

U.S. Sen. Barack Obama, D-Ill. speaks to a large crowd gathered at the Old State Capitol in Springfield Saturday as he announces his bid to run for president.



Abraham Lincoln presenter Lon Pressnall of Forsyth gazes at the large crowd gathered for Barack Obama.

“You came here because you believe in what this country can be. ... You believe we can be one people, reaching for what’s possible, building that more perfect union.”

Barack Obama, presidential candidate

Quoting Obama

Excerpts from Barack Obama's speech announcing his run for president:

“We all made this journey for a reason. It's humbling, but in my heart I know you didn't come here just for me, you came here because you believe in what this country can be.”

“It was here, in Springfield, where I saw all that is America converge — farmers and teachers, businessmen and laborers, all of them with a story to tell, all of them seeking a seat at the table, all of them clamoring to be heard.”

“That is why, in the shadow of the Old State Capitol, where Lincoln once called on a divided house to stand together, where common hopes and common dreams still, I stand before you today to announce my candidacy for President of the United States.”

“Each and every time, a new generation has risen up and done what's needed to be done. Today we are called once more — and it is time for our generation to answer that call. For that is our unyielding faith - that in the face of impossible odds, people who love their country can change it.”

“Although government will play a crucial role in bringing about the changes we need, more money and programs alone will not get us where we need to go. Each of us, in our own lives, will have to accept responsibility - for instilling an ethic of achievement in our children, for adapting to a more competitive economy, for strengthening our communities, and sharing some measure of sacrifice.”

“Let us be the generation that reshapes our economy to compete in the digital age. Let's set high standards for our schools and give them the resources they need to succeed. Let's recruit a new army of teachers, and give them better pay and more support in exchange for more accountability. Let's make college more affordable, and let's invest in scientific research, and let's lay down broadband lines through the heart of inner cities and rural towns all across America.”

“Most of all, let's be the generation that never forgets what happened on that September day and confront the terrorists with everything we've got. Politics doesn't have to divide us on this anymore - we can work together to keep our country safe.”

“It's time to admit that no amount of American lives can resolve the political disagreement that lies at the heart of someone else's civil war. That's why I have a plan that will bring our combat troops home by March of 2008. Letting the Iraqis know that we will not be there forever is our last, best hope to pressure the Sunni and Shia to come to the table and find peace.”

“Finally, there is one other thing that is not too late to get right about this war — and that is the homecoming of the men and women — our veterans - who have sacrificed the most. Let us honor their valor by providing the care they need and rebuilding the military they love. Let us be the generation that begins this work.”

“This campaign must be the occasion, the vehicle, of your hopes, and your dreams. It will take your time, your energy, and your advice — to push us forward when we're doing right, and to let us know when we're not. This campaign has to be about reclaiming the meaning of citizenship, restoring our sense of common purpose, and realizing that few obstacles can withstand the power of millions of voices calling for change.”

“By ourselves, this change will not happen. Divided, we are bound to fail. But the life of a tall, gangly, self-made Springfield lawyer tells us that a different future is possible. He tells us that there is power in words. He tells us that there is power in conviction. That beneath all the differences of race and region, faith and station, we are one people. He tells us that there is power in hope.”

OBAMA

Continued from Page A1

and occasionally interrupted the speech with thunderous applause.

“It was amazing,” Springfield's Andrew Dambrauskas, 18, said afterward. “I'm just very encouraged by how much confidence (with which) he spoke. I really like his plans — it really feels like a new hope for the country.”

“He pretty much hit the nail on the head,” agreed Springfield's Terry Tran, 17. “You can't help but believe in what he's saying and trust him.”

While the brunt of Obama's speech trumpeted hope, he did lob a few jabs toward the current administration. Without naming President Bush, Obama accused current leadership of fostering “disillusionment and frustration” among citizens.

“For the last six years we've been told that our mounting debts don't matter, we've been told that the anxiety Americans feel about rising health care costs and stagnant wages are an illusion, we've been told that climate change is a hoax, and that tough talk and an ill-conceived war can replace diplomacy, and strategy and foresight,” Obama said. “And when all else fails, when (Hurricane) Katrina happens, or the death toll in Iraq mounts, we've been told that our crises are somebody else's fault. We're distracted from our real failures, and told to blame the other party, or gay people, or immigrants.”

After an introduction by fellow Illinois Democratic Sen. Dick Durbin of Springfield, Obama and his family, wife Michelle and daughters Malia and Sasha took the stage to the song “City of Blinding Light” by venerable rock band U2.

Whether that song is to become a staple of Obama's campaign is not known, but U2's broad appeal seems to match that of Obama's — the crowd, while skewing noticeably young for an appearance by a presidential candidate, stretched across all age and racial lines.

The event also attracted about 500 media members from across the world.

Not everyone in attendance was wholly sold on Obama, however. Myra Phillips, a Springfield native who now lives in Dallas, was in town visiting relatives and decided to take in the spectacle.

“I think it's just history, because he's doing this in Springfield and he's comparing himself to Lincoln,” Phillips said before the speech. “I don't know if I'm going to support him or not.”

Obama briefly discussed bits of his personal history — notably an early job as a community organizer in Chicago that eventually led to his work as a civil rights lawyer — before launching into his platform.

He touted a push to achieve universal health care “by the end of the next president's first term,” shoring up education by setting high standards for schools and recruiting “a new army” of teachers, making college more affordable, investing in scientific research and making broadband Internet available nationwide.

He also called, to an enthusiastic response, for a plan to pull combat troops out of Iraq by March 2008.

“It's humbling to see a crowd like this, but in my heart I know you didn't come here just for me,” Obama said. “You came here because you believe in what this country can be. ... You believe we can be one people, reaching for what's possible, building that more perfect union.”



ABOVE: U.S. Sen. Barack Obama, D-Ill. with his wife Michelle and daughters Sasha, left, and Malia wave to a large crowd gathered at the Old State Capitol in Springfield Saturday after Obama announced his candidacy for the 2008 Democratic presidential nomination. BELOW: The Old State Capitol building, the background for Obama's speech, has deep ties with Lincoln, fueling comparisons between the two men.

Photographs by **ADAM GERIK** of the Journal Star



ABOVE: Patrick Kane of Boston, left, Carl Geiringer of Boston and Jenny Lane of Cleveland pass the time before Barack Obama announced his candidacy for the 2008 Democratic presidential nomination in Springfield. They said that the idea for the costumes came from a few YouTube videos that do a comparison between Obama and the Man of Steel. “We saw these Superman sheets and we thought we'd put it together,” said Geiringer.

