

# PROMISES, PROMISES: Miles to go, promises to keep

By CALVIN WOODWARD – 38 minutes ago

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Barack Obama has not yet achieved the big campaign promises he'll be judged on years from now, on health care, war, the economy and so much more. It's early, it's a colossal load and Rome wasn't built in 100 days.

He has delivered, though, on the work ethic he outlined back when his Republican presidential rival challenged him to suspend campaign events and confront the financial crisis. "You know," he said then, "presidents are going to have to deal with more than one thing at a time."

So he has.

Obama has moved ahead on the towering problem of health coverage, succeeding on the first baby steps, and has taken on still big-ticket items that other leaders might have mothballed in perilous times like these.

On foreign policy, energy and the environment, Obama the president is trying to do what Obama the candidate promised. No bait and switch here.

But he'll be judged on results, not effort.

He's broken some promises:

Obama's pledge to change the way Washington works is turning out to be a mix of gimmick, genuine reform and sidelined ambition.

He promised repeatedly not to raise taxes on anyone but the rich, then did, approving a tobacco tax increase that disproportionately hits the poor.

His broad directions, though, are rooted in the rhetoric of his change-is-coming campaign.

He's winding down the Iraq war, though a little more slowly than promised. He's reached out to adversaries as he said he would, in a stark departure from President George W. Bush's uncompromising world view.

A look at Obama's progress on a sampling of his promises:

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## THE DEFICIT

The promise: "Every dollar I've proposed, I've proposed an additional cut that it matches." — Presidential debate, Oct. 15, 2008.

The performance: Obama's contention that his programs would not deepen the deficit was treated with great skepticism in the campaign, even before the financial crisis was in full fury. The nonpartisan Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget estimated his policy proposals would add a net \$428 billion to the deficit over four years, even accounting for his spending reduction goals. Now, the deficit is nearly quadrupling to \$1.75 trillion, and few independent analysts believe he can meet his goal of halving the deficit in five years.

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## DIPLOMACY

The promise: To pursue direct diplomacy with Iran and other hostile governments. Asked in a Democratic debate in 2007 whether he would meet the leaders of Iran, Syria, Venezuela, Cuba and North Korea without conditions during his first year in office, he said: "I would." Later in the campaign, Obama hedged on that after being called naive by rival Hillary Rodham Clinton, now his secretary of state. But he stuck to his basic position that the U.S. should engage with unfriendly countries.

The performance: Obama has offered dialogue to Tehran, made a video appealing to the Iranian people and included Iran in multinational discussions on Afghanistan, while sticking to his insistence that the Iranians not be permitted to develop nuclear weapons.

And Obama — without conditions — crossed a room at the Summit of the Americas to shake the hand of Hugo Chavez, the fiercely anti-American leader of Venezuela, and chat briefly.

The promise: "There are no better ambassadors for freedom than Cuban-Americans. That's why I will immediately allow unlimited family travel and remittances to the island." — May 23, 2008, speech, Miami.

The performance: This month, Obama delivered on the promise by announcing he will allow Cuban-Americans to visit families in Cuba and send money to them. He also opened possibilities for telecommunications cooperation between the two countries while honoring his pledge to keep the trade embargo largely intact until Havana allows more freedom.

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## EDUCATION

The promise: "Obama will fund No Child Left Behind and improve its assessments and accountability systems." — Obama's "Blueprint for Change" platform.

The performance: The economic stimulus bill signed Feb. 17 includes \$25 billion for education improvements, including No Child Left Behind.

The promise: "When I'm president, we'll fight to make sure we're once again first in the world when it comes to high school graduation rates." — Dayton, Ohio, Sept. 9, 2008.

The performance: This will be a work in progress for a long time. Obama's 2010 budget proposes new spending aimed at keeping at-risk kids in school.

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## ENERGY-ENVIRONMENT

The promise: "I will set a hard cap on all carbon emissions at a level that scientists say is necessary to curb global warming — an 80 percent reduction by 2050. To ensure this isn't just talk, I will also commit to interim targets toward this goal in 2020, 2030 and 2040. These reductions will start immediately." — Oct. 8, 2007, Manchester, N.H.

The performance: The president's proposed budget would put the U.S. on his promised path. His administration's declaration that carbon dioxide and five other greenhouse gases "endanger public health and welfare" was a stage-setting pronouncement for the long and contentious debate ahead. Prospects are uncertain, as the argument for emission controls tangles with concerns about higher energy costs to consumers arising from Obama's proposed cap-and-trade system.

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## ETHICS-OPEN GOVERNMENT

The promise: "When you walk into my administration, you will not be able to work on regulations or contracts directly related to your former employer for two years. And when you leave, you will not be able to lobby the administration throughout the remainder of my term in office." — Manchester, N.H., June 22, 2007.

In November 2007 he said of lobbyists: "When I am president, they won't find a job in my White House."

