

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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Barack Obama Wins Historic Election Victory

Democrat will be first African-American U.S. president

By Stephen Kaufman

Staff Writer

Washington – On November 4, Americans elected Illinois Senator Barack Obama the 44th president of the United States.

Addressing supporters in Chicago November 4, the president-elect said, "To all those who have wondered if America's beacon still burns as bright, tonight we've proved once more that the true strength of our nation comes not from the might of our arms or the scale of our wealth, but from the enduring power of our ideals: democracy, liberty, opportunity and unyielding hope."

Obama said that through their votes, Americans sent a message "that we have never been just a collection of individuals or a collection of red states and blue states. We are and always will be the United States of America."

"A new dawn of American leadership is at hand," he said. "To those who would tear the world down, we will defeat you. To those who seek peace and security, we support you."

As of early November 5, Obama had won at least 26 states and the District of Columbia with a total of 338 electoral votes, putting him well above the 270 needed to clinch the presidency. Results still were being reported from some states in the early hours of the day after Election Day.

Obama will become the first African-American president of the United States and also the first person of color to govern a country with a white majority.

The Illinois senator carried all the states won by Democrat John Kerry in 2004, as well as Ohio, Iowa, Florida, New Mexico, Colorado, Nevada and Virginia – states previously carried by Republican George Bush.

In his concession speech from Phoenix, Senator John McCain said he had telephoned President-elect Obama to offer his congratulations. He recognized the significance of Obama's victory for African Americans and the "special pride that must be theirs tonight" following a long history of slavery, segregation and discrimination.

He said the United States is now "a world away from the cruel and prideful bigotry of that time," and "there is no better evidence of this" than Obama's election. He also

pledged to support the incoming president and urged his supporters to offer their "good will and earnest effort to find ways to come together."

Obama's victory came after a long and difficult Democratic Party primary battle with New York Senator Hillary Clinton, followed by an intense general election campaign against McCain.

The 2008 U.S. presidential election was historic in a number of ways. After the field of Democratic Party candidates narrowed in early 2008, it was clear that voters would be choosing between the first female presidential nominee and the first African-American nominee.

On the Republican side, McCain's choice of Alaska Governor Sarah Palin as a running mate marked only the second time a woman has been on the ticket of a major political party.

OBAMA CLAIMS VICTORY

Early November 5, Obama and his running mate, Delaware Senator Joe Biden, addressed cheering supporters in Chicago, and pledged to be the president of all Americans, regardless of whether they had given him support or not. Hundreds of thousands of people, some of whom arrived the day before, celebrated in Chicago's Grant Park.

Obama's rally was especially poignant given that 40 years ago the park was the site of the violent demonstrations aimed at the 1968 Democratic National Convention. That violence illustrated the rift within the party between younger liberal activists and older conservative stalwarts. It was also in 1968 that Democratic presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy predicted an African-American could become president in 2008.

"Things are moving so fast in race relations a Negro could be president in 40 years. There is no question about it. In the next 40 years, a Negro can achieve the same position that my brother has ... prejudice exists and probably will continue to ... but we have tried to make progress and we are making progress. We are not going to accept the status quo," Kennedy said May 27, 1968, approximately one week before he was assassinated.

Statement by President Bush on U.S. Presidential Election Results

Bush congratulates President-elect Obama on an impressive, historic victory

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary
November 5, 2008

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT ON THE
PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION
Rose Garden

THE PRESIDENT: Good morning. Last night, I had a warm conversation with President-elect Barack Obama. I congratulated him and Senator Biden on their impressive victory. I told the President-elect he can count on complete cooperation from my administration as he makes the transition to the White House.

I also spoke to Senator John McCain. I congratulated him on a determined campaign that he and Governor Palin ran. The American people will always be grateful for the lifetime of service John McCain has devoted to this nation. And I know he'll continue to make tremendous contributions to our country.

