north, south, east and west, black, white, Latino, Asian, and Native American, gay and straight, disabled and not - then not only would we restore hope and opportunity in places that yearned for both, but maybe, just maybe, we might perfect our union in the process.

This is what I believed, but you made this belief real. You proved once more that people who love this country can change it. And as I prepare to leave for Washington on a trip that you made possible, know that I will not be traveling alone. I will be taking with me some of the men and women I met along the way, Americans from every corner of this country, whose hopes and heartaches were the core of our cause; whose dreams and struggles have become my own.

Theirs are the voices I will carry with me every day in the White House. Theirs are the stories I will be thinking of when we deliver the changes you elected me to make. When we are seeing new jobs created that pay more to those who work them, I will be thinking of people like Kevin and Kirsten Meehan, who can't afford to turn on the heat or pay rent, and are tapping into Kevin's 401k to help support their two young children.

When our children are graduating from newer, better schools that prepare them to be good citizens and sought-after workers, I will be

thinking of middle school teachers like Rosa Mendoza, who is giving her students the chance to fulfill their God-given potential.

When quality health care is no longer something we hope for, but something we can count on, I will be thinking of people like Patricia Stiles, who was diagnosed with a serious illness just as her husband lost his pension and her kids' tuitions were coming due.

These are the stories that will drive me in the days ahead. They are different stories, told by men and women whose journeys may seem separate. And yet, what you showed me time and again is that no matter who we are or what we look like, no matter where we come from or what faith we practice, we are a people of common hopes and common dreams, who ask only for what was promised us as Americans - that we might make of our lives what we will and see our children climb higher than we did.

We recognize that such enormous challenges will not be solved quickly. There will be false starts and setbacks, frustrations and disappointments. And we will be called to show patience even as we act with fierce urgency.

But we should never forget that we are the heirs of those early patriots, ordinary men and women who refused to give up when it all seemed so improbable; and who somehow believed that they had the power to make the world anew. That is the spirit that we must reclaim today.

For the American Revolution did not end when British guns fell silent. It was never something to be won only on a battlefield or fulfilled only in

our founding documents. It was not simply a struggle to break free from empire and declare independence. The American Revolution was - and remains - an ongoing struggle “in the minds and hearts of the people” to live up to our founding creed.

Starting now, let’s take up in our own lives the work of perfecting our union.

Let’s build a government that is responsible to the people, and accept our own responsibilities as citizens to hold our government accountable.

Let’s all of us do our part to rebuild this country.

Let’s make sure this election is not the end of what we do to change America, but the beginning.

Join me in this effort. Join one another in this effort. And together, mindful of our proud history, hopeful for the future, let’s seek a better world in our time. Thank you.