



BARACK OBAMA: WORKING FOR SOUTH ASIAN AMERICANS

"As the child of a black man and a white woman, someone who was born in the racial melting pot of Hawaii, with a sister who's half Indonesian but who's usually mistaken for Mexican or Puerto Rican, and a brother-in-law and niece of Chinese descent...I've never had the option of restricting my loyalties on the basis of race, or measuring my worth on the basis of tribe. Moreover, I believe that part of America's genius has always been its ability to absorb newcomers, to forge a national identity out of the disparate lot that arrived on our shores."
[*The Audacity of Hope*]

BARACK OBAMA AND THE SOUTH ASIAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY

As a community organizer, civil rights lawyer, and elected official, Barack Obama has spent his career working on issues of importance to South Asian Americans. Obama is proud to have worked side-by-side with South Asian Americans on a variety of issues, including immigration, civil rights, foreign policy, and education, and Obama looks forward to strengthening his relationship with South Asian Americans during his presidential administration.

IMMIGRATION

Obama has played a leading role in crafting comprehensive immigration reform and believes that our broken immigration system can only be fixed by putting politics aside and offering a solution that strengthens our security while reaffirming our heritage as a nation of immigrants.

Improve Legal Immigration: The overwhelming majority of immigrants, both legal and undocumented, come to this country with the hope that hard work and sacrifice will secure a better life for their children. Every year, an estimated 500,000-800,000 people enter the country illegally or illegally overstay their visas. Another million people enter legally. Barack Obama believes we must address illegal immigration by strengthening border security and fixing the dysfunctional bureaucracy to balance the needs of American workers and the U.S. economy.

That includes creating legal avenues for people to work here. Barack Obama believes immigrant workers should have legal protections to avoid abuse and downward pressure on American wages and working conditions.

Obama believes that we have to fix our immigration system to increase the number of people we allow into the country legally to a level that unites families and meets the demand for workers for jobs employers cannot fill. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services has decided to raise fees on applications to as much as \$2,400 for a family of four. Obama joined Rep. Luis Gutierrez (D-IL) to introduce the Citizenship Promotion Act to ensure that immigration application fees are both reasonable and fair. This bill reverses large fee increases for legal immigrants seeking to become citizens and provides grants to states to help educate immigrants and promote citizenship.

A key choke point in the process of becoming a legal permanent resident or a U.S. citizen is the FBI name/security check. Many law-abiding legal immigrants see their immigration applications delayed by months and often years as the overwhelmed FBI completes its background check. Obama introduced legislation that

passed the Senate to improve the speed and accuracy of these background checks.

Safeguard and Streamline the Family Reunification Process: Many South Asian American families rely on family reunification policies to assist them build better lives in the United States. In 2005, nearly 22,000 South Asians entered America under family reunification laws. However, South Asian American families have some of the longest immigration backlogs, including some waits of over a decade. In the most recent immigration debate on the U.S. Senate floor, Obama fought to improve and pass a comprehensive bill. Obama introduced amendments to put greater emphasis on keeping immigrant families together and to revisit a controversial new points system that would dramatically alter U.S. immigration policy.

Reform H-1B Visas: South Asian American immigrants have helped create wealth in America's 21st century economy. Barack Obama supports comprehensive immigration reform that includes improving our visa programs, including the H-1B program, to attract some of the world's most talented people to America. Moreover, Barack Obama would like to see immigrant workers less dependent on their employers for their right to stay in the country, and would hold accountable employers who abuse the system and their workers.

Bring People Out of the Shadows: America has always been a nation of immigrants. There are millions of people living in the shadows, including many South Asian Americans, who would like to fully embrace our values and become full members of our democracy. For the millions living here illegally but otherwise playing by the rules, we must encourage them to come out of hiding and get right with the law. Barack Obama supports a system that requires undocumented immigrants, who are in good standing to pay a fine, learn English, not commit crimes, and go to the back of the line for citizenship. After all those conditions are met, they would be granted the opportunity to stay in the United States.

