

## **WWE: THE 18-30 VOTER ISSUES PAPER BARACK OBAMA RESPONSE**

### **ECONOMY & JOBS**

#### **• What specific legislative proposal will you support to ensure that jobs that pay a living wage are available domestically for America's younger generation?**

We can't keep passing unfair trade deals like NAFTA that put special interests over workers' interests. I didn't just start criticizing unfair trade deals like NAFTA because I started running for office - I'm doing it because I've seen what happens to a community when the factory closes down and the jobs move overseas. I began my career as a community organizer on the South Side of Chicago, fighting joblessness and poverty in neighborhoods that were devastated when the local steel plant closed.

And it's because of this longstanding commitment to working families that I will not sign any trade agreement as President that does not have protections for our environment and protections for American workers. And I'll pass the Patriot Employer Act that I've been fighting for ever since I ran for the Senate so we can end tax breaks for companies that ship our jobs overseas, and give those breaks to companies that create good jobs with decent wages here in America.

While we have to acknowledge that some of the jobs we've seen go overseas are not coming back, there is more we can do to create new jobs here at home. We can invest in American jobs by investing in America, and rebuilding our roads and bridges. I've proposed a National Infrastructure Reinvestment Bank that will invest \$60 billion over ten years. This will multiply into almost half a trillion dollars of additional infrastructure spending and generate nearly two million new jobs – many of them in the construction industry that's been hard hit by the housing crisis we're facing. Additionally, we can do more to create the green jobs that are jobs of the future. My energy plan will put \$150 billion over ten years into establishing a green energy sector that will create up to 5 million new jobs over the next two decades – jobs right here in Indiana that pay well and can't be outsourced. And we'll provide funding to help manufacturers convert to green technology and help workers learn the skills they need for these jobs.

#### **• What sectors do you perceive as being “high growth” areas for job creation for young adults?**

I believe that America is at a competitive advantage when it comes to building the high-demand technologies of the future, and I will help nurture America's success in clean technology manufacturing by establishing a federal investment program to help manufacturing centers modernize and help Americans learn the new skills they may need to produce green products. Along with the increased federal investment in the research, development and deployment of advanced technologies, this investment will help spur sustainable economic growth in communities across the country.

My plan to create more American jobs will increase funding for federal workforce training programs and direct these programs to incorporate green technologies training, such as advanced manufacturing and weatherization training, into their efforts to help Americans find and retain stable, high-paying jobs. I will also create an energy-focused youth jobs program to invest in disconnected and disadvantaged youth. This program will provide youth participants with energy efficiency and environmental service opportunities to improve the energy efficiency of homes and buildings in their communities, while also providing them with practical skills and experience in important career fields of expected high-growth employment. Participants will not only be able to use their training to find new jobs, but also build skills that will help them move up the career ladder over time.

America should lead the world in broadband penetration and Internet access. As a country, we have ensured that every American has access to telephone service and electricity, regardless of economic status, and I will do likewise for broadband Internet access. Full broadband penetration can enrich democratic discourse, enhance competition, provide economic growth, and bring significant consumer benefits. Moreover, improving our infrastructure will foster competitive markets for Internet access and services that ride on that infrastructure. I believe we can get true broadband to every community in America through a combination of reform of the Universal Service Fund, better use of the nation's wireless spectrum, promotion of next-generation facilities, technologies and applications, and new tax and loan incentives.

**• With many young adults believing Social Security will not be available once they retire, what is being done now so that members of the next generation will be able to meet their financial obligations when they retire?**

As someone who was largely raised by my grandparents, I recognize that Social Security is indispensable to workers and seniors, and it is probably the most important and most successful programs that our country has ever created. I remain committed to making sure Social Security is solvent and viable for the American people, now and in the future.

The underlying Social Security system remains strong, but the projected long-term cash flow of the program needs to be addressed. This is a real but manageable problem. But the longer we wait to solve the problem, the bigger it grows.

I will be honest with the American people about the long-term solvency of Social Security and the ways we can fix the problem. There are a number of ways to extend the Social Security trust fund, and I will come to the table with an open mind and listen to all those options. But I believe that benefits should not be cut, the retirement age should not be raised, but instead the wealthiest should pay a little bit more through a raise in the payroll tax ceiling to ensure that the most successful social program in history stays strong. This could include a "doughnut hole" to ensure that lifting the payroll tax cap only applies to the wealthiest Americans. I believe that privatization of Social Security, which I have long opposed, is not a valid option for us to consider because it tears the fabric of Social Security – the idea of mutual responsibility – by subjecting a secure

program to the whims of the market, and that is not an acceptable way to strengthen this program.