No matter how they cast their ballots, all Americans can be proud of the history that was made yesterday. Across the country, citizens voted in large numbers. They showed a watching world the vitality of America's democracy, and the strides we have made toward a more perfect union. They chose a President whose journey represents a triumph of the American story -- a testament to hard work, optimism, and faith in the enduring promise of our nation.

Many of our citizens thought they would never live to see that day. This moment is especially uplifting for a generation of Americans who witnessed the struggle for civil rights with their own eyes -- and four decades later see dream fulfilled.

A long campaign has now ended, and we move forward as one nation. We're embarking on a period of change in Washington, yet there are some things that will not change. The United States government will stay vigilant in meeting its most important responsibility -- protecting the American people. And the world can be certain this commitment will remain steadfast under our next Commander-in-Chief. There's important work to do in the months ahead, and I will continue to conduct the people's business as long as this office remains in my trust. During this time of transition, I will keep the President-elect fully informed on

important decisions. And when the time comes on January the 20th, Laura and I will return home to Texas with treasured memories of our time here -- and with profound gratitude for the honor of serving this amazing country.

It will be a stirring sight to watch President Obama, his wife, Michelle, and their beautiful girls step through the doors of the White House. I know millions of Americans will be overcome with pride at this inspiring moment that so many have awaited so long. I know Senator Obama's beloved mother and grandparents would have been thrilled to watch the child they raised ascend the steps of the Capitol -- and take his oath to uphold the Constitution of the greatest nation on the face of the earth.

Last night I extended an invitation to the President-elect and Mrs. Obama to come to the White House. And Laura and I are looking forward to welcoming them as soon as possible.

Thank you very much.

Work Begins Immediately for Next U.S. President and His Team

Major economic, foreign policy challenges await the Obama administration

By Michelle Austein
Staff Writer

Washington -- Barack Obama will not take the oath of office until January 20, 2009, but work to address the many challenges that await him in the presidency begins immediately.

As campaign staffs across the country clean out their offices, a transition team begins its work to ensure the Obama administration is ready to handle the major foreign policy and economic challenges facing the United States.

The transition team, which will include experts on every major policy issue, will begin preparing policy recommendations for the president-elect and help him select Cabinet members. These Cabinet appointments are subject to confirmation by the new Congress after Obama is sworn in.

The transition team will receive help from the White House. The peaceful transfer of power from one presidential administration to the next is a hallmark of American democracy, and the Bush administration is committed to assisting with that transfer.

Transition planning began months ago. Federal agencies and White House offices have prepared briefings on significant pending policy issues for the president-elect's transition team.

Both presidential candidates were briefed regularly on national security issues, and Obama will be kept continuously informed as he prepares to take office.

FOREIGN POLICY CHALLENGES

When Obama becomes president on January 20, 2009, he will become commander in chief of U.S. military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The wars were a major topic on the campaign trail, and both candidates supported increasing troop levels in Afghanistan. They differed on Iraq.

Obama has criticized the Iraq war since its beginning and has pledged to begin withdrawing troops as soon as he is inaugurated, with a goal of having most troops out of the country within 16 months.

Along with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Obama administration will have to address Iran's drive for nuclear capabilities, Steven Cook, senior fellow at the Council of Foreign Relations, told journalists at the State Department's Foreign Press Center October 29.

The new administration also must decide "whether or not it is worth the president's time and effort to engage diplomatically on the Arab-Israeli front, given all the other issues that are confronting the president," he said.

"The Middle East has been a central focus of the Bush administration's foreign policy and it's likely to be a central focus for the next administration," Cook said.

Throughout his campaign, Obama called for a multilateral approach to foreign policy in which the United States would engage more deeply and more frequently with its allies. American University professor Allan Lichtman told journalists at the State Department's Foreign Press Center November 3 that he expects the Obama administration will follow through on that pledge.

One potential area for increased cooperation is climate change. "I would expect Barack Obama to reopen negotiations with the [European Union] and other nations, including Russia and China, on the problem of global climate change," Lichtman said.