Secure Our Borders: Barack Obama wants to preserve the integrity of our borders to reduce illegal immigration. He supports additional personnel, infrastructure, and technology on the border and at our ports of entry. Obama believes we need additional Customs and Border Protection agents equipped with better technology and real-time intelligence.

Remove Incentives to Enter U.S. Illegally: To remove incentives to enter the country illegally, we need to crack down on employers who hire undocumented immigrants. Barack Obama has championed a proposal with Senators Charles Grassley (R-IA), Ted Kennedy (D-MA) and Max Baucus (D-MT) to create a new employment eligibility verification system so employers could verify that their employees are legally eligible to work in the U.S., making the system fair to legal workers and tougher on employers.

EQUAL RIGHTS

End Racial Profiling: As a state senator, Barack Obama worked across party lines and with law enforcement to pass a bill to prohibit racial profiling by requiring officers to record the race, age, and gender of those stopped for violations, to be analyzed for evidence of racial profiling. Obama also cosponsored the End Racial Profiling Act (ERPA), which defined racial profiling and prohibited law enforcement from using race or ethnicity as a basis for routine or spontaneous law enforcement.

Expand Hate Crimes Statutes: Hate crimes against South Asian Americans have risen in the wake of the Sept. 11 attacks. In the U.S. Senate, Obama cosponsored legislation that would expand federal jurisdiction to reach violent hate crimes motivated by race, color, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, or physical disability. As a state senator, Obama passed tough legislation that made hate crimes and conspiracy to commit them against the law.

Protect Voting Rights: Barack Obama was a leader in the effort to reauthorize the Voting Rights Act. In early 2006, he joined Representatives Melvin L. Watt (D-NC), John Lewis (D-GA), John Conyers (D-MI) and members of the Senate and House leadership and Judiciary Committees to introduce bipartisan, bicameral

legislation to extend the VRA for 25 years and update a number of its provisions. Obama also supports fully funding the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) to enforce critical requirements like statewide registration databases and to ensure that polling equipment is distributed equitably and that the equipment works.

Promote Religious Freedom and Respect for Religious Pluralism: In June 2006, Obama delivered what Washington Post columnist E.J. Dionne called perhaps the most important speech on religion and politics in 40 years. Recognizing the growing diversity of America, Obama said, “Moreover, given the increasing diversity of America's population, the dangers of sectarianism have never been greater. Whatever we once were, we are no longer just a Christian nation; we are also a Jewish nation, a Muslim nation, a Buddhist nation, a Hindu nation, and a nation of nonbelievers.”

Restore Habeas Corpus and Due Process: The right of habeas corpus allows prisoners to ask a court to determine whether they are being lawfully imprisoned. Recently, this right has been denied to those deemed enemy combatants. Barack Obama strongly supports the bipartisan efforts to restore habeas rights. He firmly believes that those who pose a danger to this country should be swiftly tried and brought to justice, but those who do not should have sufficient due process to ensure that we are not wrongfully denying them their liberty.

FOREIGN POLICY

South Asia is Key to America's Interests: Barack Obama has long recognized that South Asia is critical to U.S. interests and will ensure that strong U.S. relations in the region are a top foreign policy priority. Countries in this vital region are key partners in the war on terrorism. Also, we share fundamental and important values, including with the world's largest democracy, India. Further, the South Asian region can be a key future trade and economic partner with the United States, which will mutually benefit all of us. Barack Obama seeks a strong South Asian region, which in turn will strengthen the U.S. and its international interests.

Reestablish U.S. Moral Leadership: Obama will restore America's standing, reputation, and authority in the world by respecting civil liberties, ending torture, restoring habeas corpus, making the U.S. electoral processes fair and transparent, and fighting corruption at home.

Work to Eliminate the Education Deficit: Worldwide, an estimated 100 million children are not attending school, according to Human Rights Watch. Barack Obama would invest part of increased U.S. assistance to establishing a \$2 billion Global Education Fund that spurs the world to join together to eliminate the global education deficit.