**• Because young adults have expressed concern that federal, state and local taxes are too high, what tax reforms would you offer to address this concern?**

As president, I will end the Bush tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans to pay for my health care plan.

I have also proposed a middle class tax cut plan that will restore fairness to the tax code and provide 150 million workers the tax relief they need. My new “Making Work Pay” tax cut will provide up to \$500 per worker, or \$1,000 per working family, and I will completely eliminate income taxes for 10 million Americans. The economy has weakened significantly. I believe we cannot wait for the next president to give workers the tax relief they need. We should make half of the tax credit, \$250 per worker, available immediately in order to quickly get money into the pockets of Americans. This will help maintain consumer spending, strengthen the economy and ease the squeeze so many Americans are currently experiencing. If there is a three-month cumulative decline in employment, I believe we should immediately provide the remaining portion of that tax credit, an additional \$250 per worker. I will also dramatically simplify tax filings so that millions of Americans will be able to do their taxes in less than five minutes. My plan will be fully paid for by closing the corporate loopholes and cracking down on international tax havens, increasing the highest bracket for capital gains and dividends and closing the carried interest loophole.

**• What policies and legislation will you promote to help 18-30 year olds achieve greater financial planning and security, and to help those who are living paycheck to paycheck get out of that cycle?**

Only 55 percent of Americans working full-time hold a job with any retirement savings plan. The percentage is even lower for part-time workers and minorities. I want to make retirement saving easier, cheaper, and more automatic for working people who get only minor tax benefits to save and who do not have the option of a defined benefit plan. In the Senate, I supported the Save More for Retirement Act with Senator Jeff Bingaman (D-NM). The bill provides incentives for automatic enrollment in 401Ks. I would also expand savings by establishing automatic enrollment in IRAs for employees who are not covered by 401K plans and expanding and improving the Saver’s Tax Credit to help more low and moderate income households save.

## **HEALTHCARE**

**• How would you describe the current status of health care in America? How will you tackle the challenge of providing all young adults with access to affordable health care? What should the government do, if anything, to ensure that every American has health coverage?**

I believe our health care system is broken. Health care costs continue to rise faster than inflation every year, and more Americans now lack health insurance than at any other point in history. I will tackle this problem by signing universal health legislation by the end of my first term in office that ensures all Americans have high-quality, affordable health care coverage. My plan will save a typical American family up to \$2,500 every year on medical expenditures by providing affordable, comprehensive and portable health coverage for every American; modernizing the U.S. health care system to contain spiraling health care costs and improve the quality of patient care; and promoting prevention and strengthening public health to prevent disease and protect against natural and man-made disasters.

**• What responsibility do employers have to assist in addressing the current health care dilemma for 18-30 year olds, particularly for young adults who are hired as short or long-term temp workers as they start their careers?**

Young people ages 19-29 are one of the largest and fastest-growing segments of the U.S. population without health insurance. 13.7 million lacked coverage in 2004, an increase of 2.5 million since 2000. Young adults often lose coverage under their parents' policies when they turn 19 or graduate from school. Nearly 40 percent of college graduates will be uninsured for some period of time during their first year out, and the same is true for 50 percent of high school graduates who do not go onto college. Under my health care plan, young adults will be able to get their own affordable health care coverage. My plan will also allow young people up to age 25 to continue coverage through their parents' plans if they want to.

All Americans, including young adults, will also have access to a new affordable public health plan as well as quality private health care plans through a National Health Insurance Exchange. The insurance plans available under both programs will be portable so that young adults will not have to worry about losing their health insurance if they lose or leave their job. And large employers will be required to contribute a reasonable amount to the public health plan if they do not offer their employees meaningful health insurance coverage options.

## **EDUCATION**

**• What role do you believe the government should play in making higher education more accessible and affordable?**

The federal government certainly has to do more to make college more affordable for every American. The very first bill I introduced in the United States Senate sought to increase the maximum Pell Grant award to \$5,100. As part of the College Cost Reduction and Access Act that was signed into law in September, we moved one step closer toward reaching that goal by increasing the current maximum to \$4,310 in 2007 and to \$5,400 by 2012. The Act also mandates that interest rates on subsidized student

loans are cut in half over four years. I sat on the Conference Committee that won these improvements in the bill.

But there is more we can do. As president, I will create a new American Opportunity Tax Credit to help American families who are struggling to send their children to college. This fully refundable \$4,000 tax credit will be provided to students before they have to pay their tuition bills. I will also simplify the financial aid application process by eliminating the current student aid form altogether. Instead, we will use tax data and make this process far easier for students and their families, because students should not need a PhD to apply for financial aid.

