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Final Edition

**'There is power in hope': Campaign opens with promise to 'transform' U.S.**

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Staff reporters

SPRINGFIELD -- Invoking Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King Jr., Barack Obama launched his bid for the White House on Saturday with a pledge to lead an "improbable quest" to bring the troops home, end poverty, give everyone health care and "transform our nation."

"I recognize there is a certain presumptuousness -- a certain audacity -- to this announcement," the freshman senator said. "I know I haven't spent a lot of time learning the ways of Washington.

"But I've been there long enough to know that the ways of Washington must change."

The South Side Democrat kicked off his historic campaign to become the nation's first African-American president before as many as 17,000 cheering supporters.

They wrapped themselves in blankets to stave off 12-degree weather. Obama wore no hat or gloves, although an aide said the presidential hopeful wore long johns beneath a suit and overcoat.

"I know it's a little chilly," said Obama, 45, as he took to the stage. "But I'm fired up!"

So was the crowd, which came from as far away as Massachusetts, Georgia and North Carolina. Some waved hand-painted signs saying "Barack the Vote." Others wore buttons proclaiming him "Superbama."

**Weaves Lincoln into speech**

"Oh! Bama!" they yelled, interrupting his 20-minute speech more than 20 times with applause.

Obama's backdrop was the Old State Capitol, where Lincoln delivered his famous "House Divided" speech in 1858 that deplored the prospects of a nation split into half slave states and half free states. Red, white and blue bunting decorated two sides of the landmark, while a huge U.S. flag hung from a nearby office building.

Facing Lincoln's law office, Obama wove the 16th president throughout his speech, telling the crowd "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.

"That is our purpose here today. That's why I'm in this race. Not just to hold an office, but to gather with you to transform a nation."

Pointing to past generations that explored the moon and embraced the moral challenge of King, Obama called on young people to join him in a sweeping crusade.

He provided no details, but offered to try to solve nearly every problem vexing the nation -- ending poverty, capping greenhouse gases, extending health care in his first term, making college more affordable, providing comfortable retirements for workers, reducing foreign oil dependence and combatting terrorism.

**Clinton downsplays bid**

"But all of this cannot come to pass until we bring an end to this war in Iraq," he said, provoking some of the loudest applause. "America, it's time to start bringing our troops home."

Obama did not mention President Bush by name but attacked him on the national debt, health care, the economy, the environment and Hurricane Katrina.

"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."

Democratic opponent Hillary Clinton downplayed the significance of his candidacy. "We certainly welcome him into the race," said Mo Elleithee, a spokesman for the New York senator.

A couple of dozen anti-abortion demonstrators tried to dampen Obama's big day, protesting his support for abortion rights with signs bearing photos of aborted, bloody fetuses and asking, "What If His Momma Had Aborted Obama?"

"We're here to share the truth about Barack Obama and how he supports black genocide," said Angela Michael, 40, of Highland, Ill. "He is for abortion on demand."

Obama spokesman Robert Gibbs declined to address their remarks, saying he did not hear their chanting.

Republicans also took aim at Obama, criticizing his use of Lincoln -- the GOP's first presidential candidate.

"Lincoln never compared himself to President Washington or Jefferson," state GOP chairman Andy McKenna Jr. said.

Gov. Blagojevich, however, said the comparison was appropriate. "Barack, Abraham Lincoln and a lot of others have proven that in America, anything is possible," he said. "This is a place where dreams come true."

**‘Everybody is ready’**

Whatever the critics had to say about Obama's speech did not register with his adoring followers.

Carrie Grant, a 31-year-old software company employee, drove her two young sons five hours from Louisville, Ky., to see Obama and to emphasize that their heroes should not be the latest act on MTV.

And Joslyn McBride, a 51-year-old state worker from near Springfield, came because of the potential historic nature of Obama's candidacy.

"As an African American, it was really important because it will probably never happen again in my lifetime," she said. "Looking at the sampling of the people who are out here, I think everybody is ready. I think we're all ready to look past race and go with the candidate, no matter what the ethnic background."