

## **Spotlight on Poverty and Opportunity**

### **Senator Barack Obama's Written Responses**

To the candidates: For each of the questions, please provide the public with as detailed a response as possible in two minutes.

1. **GOAL:** Some nations have set numerical targets to reduce poverty. The UK, for example, has set a goal to eliminate child poverty by 2020.

*Would your Administration set a specific numerical target and timeline for reducing poverty and if so, what would it be? With or without a target, what would be your top policy priorities for reducing poverty?*

Rising poverty is one of the most serious issues facing America today, and I believe that inserting simplistic tag lines or one-dimensional goals are unlikely to be helpful in meeting this challenge. As president, I will build off of my life experiences of fighting poverty and hopelessness as a community organizer, civil rights lawyer and elected official to make poverty eradication a top goal of my administration.

My anti-poverty plan will significantly improve opportunities for millions of poor children and their parents by strengthening the economy for working Americans and providing additional resources to programs that have proven to be effective in reducing poverty. For example, my plan will expand the EITC, which is considered one of the most effective pro-work anti-poverty programs to date, to 5.8 million more Americans. Additionally, my EITC plan will increase EITC benefits for another 6.2 million Americans. I will also extend affordable, quality and portable health insurance coverage to every American and make significant investments in early childhood education to help low-income families. I will invest \$1 billion over five years into transitional jobs and career pathways programs to engage more Americans into the workforce and help them succeed. I will also work to tackle chronic poverty in urban neighborhoods across American by creating Promise Neighborhoods in 20 cities to provide new hope and opportunities to residents of concentrated poverty.

Perhaps most importantly, my plan will only focus on strengthening and expanding the most-effective methods for reducing poverty – including taking steps to strengthen families by reducing domestic violence, rewarding fathers who do the right thing and giving parents the right to take time off from work to care for a sick child. That's why my plan includes expanding innovative programs like the Nurse-Family Partnership, a program that has nurses visit and train low-income first-time mothers, because it has been proven to have produced an average of five dollars in savings for every dollar invested and produced more than \$28,000 in net savings for every high-risk family enrolled in the program. If my administration finds that one of its anti-poverty programs is not working, that program will be eliminated and funds will be routed to more effective uses.

2. **OPPORTUNITY:** The American Dream is about the opportunity to get ahead by working hard. Today, however, three million American workers live in poverty while working full time and year-round.

*What, if any, actions would your Administration take to address this situation?*

As president, I will work to retire the phrase “working poor” from our nation’s vocabulary. I will provide working families with expanded EITC coverage and increased EITC benefits; affordable, quality and portable health care coverage with subsidies to pay for premiums; a payroll tax credit to put up to \$1,000 in the pockets of every American working family; invest in career ladder programs to help working parents move up the job ladder and receive higher pay and benefits; and a mortgage tax credit and improved affordable housing opportunities to help more Americans purchase their own home.

### 3. **YOUR PAST ACTIONS:**

*Throughout your career, what action, policy, or effort are you most proud of that in some way addressed the issue of the poverty and opportunity? How would this experience inform or reflect your Administration’s approach to poverty and opportunity?*

I have spent my career fighting poverty and hopelessness. I am especially proud of my successful efforts on the South Side of Chicago to organize residents to clean up environmental health hazards and improve the quality of life in their neighborhoods. Perhaps my most notable accomplishment to fight poverty, though, came when I was an Illinois state senator and I led efforts to create the Illinois Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), which put \$100 million directly in the pockets of working parents. The EITC has often been described as the most successful anti-poverty effort in U.S. government history, and I am proud that I was able to bring both parties together to create the first EITC program in Illinois.

These life experiences have undoubtedly shaped my approach to fighting poverty. As a community organizer, civil rights lawyer and elected official, I have seen firsthand the ineffectiveness of some traditional anti-poverty programs. That’s why I have a strong commitment to pursuing only the most-effective anti-poverty programs.

4. **CHILDREN:** Poverty takes a harsh toll on children. Children who are poor are more likely to die in infancy, go without health care, housing and adequate food, and do worse in school. Nearly one in ten U.S. children – 6 million – live in extreme poverty (below 50 percent of the official poverty level, just \$10,000 for a family of four) and nearly one in five children live in poverty.

*What actions would you take to protect children from these consequences of poverty?*

I believe strongly in ending childhood poverty. That’s why I will mandate that all children have health insurance coverage and increase funding for high-quality early childhood education programs, which are considered a vital investment in improving the lives of poor children. I will also reverse the Bush Administration’s repeated cuts to health care, food and housing programs that have led to an overall increase in childhood poverty over the last several years.

I will also work to tackle concentrated poverty by building off the successful efforts of the Harlem's Children Zone in New York City, which provides comprehensive anti-poverty supports to ensure that chronic poverty ends with the current generation. I will create 20 Promise Neighborhoods throughout the nation in areas that have high levels of poverty, crime and low levels of student academic achievement in cities across the nation. My Promise Neighborhoods will provide a full network of services to an entire neighborhood from birth to college. The Promise Neighborhoods will seek to engage all resident children and their parents into an achievement program based on tangible goals, including college for each and every participating student, strong physical and mental health outcomes for children as well as retention of meaningful employment and parenting schools for parents. These efforts will help finally break the cycle of poverty that has lasted for too long in America, and help the next generation of children succeed and prosper.

**5. THE ROLE of GOVERNMENT, BUSINESS, and INDIVIDUALS:** Individuals, employers, and government can each play a role related to poverty.

*How would your policy proposals consider and balance the roles of individual responsibility, government action, and business practices?*

My anti-poverty agenda reflects my experiences working directly with low-income families, government and the private sector to provide additional opportunities to more Americans. I have learned that government alone cannot eradicate poverty in American – rather, it is our responsibility to empower individuals to make responsible decisions for their well-being and to engage the private sector which has much to gain by helping all Americans succeed. That's why I will invest \$1 billion in transitional jobs and career pathways programs that engage businesses because businesses often realize that helping their low-income workers succeed means that the business itself will succeed.

I will also improve supports for low-income mothers and fathers, to help empower them to take responsibility for the success for their children and families. I'll pass the Responsible Fatherhood and Healthy Families Act, a bill I introduced last year that will provide more financial support to fathers who make the responsible choice to help raise their children and crack down on the fathers who don't. And I'll help new mothers with their new responsibilities by expanding a pioneering program known as the Nurse-Family Partnership that offers home visits by trained registered nurses to low-income mothers and mothers-to-be. My plan will assist approximately 570,000 first-time mothers each year.

Finally, my plan to establish Promise Neighborhoods will also require collective action between individuals, local government and business by requiring all parties to come together to create the strategic plan for each Promise Neighborhood.