

## **Voting on Change and Inspiration? Vote McCain**

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The coming presidential election is a positive one for many Americans because both candidates are inspiring and refreshing prospects. On the left sits a charismatic young man whose dignified optimism and appeal to our idealism has inspired young and old in red and blue states alike. On the right sits a lionized politician whose courage, humility, and disdain for the corruption and divisiveness of party loyalty *über alles* has garnered an equal following in those same blue and red states. But elections are about distinctions and decisions, determining who is most qualified to be president. I make the case for Senator John McCain.

Some say they cannot support Senator McCain because they disagree with his policies. To these people I recommend a broader look at both candidates' policy positions within the framework of contemporary circumstances. As shocking as this sounds, on a great breadth of policies, Senators McCain and Obama agree with one another.

Regarding the Iraq War, both men acknowledge that our withdrawal policies need to be based on realities on the ground rather than an immutable timetable. Senator Obama drew the ire of his Democratic base when he declared his intention to refine the sixteen-month timetable based on conditions on the ground. Senator McCain's withdrawal position has been the same, minus this politically advantageous yet militarily counterproductive caveat. He has said that we must begin withdrawing our troops as we meet our objectives – however we choose to define or refine them – without the imposition of an artificial timetable. I do not begrudge Senator Obama this piece of red meat so skillfully tossed to the war-weary electorate; I only mark the difference in willingness to politicize the issue that it confers.

Their similarities continue beyond Iraq. Both men support extending legal recognition to same sex couples while opposing gay marriage. Both promise to cut taxes, and both blame the economic crisis on a lack of transparency and surfeit of corporate greed. Both men support offshore drilling as well as massive investment into alternative sources of energy. The points to take away are threefold: first, the two men agree in scope if not in scale on many policies; second, notice whose positions are greater divergences from the respective parties lines; and three, note which of the two men have made real legislative attempts at addressing these issues. I admit that many of John McCain's attempts have often come up short, but sometimes the hardest part is starting the dialogue. Should we blame him for failing to pass every piece of legislation he has penned or cosponsored, or should we praise him for failing to give up?

To be sure, there are substantive differences, particularly on healthcare. However, path dependency requires the role of the private insurance industry to be superior to that of the government. Any significant change to this structure will require decades of reform, spanning many different administrations, not to mention enormous political and economic capital. The unfortunate fact is that healthcare reform is dead, a casualty of the \$700 billion institution bailout plan. Senators McCain and Obama know they cannot accomplish any of their weightier healthcare goals, so for the next few years, healthcare reform has become impossible and a non-issue.

Some say they cannot support Senator McCain because after eight years of President Bush, they cannot vote for another Republican. To these people I point out

that John McCain is nothing like George Bush; to deny this is to deny the actions of his entire career. Is there a Republican leader who has so consistently and so vocally challenged the excesses of the Bush Administration? Punishing Senator McCain for President Bush's failures is a misappropriation of frustration. If these voters want someone with whom to be frustrated, I point them to the voters in 2000 who concluded that after eight years of Clinton scandals, they could not vote for another Democrat. In their frustration, voters turned away from a competent yet unglamorous choice in favor of a perceived outsider who, lacking political accomplishments, offered vague compassion and a reassuring yet ill-explained ability to heal the divided nation.

There are others who say they liked the John McCain of 2000 but not the one of 2008. To these people I propose that you only liked the *idea* of liking John McCain. We all have our biases, and nothing feels better than proving the extent of our tolerance to others, or to ourselves. It is not enough to say you liked John McCain in 2000 because you never had to make a choice; I challenge people to honestly ask themselves if they would have voted for McCain over Al Gore. Is there a Republican for whom you would vote over a Democrat? I suspect the answer is no – the converse being true of Republicans – and that, I think, speaks volumes.

So far these have all been reasons why most Democrats and some Republicans are *not* voting for Senator McCain, and I have tried to show why I find these reasons unsound. However, instead of just refuting Senator McCain's ill-perceived negatives, I want to address his many positives. Our country is at a crossroads: we can continue down a path of political divisiveness, ballooning the deficit and mortgaging away our future while giving in to the frustrations created during these past eight years, or we can make the difficult decision to affect the change we wish to see in our world. Both candidates promise hope and change, but only Senator McCain asks us to direct our passions to something other than his candidacy.

As Senator Hillary Clinton pointed out, it is not enough to hope for change; it is something for which you have to fight because the vested interests will not be swayed by huge rallies, soaring oratory, or historical candidacies. Changing our nation's course will be a monumental undertaking requiring bipartisan support. Time and again John McCain has proven himself able to reach beyond his own party to institute major change, be it on climate change in McCain-Lieberman, campaign finance reform in McCain-Feingold, supporting President Clinton's efforts to normalize relations with Vietnam, standing up to the Bush Administration on the handling of the Iraq War, treatment of detainees, or the performance of Secretary Rumsfeld.

The Democrats swept both chambers of Congress in 2006 by painting disparate Republican scandals with the same brush, corruption. Jack Abramoff was the focal point, and it was John McCain's longtime investigation of Mr. Abramoff which led to his arrest, indictment, and eventual imprisonment. John McCain supported the surge and comprehensive immigration reform when it was political suicide. While Senator Obama observed, John McCain took the politically unattractive step of joining with Senate Republicans and Democrats in drafting the needed compromise to avert the "nuclear" option – a procedural move by Senate Republicans to change the rules of debate regarding judicial nominations so that cloture was met by a simple majority rather than the normal three-fifths majority. Just one of these positions is enough to make any Democrat respect John McCain; their aggregate means he is the best person to heal a

divided country. Now more than ever, we need sacrifice not sanctimony, competence not charisma, vicissitude not vainglory.

Mr. Obama is a relative newcomer, so it is unfair to expect accomplishments similar to John McCain's. Mr. Obama plays the part of a Washington outsider while using his four years in the Senate to refute claims of an experience gap. Those four years have presented him with innumerable opportunities to enact the change of which he speaks, to display that judgment which he touts, to brandish that ability to unite Democrats and Republicans. And in those four years, he has passed no major piece of legislation, his judgment has proven wrong – on campaign finance reform, on the war in Georgia, on the viability of the surge, on telecom immunity. His only claim to bipartisanship is his involvement in renewing the Nunn-Lugar Act. The actions that Mr. Obama laud are ones where John McCain has made his name.

Lacking a record of legislative accomplishments, Mr. Obama has chosen to run on pathos. Yet John McCain is a stronger choice because he is asking us to sacrifice our enthusiasm for Senator Obama's historic candidacy and unmatched oratory for the prosaic adeptness of experience and judgment. While Senator Obama appeals to our sense of hope for a better world, Senator McCain appeals to our higher sense of duty; he is asking us to sacrifice the exuberance of an Obama candidacy for the competence and earnestness of a McCain presidency. I find that far more inspirational.