**• In light of the struggle to pay for college, what will you do to make it easier for young adults to attend college or graduate school without accumulating unmanageable debt?**

My American Opportunity Tax Credit will make community college tuition completely free for most Americans. With tuition and fees at community colleges averaging about \$2,300, the credit will eliminate tuition expenses entirely for lower-income and middle-class families. And because the credit is fully refundable, it will help low-income families that need it the most.

This tax 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, the credit will help low-income families that need it the most. I 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. Recipients of this credit will be required to conduct 100 hours of public service a year, either during the school year or over the summer months.

I will also seek to free up money for student aid by reforming the federal student loan program. Currently, there are two basic federal loan programs. The Direct Loan system allows students to borrow from the government through their schools. The Federal Family Education Loan Program (FFEL) instead gives private banks federal subsidies to make government-backed student loans. FFEL guaranteed loans cost about \$6 more per \$100 loan than direct loans. As president, I will eliminate wasteful subsidies for banks under FFEL and mandate that all federal student loans be provided through the direct loan program. By switching to the direct lending system, we can save taxpayers billions of dollars a year – money that can and should be directed to making college more affordable for Americans.

I also cosponsored Senator Kennedy's Student Debt Relief Act, which encourages colleges to participate in the Direct Loan program and use the savings to invest in grant aid to students. The legislation also increases need-based aid, and decreases fees and interest rates for student loans.

**• What policies will you promote to help better prepare high school students for college or for entering the workforce?**

To prepare students for college, we can give more high school students access to Advanced Placement programs. I introduced a bipartisan plan to allow students who do not have access to college-level courses at their high schools to apply for need-based grants and seek credit at local colleges or community colleges. I will also expand access to high-quality afterschool programs that will help children learn and strengthen a broad range of skills and provide relief to working parents who have to juggle child care and work responsibilities. I will double funding for the main federal support for afterschool programs, the 21st Century Learning Centers program, to serve one million more children. I will include measures to maximize performance and effectiveness across grantees nationwide.

My “STEP UP” plan supports summer learning opportunities for disadvantaged children through partnerships between local schools and community organizations. One portion of this proposal was included in a comprehensive bill to improve U.S. competitiveness that passed the Senate in April 2007 with a provision for summer programs focused on increasing student math and problem-solving skills.

I will also address the high-school drop-out problem by helping at-risk students before they get to high school, because the warning signs often occur well before high school. I will sign into law my “Success in the Middle Act,” which will provide federal support to improve the education of middle school students in low-performing schools by requiring states to develop a detailed plan to improve student achievement, develop and utilize early identification data systems to identify those students most at-risk of dropping out and invest in proven strategies that reduce the number of drop outs. I will also support federal efforts to continue to encourage schools to organize themselves for greater success by developing stronger relationships among adults and students, a more engaging curriculum, more adaptive teaching, and more opportunities for teachers to plan and learn together. I will establish a competitive grant process open to existing or proposed public/private partnerships or entities that are pursuing evidence-based models that work – such as Diploma Plus or Teacher Advisor programs. These grants will decrease the dropout rate by increasing the capacity of state and district leaders as well as outside leaders – foundations, politicians, entrepreneurs, and community leaders – to collaborate on improving graduation rates.

**• What skills and training can help U.S. workers stay competitive in a global economy?**

I am committed to strengthening the economy to make sure that young people with and without college degrees can enter and thrive in the job market. I believe we need to 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 more and better jobs. As president, I 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.

## **IRAQ WAR & WAR ON TERRORISM**

### **• What steps would you support for withdrawing U.S. troops from Iraq and why? Before U.S. troops leave Iraq, what structure needs to be in place to ensure stability in Iraq?**

I favor an immediate withdrawal of our troops engaged in combat operations in Iraq at a pace of one or two brigades every month, to be completed in 16 months. The withdrawal would be strategic and phased, directed by military commanders on the ground and done in consultation with the Iraqi government. Troops would be removed from secure areas first, with troops remaining longer in more volatile areas. Under my plan, American troops may remain in Iraq or the region for two specific missions: facility and personnel protection and counter-terrorism operations. These American troops will protect American diplomatic and military personnel in Iraq, and continue striking at al Qaeda in Iraq. If Iraq makes political progress and their security forces are not sectarian, we would also continue training of the Iraqi Security Forces. I would call for a new constitutional convention in Iraq, convened with the United Nations, which would not adjourn until Iraq's leaders reach a new accord on reconciliation. I would use presidential leadership to surge our diplomacy with all of the nations of the region on behalf of a new regional security compact. And I would take immediate steps to confront the ongoing humanitarian disaster in Iraq.

