

PERSPECTIVE

Two things struck me as I again watched the speech. One was its optimism. The second how closely Obama has followed its major themes.



Democratic vice presidential candidate Sen. Joe Biden, D-Del., joins Democratic presidential candidate Sen. Barack Obama, D-Ill., on stage at Invesco Field at Mile High in Denver on the final day of the Democratic National Convention Aug. 28, 2008.

Obama 2008: The promise of a better place

Big news at the time, the public soon forgets the claims and promises made by presidential candidates in accepting the nomination of their respective political parties. Curious, I looked back at President Barack Obama’s acceptance speech on Aug. 28, 2008, in Denver. You remember that one. Democrats decided to move the speech from the civic center where they were holding their convention to the 80,000-seat Mile High Stadium. Obama filled it. Looking more youthful than his 47 years, Obama strode through the columns of a faux Greek temple and onto the stage. Late-night comedians had fun with that. The first African-American to gain the nomination of a major American political party was giving his acceptance speech 45 years to the day that Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his “I Have a Dream” address at the foot the Lincoln Memorial, part of the “March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.” The parallelism was perfect.



PAUL CHOINIERE
p.choiniere@theday.com

Two things struck me as I again watched the speech. One was its optimism. The second how closely Obama has followed its major themes. Our nation has its problems now, but those were truly dark times. Large financial institutions, thought invulnerable, had folded. Others teetered. The markets had collapsed and billions of dollars of wealth that Americans had counted on for retirement, their kids’ education, for buying a home, had evaporated. Millions of Americans were losing their jobs or their homes and, often, both. Facing perhaps a second Great Depression, Americans watched in record numbers as a freshman

senator delivered a hopeful message. Better days were ahead. “It is that American spirit, that American promise, that pushes us forward even when the path is uncertain; that binds us together in spite of our differences; that makes us fix our eye not on what is seen, but what is unseen — that better place, around the bend. That promise is our greatest inheritance,” Obama reassured a nation. Though many Americans remain disillusioned — the result of stagnant wages and too much wealth accumulating among the most rich — the nation is at a “better place, around the bend.” Since Obama took office, the economy has added more than 10 million jobs, and job openings are at a 15-year high, according to Factcheck.org. At 4.9 percent, the unemployment rate has dropped well below the historical norm. Corporate profits are running 152 percent higher, the S&P 500 is up 165 percent. The trade deficit has been cut by 24 percent. “Now is the time to finally

keep the promise of affordable, accessible health care for every single American,” Obama said at his Denver speech. Once elected, he and fellow Democrats in Congress pushed through the Affordable Care Act. “I’ll invest in early childhood education ... I’ll ask for higher standards and accountability,” vowed Obama. Though Republicans often blocked the funding he sought, Obama’s “Race to the Top” program encouraged states to pursue higher standards as they competed for grants, with 46 states undertaking comprehensive education reform plans, even though only 19 have won federal funding. He told America that if elected he would tap natural gas reserves, require more fuel efficient cars, and push investment in wind and solar power development, boldly stating that “in 10 years, we will finally end our dependence on oil from the Middle East.” In late 2014, U.S. oil production surpassed oil imports. Domestic oil production is up 84 percent,

imports down 53 percent, since Obama took office. Energy from wind and solar is up 322 percent. MPG standards for cars and light duty trucks continue to rise, reaching a mandated 54.5 mpg by Model Year 2025. Oh, he swore to “take out Osama bin Laden and his lieutenants” and use “diplomacy that can prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons.” He also swung and missed, including in vowing to “curb Russian aggression.” The ACA has required many tax increases. Federal debt has doubled. U.S. troops remain in Afghanistan and anarchy and civil war across wide swaths of the Middle East enabled the Islamic State to emerge. Obama has been cautious, arguably too cautious, in responding militarily. On balance, however, the nation has come closer to the vision Obama offered in the shadows of those plywood Greek columns than even his most ardent supporters could have expected. Paul Choiniere is the editorial page editor.

Bill and Hillary’s marriage far more complex than ‘mere romance’

By ALYSSA ROSENBERG

Once upon a time, a boy from Arkansas spotted a girl from Illinois across a crowded classroom. And on Tuesday night in Philadelphia, on the night Hillary Rodham Clinton became their party’s official nominee for president, Bill Clinton did his best to make one of the most-scrutinized marriages in the history of American politics fit into the contours of a fairy tale. Watching Bill Clinton argue to the American people that they, too, should love his wife, and trying to narrate his marriage as a wonky fable, was both vexing and sweet at the same time. The harder the Clintons have worked to preserve their marriage, the less easily that

marriage has fit into easy stories about what true love should look like. The relationship becomes more vulnerable to criticism and dissection at the moments when it’s asked to carry the greatest public weight. That complexity is in part a testament to the highly unusual route the Clintons travel, and the unique place they occupy in American history. It’s also about our failure to distinguish between the courage it takes to tap a girl on the back and the effort it takes to stay with her, between persuading her to marry you, and convincing her to stay after you’ve metaphorically burned down that cute little un-air-conditioned starter house. Clintons’ marriage has taught me that marriage is a



DONALD R. BROYLES/AP PHOTO
Bill Clinton, wife Hillary Rodham, and week-old baby Chelsea pose for a family picture in 1980.

mystery — not merely in that it’s perplexing, but that its power lies in part in the fact that any given marriage is not comprehensible to outsiders. It may be true, as Dana

Bash put it on CNN after Bill Clinton’s speech, that in his version of the story, “She was the object of desire . . . It actually is incredibly important for people to hear this.” However, there is no explanation of their marriage that the Clintons can give in public that solves the equation that makes up their relationship. It’s one of those strings of symbols and numbers that runs the universe, and yet is inaccessible to those who live in it. I believe Bill Clinton loves his wife. I cannot comprehend that he has subjected her to the humiliations she suffered through the years. However apocryphal the stories about how Arkansans thought it elected the wrong Clinton, or Bill’s insistence

that she should put her own career first — she’s there — the Democratic nominee for president. And he’s there, doing what political spouses have done for decades, and arguing that because she never quit on him, she’ll never quit on the voters. It’s a promise with extra frisson because we can imagine, from the outside, why she might have given up on that marriage. So who’s right? Is it Clinton’s tortured journey that defines her, or her position on the threshold of the destination? Her husband’s infidelities, or the stories he tells

SEE CLINTON’S PAGE B6

Alyssa Rosenberg blogs about pop culture for The Washington Post’s Opinions section.