

OPINION

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Obama: A Drum Major for Change

America needs a new direction

BY JIMI JOHNSON

Sen. Barack Obama has campaigned on "change" in his run for president. He has stressed how important it is for America to change the way we do business at home and abroad.

The American people have heard the call and have begun to embrace the idea of a new, brighter, better and more tolerant America.

Many politicians have echoed Obama's message of change. Though the strategies on how to affect change may differ, Americans surely understand is that a change of direction for our coun-

try is a must.

Change has become the political chorus line for 2008 and Obama is the lead singer.

President Bush and the Republican administration have had a "choke hold" on the White House for nearly eight years. Since Bush took office in January 2001, our national debt has risen 70 percent to over \$9 trillion. The

unemployment rate is the highest America has seen in nearly two decades. Home foreclosures are at record highs and families are seeing the "American Dream" vanish before our eyes.

This country cannot withstand four more years of the Bush/Republican doctrine. Bush's two terms have undermined everything that is great about this na-

tion. The Bush administration has shown the world an America that is isolated and indifferent to the international community. They have shown an America that cares little about its own citizens and more about making money for the

caused the economy to tail spin into a recession. At the same time the Halliburton Corporation is making billions of dollars in Iraq. The former C.E.O. of Halliburton is current Vice President Dick Cheney.

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richest one percent of this nation.

The Bush administration has shown an America that will unilaterally invade a sovereign nation without the support of the United Nations. This administration has tried to disregard and discard our First Amendment rights in the name of patriotism and national security.

We need a regime change. We must change our course and begin to engage our international partners and other world leaders in serious dialogue about the direction our world is headed.

While our economy is on a downward spiral, the current administration continues to spend tax dollars on an ill fated and unjustifiable war in Iraq. This was has brought our economy to the brink of collapse.

Since President Bush declared, "mission accomplished" in May 2003, the United States have spent over \$500 billion in Iraq. And most importantly, we have lost over 4,000 U.S. soldiers during this misled invasion.

The Bush foreign policy has

When Republican presidential candidate John McCain was asked about the worsening conditions of the U.S. economy he said "the fundamentals of our economy are strong". I greatly question the leadership ability of a person that calls an economic recession a strong economy.

However, McCain voted with Bush over 90 percent while in the senate on issues affecting our nation. We cannot withstand another four years of the Bush/Republican doctrine.

Obama was one of the first politicians to come out against the war in Iraq. He said invading Iraq was a "tragic mistake". He understood that the war on terror did not go through Iraq.

Obama showed great insight and judgment by standing up and outlining many reasons against invading Iraq. The potential loss of American lives, the cost of war when dollars could be better spent elsewhere, and an unclear exit plan.

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Save College Pell Grants

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

For more than 30 years, federal Pell Grants have helped mostly needy students pay for college; without it many would not be able to further their education.

Over the last year, more students applied for a Pell grant than ever before. The high demand for these funds has put a strain on the program; the Department of Education faces a \$6 billion dollar shortfall in next year's funding for the grant. To balance the department's budget, Congress will either have to approve \$6 bil-



lion in new funds or cut back on the program.

Scaling back is not an option. Just as Wall Street received - and continues to receive - federal bailouts, so too should the Pell Grant program. In this instance, at least the taxpayer funds would be put towards something that has a positive impact on the country's long term health.

Pell Grants are usually awarded to students - 90 percent of them low income - working toward their first college degree, whether they are recent graduates or older stu-

dents.

The funds do not have to be repaid. The most any student can receive each a school under the program is just over \$4,700. That's enough to fully fund a year at a community college.

At more expensive schools, the Pell Grants forms the foundation for a financial aid package that includes other grants and, often, student loans. Without a Pell Grant, students may have to either reduce their courseload or take on more loan debt.

Congress set aside \$14 billion for the grants for the current year,

but a failing economy and stagnant job market pushed many Americans, more than expected, to return to the classroom. The increased demand, combined with a build up of shortfalls from previous years, the Education Department is now faced with this huge budget deficit in the Pell program.

Finding the money to save the program shouldn't be that difficult. After all, President Bush recently asked the American people to get behind a \$700 billion bailout for the financial industry.

The Federal Reserve didn't seem to flinch when it dipped into its coffers and found an extra \$85 million to loan financially strapped insurance giant AIG. Nor did it seem to have a problem giving million dollars to several other similarly troubled corporations over the last few months.

At least the use of taxpayer funds to support the Pell Grant program would make sense: A well-educated workforce drives the economy. America's heavily outsourced job market needs educated, qualified candidates. Sustaining the Pell Grant program would help ensure there is are trained work-

ers who would help the country compete in a global marketplace. This competition would create jobs and America as a whole will benefit.

Congress needs to act quickly and assure students that there will be no cuts in the Pell Grant program. If the government is able to give what will total \$1 trillion to corporations whose bad business practices and greed created the problems they currently face, surely they can find a mere \$6 billion for students in need.

Judge Greg Mathis is vice president of Rainbow PUSH and a board member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

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