### **• How will you balance the continuing costs of the war in Iraq with the costs of domestic policy needs?**

At a time when we're on the brink of recession – when neighborhoods have For Sale signs outside every home, and working families are struggling to keep up with rising costs – ordinary Americans are paying a price for this war. The most conservative estimates say that Iraq has now cost more than half a trillion dollars, more than any other war in our history besides World War II. Some say the true cost is even higher and that by the time it's over, this could be a \$3 trillion war.

This is all part of the reason I opposed this war from the start. It's why I said back in 2002 that it could lead to an occupation not just of undetermined length or undetermined consequences, but of undetermined costs. It's why I've said this war should have never been authorized and never been waged.

When I am President, I will spare no expense to ensure that our troops have the equipment and support they need. There is no higher obligation for a Commander-in-Chief. But we also have to understand that the more than \$10 billion we're spending each

month in Iraq is money we could be investing here at home. Just think about what battles we could be fighting instead of fighting this misguided war. Instead of fighting this war, we could be fighting the terrorists who attacked us on 9/11 and who are plotting against us in Afghanistan and Pakistan. We could be securing our homeland and stopping the world's most dangerous weapons from falling into terrorist hands.

I will also work with Congress to cut income taxes for working Americans to offset the payroll tax they're paying. I will provide middle class tax cuts of up to \$1,000 for working families. And I will eliminate income taxes for any retiree making less than \$50,000 each year. My plan will also reduce taxpayers' headaches and payments during tax season by simplifying tax filings so middle class Americans can complete their taxes on their own in 5 minutes or less. By the end of my first term, I will sign universal health care into law to ensure that every American has access to affordable, quality and portable health insurance coverage. My plan will lower a typical family's premiums by \$2500 each year.

**• What recruitment and retention measures do you support to ensure our military maintains adequate personnel levels?**

The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have demonstrated the consequences of underestimating the number of troops required to fight two wars and defend our homeland. I support plans to increase the size of the Army by 65,000 troops and the Marines by 27,000 troops. Increasing our end strength will allow units to retrain and re-equip properly between deployments and decrease the strain on military families. I also will invest in an equipment reset for the Armed Services, including the National Guard, which has seen its readiness for homeland security missions decrease significantly.

**• What actions do you support to stabilize U.S. relations with Iran?**

Iran's nuclear ambitions, its support for terrorist groups, and President Ahmadinejad's calls for Israel's destruction demonstrate that Iran poses a serious threat to the United States, our allies and our interests in a vital region. The question is, what is the best way to handle that threat? The recently released National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) on Iran clearly undercuts the argument of those who called for swift military action. While the military option must remain available, the NIE makes clear that we have time to address the Iranian nuclear issue diplomatically -- but we need to use that time wisely. Tehran is continuing to enrich uranium and, as the NIE also makes clear, if it continues to make the kind of progress it has made during the Bush Administration could produce enough fissile material for a bomb sometime in the first part of the next decade. To make sure that does not happen, we need the kind of sustained, aggressive and unconditional diplomacy that I have long supported. Collective diplomacy, with real sticks in the form of tougher sanctions and increased economic pressure, and real carrots in the form of potential normalized relations over time, could dissuade Iran from pursuing a nuclear weapons capability.

## **ENVIRONMENT & ENERGY POLICY**

### **• What steps will you take in order to ensure that our environment will be protected for future generations?**

My plan will set a hard cap on all carbon emissions at a level that scientists say is necessary to curb global warming – an 80% reduction by 2050. To reach that goal, I will implement a 100 percent auction for carbon allowances to ensure that all polluters have to pay based on the amount of pollution they release. I will use the proceeds from that auction to invest \$150 billion over the next decade in developing and deploying clean, affordable energy and creating millions of new American jobs. A part of this effort will include launching a Clean Technologies Venture Capital Fund to get the most promising clean energy technologies off the ground so the American economy can benefit from America's innovations.

My plan also uses a variety of conservation and renewable energy policies to put America on the path of true energy independence, starting by reducing our national oil consumption by at least 35%, or 10 million barrels per day, by 2030. This will more than offset the equivalent of oil we are expected to import from OPEC nations in 2030.

To meet this goal, I have called for both increasing the production of American-grown biofuels and improving the efficiency of our cars and trucks. I have called the production of 60 billion gallons of biofuels by 2030, including advanced biofuels like cellulosic ethanol and advanced biodiesel. I have also called for ending subsidies to the oil and gas industries to help level the playing field for biofuels producers, and I have helped lead efforts in the Senate to investigate whether big oil companies are preventing biofuels from coming into the market. I am also the only candidate to call for a National Low Carbon Fuel Standard to lower the carbon content of our fuels by 10 percent by 2020 and reduce our dependence on foreign oil.