The performance: Obama imposed strict rules barring registered lobbyists from working for him for two years after their registrations expire. But once in office he devised a waiver that would allow exceptions for "uniquely qualified individuals," including Raytheon lobbyist William Lynn, Obama's No. 2 Pentagon official.

The promise: "As president, Obama will not sign any nonemergency bill without giving the American public an opportunity to review and comment on the White House Web site for five days." — Campaign Web site.

The performance: Poor, starting with his first bill, a nonemergency measure giving workers more time to take their pay discrimination cases to court. No more than two days passed before it became law. Only one bill in the first 11 was posted online for five days after it cleared Congress and before Obama signed it, the Cato Institute found.

Similar pledges to give the public more insight into decision-making have yet to bear fruit, such as one to disclose all communications between the White House and outside groups concerning regulatory policymaking. Obama is also preserving Bush-era secrecy surrounding dozens of FBI databases containing personal information about Americans and foreigners.

On the other hand, Obama strengthened access to government records under the Freedom of Information Act.

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## HEALTH CARE

The promise: "Obama will expand eligibility for the Medicaid and SCHIP (State Children's Health Insurance) programs and ensure that these programs continue to serve as a critical safety net." — Blueprint for Change.

The performance: Obama signed an extension of that children's program and provided \$87 billion to help states pay for Medicaid in the stimulus package in February.

The promise: "The Obama plan will create a National Health Insurance Exchange to help individuals who wish to purchase a private insurance plan." — Blueprint for Change.

The performance: No action so far, just meetings.

The promise: Obama "will invest \$10 billion a year over the next five years to move the U.S. health care system to broad adoption of standards-based electronic health information systems, including electronic health records." — Campaign Web site.

The performance: The Feb. 17 stimulus law included \$19 billion to modernize health information technology, most of it spread over five years.

## HOME OWNERSHIP

The promise: "Obama will create a Foreclosure Prevention Fund to help people facing foreclosure stay in their homes and renegotiate with their lenders or sell their homes." — Obama campaign.

The performance: Obama delivered on this promise, at a much higher price tag than the \$10 billion he proposed before the crisis deepened this year. The cost is \$75 billion.

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## STEM CELL RESEARCH

The promise: End a ban on federal financing of research using embryonic stem cell lines created after Aug. 9, 2001. — Response to a science questionnaire.

The performance: Obama eased the restrictions. The proposed guidelines that followed, however, disappointed some scientists by limiting the stem cells available for federally financed research to those from fertility clinic embryos that otherwise would be thrown away. The rules exclude using stem cells from embryos created just for experimentation.

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## TAXES

The promise: "I will cut taxes — cut taxes — for 95 percent of all working families." — Denver, Aug. 28, 2008.

The performance: The compromise stimulus bill that became law included a tax credit of \$800 for couples making up to \$150,000, with a phase-out starting at \$200,000. The amount was trimmed from the president's original proposal of \$1,000 per couple.

The promise: "And I can make a firm pledge: Under my plan, no family making less than \$250,000 will see their taxes increase — not your income taxes, not your payroll taxes, not your capital gains taxes, not any of your taxes." — Dover, N.H., Sept. 12, 2008.

The performance: The federal excise tax rose by the largest amount ever on April 1 after Obama signed the increase into law. The tax hit tobacco users, who are disproportionately low income.

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## TERRORISM

The promise: "Barack Obama will end the use of torture without exception." — Obama campaign.

The performance: Obama signed an order outlawing torture, cruelty and degrading treatment of prisoners; released memos detailing brutal interrogation methods used during the Bush administration and has left open the possibility of prosecuting officials who provided the legal framework for using those tactics.

The promise: Close the Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, detention center. — Obama campaign.

The performance: Obama signed an executive order to close the prison in a year.

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## WAR

The promise: "I will remove one or two brigades a month, and get all of our combat troops out of Iraq within 16 months." — October 2007 and again in the summer and fall 2008 campaign.

The performance: Obama is moving to remove combat troops by Aug. 31, 2010, 19 months after he took office.

His timetable for withdrawal shifted during the campaign. At one point, in January 2008, he was promising to remove combat troops by the end of this year, 11 months after taking office.

The promise: "As president, I would pursue a new strategy, and begin by providing at least two additional combat brigades (about 7,000 troops) to support our effort in Afghanistan." — July 14, 2008.

The performance: Obama has ordered 21,000 troops into Afghanistan in an escalation that will bring the U.S. total over 60,000, the most to date.

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## WASTEFUL SPENDING

The promise: "And, absolutely, we need earmark reform. And when I'm president, I will go line by line to make sure that we are not spending money unwisely." — Presidential debate, Sept. 26, 2008.

He also promised a "Transparency and Integrity in Earmarks Act" that would require a lawmaker seeking money for a pet project — known as an earmark — to justify it in writing 72

hours before it could win Senate approval.

Performance: No action on such a measure. On March 11, Obama signed into law a \$410 billion spending bill to finance the government through September — a measure that included 7,991 earmarks costing \$5.5 billion. He signed the bill while calling it "imperfect" and urging tighter controls on pet projects.