

Obama stumps in Tulsa, OKC

He lauds Oklahoma's progress in early education and pushes health-care reform and an end to the war in Iraq.

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U.S. Sen. Barack Obama visits with Tulsa Educare Center Associate Director of Early Childhood Education Lyn Lucas (left) and Co-Director Carol Rowland at the center during Obama's tour of the facility during a presidential campaign fundraising trip Monday.

Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama swept through the state Monday, calling for education and health-care reform and for withdrawing troops from Iraq while raising more than \$300,000 during stops in Tulsa and Oklahoma City.

Obama paid a surprise visit to the Tulsa Educare Center, 2511 E. Fifth Place, shortly after noon and then attended a private fundraiser at energy and banking executive George Kaiser's home.

The U.S. senator from Illinois then traveled to Oklahoma City for a late-afternoon rally that packed the

Farmers' Market, another private fundraiser, and an appearance on "Larry King Live."

Obama praised Oklahoma's early childhood education efforts during his public comments and mentioned his Educare tour. "If it works in Oklahoma, why don't we do it in the whole country?" he asked.

Obama spoke for about 25 minutes to a crowd of more than 1,000 people who paid \$25 each to see him at the Oklahoma City Farmers' Market. He told the group that teachers should be paid more and that student performance should be improved by working with educators.

"We've got an education system that's leaving too many children behind," he said.

Obama said withdrawing troops from Iraq should begin May 1 and be complete by March 31, 2008.

"It's time for us to bring this war to a close," he said.

The treatment of returning veterans, he said, is "the one thing that we still have the opportunity to get right in this war."

That treatment should include first-class health care and job training, Obama said.

"When our veterans come home, they shouldn't be homeless; they shouldn't be digging through Dumpsters for food."

Obama also called for a new health-care system that would provide nationwide coverage and increase funding for preventive care.

"If we create a smarter health-care system, there is no reason why we can't make sure every American has health care," he said.

Obama also called for an energy policy that includes a greater focus on alternative fuels, solar and wind power, and a more efficient oil industry. He likened an investment in a more economic and efficient energy source to the country's push in the 1960s to land on the moon.

"If we can send a man to the moon, we can find a new energy source on this planet," he said.

Obama's campaign had kept his stop at the Educare Center so quiet that only two people there knew that he was coming.

Those two, Co-Director Carol Rowland and Associate Director of Early Childhood Education Lyn Lucas, were sworn to secrecy.

"We didn't find out until Friday, and we were told not to tell anyone," Rowland said.

Obama strolled through the center, asking questions of the staff and peeking into rooms where children were stretched out for early afternoon naps.

"Can I have a mat, too?" he asked at one point.

Obama said he has worked with the Ounce of Prevention Fund, which originated the Educare concept, since his days in the Illinois Legislature. Noticing the name of fund co-founder Irving Harris on a plaque just inside the Tulsa Educare Center, Obama pointed and said, "He was a very good friend."

Obama seemed particularly impressed by the center's artwork and layout and by the presence of a family medical clinic staffed by the University of Oklahoma College of Medicine.

"I've been a big proponent of early childhood education for some time," he said. "I'm extremely pleased and proud of Oklahoma for the groundbreaking work that's being done here."