Fight AIDS Worldwide: Nearly 6 million people in South Asia are living with HIV/AIDS. India has the largest number of people living with HIV/AIDS in the world. Barack Obama has been a global leader in the fight against AIDS. He traveled to Kenya and took a public HIV test to encourage testing and reduce the stigma of the disease. Obama joined Senator Sam Brownback (R-KS) at a large California evangelical church to promote greater investment in the global AIDS battle. Obama also worked with Senator Olympia Snowe (R-ME) and others to introduce the Microbicide Development Act, which will accelerate the development of products that empower women in the battle against AIDS. Microbicides are a class of products currently under development that women apply topically to prevent transmission of HIV and other infections.

Obama believes that a comprehensive, long-term approach to combating HIV/AIDS is an important investment in our common security and humanity. He has pledged to provide at least \$50 billion by 2013 for the global fight against HIV/AIDS, including our fair share of the Global Fund, in order to at least double the number of HIV-positive people on treatment and continue to provide treatments to one-third of all those who desperately need them.

ECONOMY

Support Job Creation and the Innovation Economy: Barack Obama will invest in a strong economy for all Americans. He will double federal funding for basic research, expand the deployment of broadband technology, and make the research and development tax credit permanent so that businesses can invest in innovation and create high-paying, secure jobs. As president, Obama will make long-term investments in education, language training, and workforce development so that Americans can leverage our strengths – our ingenuity and entrepreneurialism – to create new high-wage jobs and prosper in a global economy.

Invest in the Sciences: Barack Obama supports increasing federal funding for basic research. As a share of the Gross Domestic Product, American federal investment in the physical sciences and engineering research has dropped by half since 1970. Yet, it often has been federally-supported basic research that has generated the innovation to create markets and drive economic growth. For example, one recent report demonstrated how federally supported research in fiber optics and lasers helped spur the telecommunications revolution.

Expand Broadband Access: Getting broadband Internet access into every home and business in America at an affordable rate could give more people, including South Asian Americans, increased opportunities to start businesses and engage actively in our communities. As president, Barack Obama will reform the Telephone Universal Service Program, direct the FCC to better manage the nation’s airwaves, and encourage public-private partnership to get more communities connected.

Invest in Small Businesses: Many South Asian Americans are successful small business owners who help grow the American economy by providing needed jobs and services throughout the country. Barack Obama will support entrepreneurship and spur job growth by creating a national network of public-private business incubators. Business incubators facilitate the critical work of entrepreneurs in creating start-up companies by offering help designing business plans, identifying and addressing problems affecting all small businesses within a given community, and giving advice on a wide range of business practices. Business incubators will engage the expertise and resources of local institutions of higher education and successful private sector businesses to help ensure that small businesses have both a strong plan and the resources for long-term success. Barack Obama will also strengthen Small Business Administration programs that provide capital to minority-owned businesses and work to reduce duplicative, complicated and unnecessary regulations that adversely affect small businesses.

Provide a Tax Cut for Working Families: Barack Obama will restore fairness to the tax code and provide 150 million workers the tax relief they deserve. Obama will create a new “Making Work Pay” tax credit of up to \$500 per person, or \$1,000 per working family. This refundable income tax credit will provide direct relief to American families who face the regressive payroll tax system. It will offset the payroll tax on the first \$8,100 of their earnings while still preserving the important principle of a dedicated revenue source for Social Security. The “Making Work Pay” tax credit will completely eliminate income taxes for 10 million Americans. The tax credit will also provide relief to self-employed small business owners who struggle to pay both the employee and employer portion of the payroll tax. The “Making Work Pay” tax credit offsets some of this self-employment tax as well.