To reduce our demands for fuel, I have introduced a plan, based on my innovative bipartisan effort in the Senate, to double our fuel economy standards within 18 years and reduce oil consumption. Finally, my energy plan will both invest in advanced vehicle research and development and support efforts to build more sustainable communities to ensure a long-term strategy for energy independence.

### **• What are your thoughts on global warming and its growing impact? How do you plan to address this issue?**

To combat global warming and preserve our natural resources, I support implementation of a market-based cap-and-trade system to reduce carbon emissions 80 percent by 2050. I also introduced legislation with Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA) to reduce carbon in our fuel supply by establishing a National Low Carbon Fuel Standard. The standard will require fuel suppliers to reduce the carbon their fuel emits by one percent every year. The standard will increase one percent each year, reducing lifecycle greenhouse gas emissions 10 percent by 2020. In addition, I support increasing fuel economy standards; requiring that 25 percent of electricity come from renewable sources by 2025; increasing domestic production, distribution, and use of biofuels and biodiesels, making gas stations eligible

for a tax credit to install E85 ethanol refueling pumps, and investing in advanced technologies that will spur innovation, create jobs, and help stop climate change.

As the world prepares for the post-2012 phase of the UNFCCC, the United States must regain its leadership role in multiple forums to negotiate effective climate agreements. An Obama administration will re-engage with the diplomatic efforts under the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change. I will take seriously the U.S. leadership role in combating climate change by creating a negotiating process that involves a smaller number of countries than the nearly 200 countries in the current Kyoto system. I will create a Global Energy Forum - based on the G8+5, which included all G-8 members plus Brazil, China, India, Mexico and South Africa - of the world's largest emitters to focus exclusively on global energy and environmental issues. This Global Energy Forum will complement - and ultimately merge with - the much larger negotiation process underway at the UN to develop a post-Kyoto framework. On a technical level, it will also allow facilitate technology transfer, joint international research, and, importantly, the numerous large scale international demonstration projects that must be embarked upon immediately in order to make these technologies economically appealing alternatives.

**• What will you do to address factors that are detrimental to the environment, such as pollution and a potential energy crisis?**

As president, I will make energy conservation a top priority and use my position as president to communicate directly with the American people about the importance of reducing our energy consumption. My goal is to make America 50 percent less energy intensive by 2030, and to ensure that all new buildings built starting in 2030 are carbon neutral. To help achieve these objectives, my plan will:

- Ensure that the federal government continuously updates its energy appliance standards so that more Americans have access to highly-efficient consumer products. I will also implement legislation that phases out traditional incandescent light bulbs by 2014, which will save American consumers \$6 billion per year on monthly electricity bills and will save 88 billion kilowatt hours of electricity per year.
- Create a competitive grant program to award those states and localities that take the first steps in implementing new building codes that prioritize energy efficiency, work to flip incentives to utilities so that they are rewarded for conservation, not increased energy consumption, and provide a federal match for those states with leading-edge public benefits funds that support energy efficiency retrofits of existing buildings.
- Invest in a smart, digitally-connected energy grid that will help consumers produce electricity at home through solar panels or wind turbines, and be able to sell electricity back through the grid for other consumers, and help consumers reduce their energy use during peak hours when electricity is more expensive.
- Implement a Renewable Portfolio Standard so that the U.S. produces 25 percent of its energy supply from renewable sources by 2025.

- Increase CAFE standards by 4 percent each year, so that we can double our fuel economy standards within 18 years.

**• What measures do you support to address our country's dependence on foreign oil? What should be done, if anything, by the government to reduce our use of and dependence on fossil fuels?**

My plan also uses a variety of conservation and renewable energy policies to put America on the path of true energy independence, starting by reducing our national oil consumption by at least 35%, or 10 million barrels per day, by 2030. This will more than offset the equivalent of oil we are expected to import from OPEC nations in 2030.

To reduce our demands for fuel, I have introduced a plan, based on my innovative bipartisan effort in the Senate, to double our fuel economy standards within 18 years and reduce oil consumption. My energy plan will both invest in advanced vehicle research and development and support efforts to build more sustainable communities to ensure a long-term strategy for energy independence.

I will ensure that my comprehensive climate change initiative not only stems the emission of greenhouse gas emissions, but also that this initiative invests in clean technologies that can be used to retrofit existing outdated power plants across the country. We have a responsibility to not only ensure that new power plants are equipped with the latest clean technology, but also that we upgrade existing facilities as soon as we can.