Political experts caution that external factors often shape a president's foreign policy. "You never know based on a campaign exactly how a president is going to conduct foreign affairs," Lichtman said.

ECONOMIC CONCERNS

After a campaign dominated by economic issues, most Americans expect the economy will be Obama's top concern when he takes office.

"The next president of the United States is going to face an enormous fiscal crisis here at home," Lichtman said, adding that the next administration "will be facing deficits of unprecedented proportions."

"The next president is going to have to make some very hard choices on priorities," he said.

Throughout his campaign, Obama pledged to lower taxes for those earning \$250,000 a year or less and to provide new options for affordable health care. But such measures can come into force only if the next Congress passes new legislation.

Because the current economic challenges are global rather than national, addressing them will have a foreign policy dimension.

The next president "is not going to be able to afford" to pay less attention to foreign policy, Cook said, because "we know this financial crisis is not just limited to the United States. This is a global issue and requires a global solution."

World Celebrates Barack Obama's Historic Win

Americans, international audiences note election's historic significance

By Michelle Austein
Staff Writer

Washington — In homes and on streets across the United States, Americans celebrated the election of the first African-American president as a significant moment in U.S. history.

Democrat Barack Obama, the son of a white woman from Kansas and a black man from Kenya, had won the presidency with 349 Electoral College votes (as of noon November 5). Although some ballots remain to be counted, at least 63 million Americans voted for the Illinois senator.

"A new dawn of American leadership is at hand," Obama

said in his acceptance speech.

Although Obama's victory speech was given at midnight EST, many Americans stayed up late to watch him speak. As his speech concluded, neighborhoods across the country filled with people celebrating the historic occasion.

In the nation's capital, hundreds of college students gathered at George Washington University's student center to watch results on television. As television networks called the election for Obama, cheers broke out and students hugged each other. A few blocks away, thousands converged outside the White House, waving flags and singing patriotic songs.

In Obama's hometown of Chicago, more than 125,000 filled the city's Grant Park to watch the president-elect speak. Television cameras captured images of prominent African-American leaders in tears as they commemorated the occasion.

In Atlanta, hundreds gathered outside Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, the church where civil rights activist Martin Luther King Jr. preached. "This is something that my father would be proud of America for," King's daughter Bernice King said in Atlanta.

Celebrations were not limited to the United States. Across the world, people gathered at restaurants and other places with televisions to watch the results.

In the small fishing town of Obama, Japan, a town that has celebrated sharing a name with the famous American, more than 30,000 joined in election-related festivities. Many chanted a phrase commonly used by Obama's supporters in the United States: "Yes we can!"

But perhaps no country was as excited for Obama's victory as Kenya. The home country of Obama's father has followed the Illinois senator's campaign closely, viewing him as one of their own. Cheers erupted throughout Nairobi at 7 a.m. local time when Obama's win was announced.

Kenyan President Mwai Kibaki declared November 6 a national holiday. "Because of his roots here in Kenya, as a country, we are full of pride for his success. I therefore wish to announce that tomorrow ... be observed as a public holiday to enable all Kenyans to celebrate this historic achievement for President-elect Obama," Kibaki said.

WORLD LEADERS CONGRATULATE PRESIDENT-ELECT

Across the world, words of support from leaders and average people alike poured in for Obama.

Just minutes after Obama secured the presidency, President Bush called the Illinois senator to congratulate him. "I told the president-elect he can count on complete cooperation from my administration as he makes the transition to the White House," he said at the White House November 5.

"No matter how they cast their ballots, all Americans can be proud of the history that was made yesterday," Bush said. "They showed a watching world the vitality of America's democracy and the strides we have made toward a more perfect union."

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice also congratulated Obama, and said the State Department is ready to assist with the transition as well.