Raise the Minimum Wage and Expand the EITC: About 51 percent of Bangladeshis and nearly 40 percent of Pakistanis live at less than 200 percent of the poverty line. Additionally, 10 percent of the Indian American community lives below the federal poverty level. Barack Obama believes that people who work full time should not live in poverty. Before the Democrats took back Congress, the minimum wage had not changed in 10 years. Even though the minimum wage will rise to \$7.25 an hour by 2009, the minimum wage’s real purchasing power will still be below what it was in 1968. As president, Obama will further raise the minimum wage to \$9.50 an hour by 2011, index it to inflation, expand eligibility for the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), and increase EITC benefits to make sure that full-time workers can earn a living wage that allows them to raise their families

and pay for basic needs such as food, transportation, and housing – things so many people take for granted. In the Illinois State Senate, Obama led the successful effort to create the Illinois \$100 million EITC program.

Prevent Workplace Discrimination and Protect Worker Rights: Barack Obama would increase funding for the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, and would fight to eliminate racial and sexual discrimination. He also would strengthen whistleblower protections. Obama will also strengthen worker rights by providing workers with freedom to join a union without harassment or intimidation from their employers, strengthening the Fair Labor Standards Act and ensuring that immigrant workers have adequate protections from exploitation.

EDUCATION

Improve Our Schools: From the moment children step into a classroom, the single most important factor in determining their achievement is their teacher. Barack Obama values teachers and the central role that they play in education. To ensure competent, effective teachers in schools that are organized for success, Obama's K-12 plan will expand service scholarships to underwrite high-quality preparation for teachers who commit to working in underserved districts, support ongoing improvements in teacher education, provide mentoring for beginning teachers, create incentives for shared planning and learning time for teachers, and support career pathways in participating districts that provide ongoing professional development and reward accomplished teachers for their expertise. The Obama Career Ladder initiative will help eliminate teacher shortages in hard-to-staff areas and subjects, improve teacher retention rates, strengthen teacher preparation programs, improve professional development, and better utilize and reward accomplished teachers.

Make Science and Math Education a National Priority: Science is often a low priority in the school program, particularly at the elementary level. Barack Obama will work with governors to create flexible and workable systems for the states to achieve the goal of ensuring all children have access to strong science curriculum at all grade levels. Obama's Teaching Service Scholarship program will prioritize recruiting math, science and technology degree graduates, and his Teacher Residency Program will further supply teachers in these high-needs subject areas.

Support College Learning Opportunities for Immigrants: Barack Obama is an original cosponsor of the DREAM Act which will give undocumented immigrant students who grow up in the United States and contribute to our communities the opportunity to go to college or to serve in our military and to become lawful residents.

Make College More Affordable: Barack Obama will make college affordable for all Americans by creating a new American Opportunity Tax Credit. This fully refundable credit will ensure that the first \$4,000 of a college education is completely free for most Americans, and will cover two-thirds the cost of tuition at the average public college or university. And by making the tax credit fully refundable, Obama's credit will help low-income families that need it the most. Obama will also ensure that the tax credit is available to families at the time of enrollment by using prior year's tax data to deliver the credit at the time that tuition is due, rather than a year or more later when tax returns are filed.

HEALTH CARE

Provide Universal Health Care Coverage and Lower Health Costs: 21 percent of South Asian Americans lack health insurance coverage. Barack Obama is committed to signing legislation by the end of his first term in office ensuring that all Americans have high-quality, affordable health care coverage. He has outlined specific principles for providing affordable and comprehensive coverage and for improving quality of care and reducing costs for everyone. These include tackling medical inflation and spiraling health care costs, developing new mechanisms to extend portable, affordable coverage, and reforming health care delivery so that it emphasizes prevention and efficiency. Obama will use the government's market muscle to encourage insurers and hospitals to adopt electronic claims systems, electronic medical records, and patient safety reporting systems. These

improvements will reduce administrative costs and health care inefficiencies such as duplicative testing and medical errors, which in turn will reduce costly medical malpractice lawsuits.

Reform Medical Malpractice: Increasing medical malpractice insurance rates is making it harder for doctors to practice medicine and raising the costs of health care for everyone. Barack Obama will strengthen antitrust laws to prevent insurers from overcharging physicians for their malpractice insurance. Obama will also promote new models for addressing physician errors that improve patient safety, strengthen the doctor-patient relationship, and reduce the need for malpractice suits.