On a more personal note, Rice said, "as an African American, I am especially proud because this is a country that's been through a long journey in terms of overcoming wounds and making race not the factor in our lives. That work is not done, but yesterday was obviously an extraordinary step forward."

Leaders from all regions of the world sent congratulatory messages to Obama.

"By choosing you, the American people have chosen change, openness and optimism," French President Nicolas Sarkozy said.

"In a new historical era, I look forward to ... taking our bilateral relationship of constructive cooperation to a new level," China's leader, Hu Jintao, said.

"The election of Senator Barack Obama to the presidency of the United States has taken the American people and the rest of the world with them into a new era — an era where race, color and ethnicity, I hope, will also disappear," said Afghan President Hamid Karzai.

Ordinary citizens from around the world also have congratulated the president-elect, leaving comments for Obama on America.gov's elections blog.

"Congratulations to American people showing to the world being part of the historic moment of the greatest people in history who created democracy! What a nation!" wrote one

reader. "The world have hope now, God bless America and all the best to Obama!"

"Mr. Obama is an inspiring man to many people outside the U.S., and we are envious of the smart, courageous, compassionate and wordly leader that the U.S. people have chosen," wrote another reader. "We are confident that under his leadership, the U.S. can again be a revered and loved people of the world."

United States Disappointed by Russian Missile Plans

U.S. says its own European-based missile plan will not threaten Russia

By Merle D. Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — The United States is disappointed that Russia plans to deploy short-range missiles near the border with Poland and Lithuania, a State Department official says.

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev announced November 5 in a lengthy speech that Russia plans to deploy Iskander missiles in Kaliningrad between Lithuania and Poland on the Baltic Sea. Medvedev said the missiles are to counter U.S. plans to locate a missile defense system in Poland and the Czech Republic.

"The missile defense sites in the Czech Republic and Poland are not aimed at Russia," State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said at a November 5 briefing. "This missile defense system is designed to protect against rogue states.

The steps that the Russian government announced today are disappointing."

"Again, this is not directed at them. Hopefully, one day they'll realize that."

Medvedev also announced that plans to scrap three nuclear missile regiments have been dropped. "We earlier planned to take three missile regiments within the missile division stationed in Kozelsk off combat duty and discontinue the division itself by 2010. I have decided to refrain from these plans," Medvedev said.

He also announced plans to locate electronic jamming equipment in the western region near Poland that could jam objects of the U.S. missile defense system.

The Iskander missile, also known as SS-26 Stone missile, is a short-range, solid-fuel-propelled system, according to

NATO. It has a range of up to 400 kilometers (248.5 miles) and generally carries a conventional high-explosive warhead, but can carry other types of explosives.

McCormack said the United States remains open to further talks with Russia about its European-based missile defense plans. "Certainly, I think all are open to continued Russian dialogue and cooperation on this, but the fact of the matter is this is important for the security of the [NATO] alliance," he said.

MISSILE DEFENSE PLAN

Under the European ground-based missile defense plan, the United States will base 10 missile interceptors, which have no warheads, in Poland. The interceptors are designed to knock down a limited number of ballistic missiles launched from a rogue state such as Iran. Another element of the U.S. plan would place an advanced radar tracking facility in the Czech Republic. The system is expected to be in place by 2012.

In exchange for agreeing to base the interceptors in Poland, the United States agreed to provide Poland with a Patriot air defense battery that can shoot down short-range missiles or attacking fighter planes or bombers. The air defense battery would be operated by about 100 U.S. Army personnel, according to the Pentagon.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said August 15 in Tbilisi, Georgia, that she and Defense Secretary Robert Gates have met with their counterparts in Moscow a number of times to discuss the missile defense plan and even have invited the Russians to participate in a continentwide missile defense system.

A European-based missile defense system was discussed by President Bush and Medvedev at their July 7 bilateral meeting during the G8 summit in Japan. Medvedev agreed to continue existing efforts to transform the current U.S. missile defense plan into a system that in the future would be jointly managed by the United States, Russia and Europe.

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