

Would Obama be the Best Democratic Nominee?

Yes

By JAN JORGENSEN

With John Edwards dropped out of the presidential race, all the attention in the Democratic Party is on Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama. Given this choice, which candidate best embodies the principles of the party and can lead it to victory in the fall? I believe that Obama is the better of the two candidates. He has put forward sensible solutions to the prevailing problems of the day, including Iraq, providing health care for the uninsured, and education.

According to Obama's campaign website, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) is a deeply flawed policy. Outside of NCLB, the American education system needs many improvements. NCLB's status as an unfunded mandate, students who don't perform at their grade level, a high dropout rate, teachers who are quitting, and college costs that are too high.

To fix NCLB, Obama wishes to reform it by giving it more funding. He wants to reduce teaching geared toward standardized testing. Obama also calls for funding for programs in middle schools to address the dropout rates. He supports outreach programs that encourage lower income children to go to college. He wants to implement programs to work with teachers to keep them in their profession.

The problems Obama identifies in healthcare are Americans without insurance, insurance premiums rising, and that not enough is spent on public health and prevention measures. Obama wishes to make a healthcare program available to every American similar to the affordable package received by Congress, modernize the healthcare system to reduce costs, and initiate preventative programs from lead poisoning protection to AIDS research.

In order to change our military policy, Obama promises honest judgment on the war in Iraq, as he has laid out a detailed plan of how to bring the troops home. He plans to have all combat brigades out of Iraq within 16 months. He plans to press Iraqi leaders to be responsible for their future. He also wants to tackle the refugee problem within Iraq, taking a humanitarian approach instead of just a military approach.

While Hillary Clinton may be able to cite experience for her campaign, Obama has a very strong platform and should be the Democratic candidate for President of the United States.

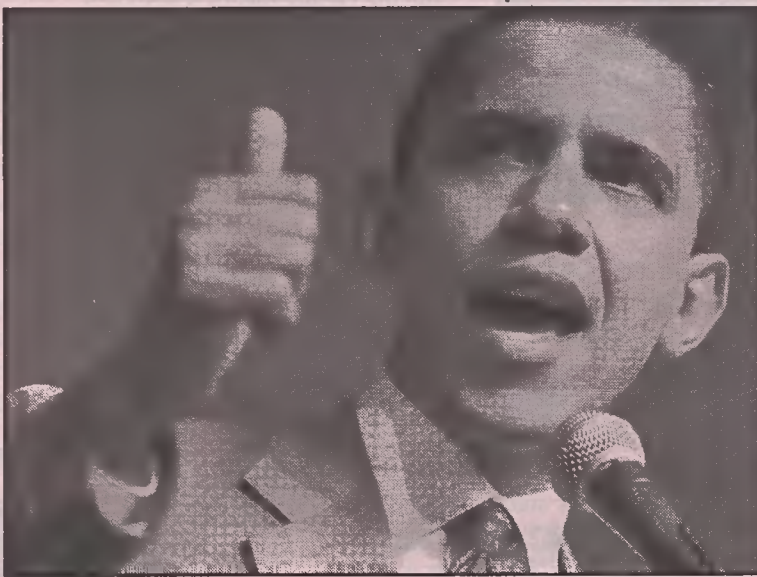


Photo: <http://todaysseniorsnetwork.com/Barrak%20Obama.jpg>

Barack Obama promises "Change we can believe in". It's very possible that Obama will bring change if elected President, but with little political experience, that change probably won't be for the best. I do commend Obama for inspiring and engaging more voters than ever in the political process, this trend can be seen through record turnout in early primary states. America has been swept away by his message of hope, forgetting the reality that we live in a world that tends to stomp on dreams. What will happen to all his plans when they are voted down, deemed unfeasible, and thrown to the side?

He doesn't have the political contacts to put change into action. I am not a fan of Hillary Clinton in the least, but at least she knows what it takes to get things done in Washington.

Obama seems like a great guy with two adorable kids and a loving wife. On his website, his family is the first image you see. As president though, I no more want Barack Obama leading the most powerful nation in the world, than I want a doctor fresh out of med-school operating on my heart. There is one truth that cannot be escaped, knowledge and effectiveness comes with experience. Obama may see all of the possibilities for America in a beautiful Disney film sort of way, but he doesn't know enough about the realities of politics, and he doesn't see the police lines that cannot always be crossed. How can anyone

bring about change in a world that they haven't been part of for long enough to understand? Obama is the wide-eyed kid that you look pitifully at, wishing that his world were reality, but at the same time realizing that it will never be so. I have not laid out all of his political ideas that I disagree with, because I agree with his political views with few exceptions. Although I find his policies feasible, I don't believe he could manage the political capital to execute them.

Most of the Democratic nominees have close to the same plan: start getting our troops out of Iraq, lower carbon-emission and preserve the environment, strengthen the middle class, raise teacher's salaries, fix the No Child Left Behind Act, and make health care more accessible. The question is who is more likely to be able to come through with what they promise. Sometimes we just have to wake up and realize the guy we like the most in the election is not necessarily the one who will do the best job as the President of the United States.

Benazir Bhutto and the American Paradox

By JOE NARON

Benazir Bhutto, former Prime Minister of Pakistan and current candidate for said office, died December 27 of last year. For Americans, her death has immense repercussions for not only our foreign policy in Pakistan, but also our relationship with the whole of Central Asia and the Middle East. The passing of the once and future Prime Minister reveals a twofold reality about our affairs in that region. First of all, there are no saviors in the Middle East, no native sons (or daughters) untainted by scandal, who can rise from the rubble and bear the standard of western democracy. Secondly, the United States must realize that idealism has infected our presence in the region, from both neoconservatives and overly diplomatic liberals, and in order to achieve stability it must be purged.

To briefly explain, Bhutto served as Prime Minister of Pakistan from 1988-1990 and again from 1993-1996. She was a dynastic politician, her father created the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), the control of which she inherited after her father's execution at the hands of a coup. She was also a product of Middle Eastern tribalism, the PPP was a primarily Sindhi party (its strength residing in the southeast of the country). Therefore, her power was a sum of dynasticism and tribalism. Her term as Prime Minister was marked by scandal, she was exiled for taking millions in kickbacks from military spending contracts. There is even some speculation that Bhutto's husband, Asif Ali Zardari, was involved in the assassination of her brother in a perceived attempt for her to have uncontested control of the PPP. Clearly, Bhutto was far from the ideal of leadership a country as unstable as Pakistan requires.

Immediately following her death, her son Bilawal and husband Zardari were given joint control of the PPP, continuing the family enterprise. Bilawal (a 19 year old Oxford student), upon being handed the reigns

of the PPP stated (quoting Bhutto) that, "Democracy is the best revenge," in regards to avenging her death. Once again, an observer can note that dynasticism and not democracy is the driving force behind Bhutto and any PPP successor's power. One would find it hard to notice that Bhutto was constantly retaliating for her father's death, Bilawal pledges to do the same for his mother. Supporting a government whose loyalties lie not with the people of the country but to a family and tribe does not promote stability, but rather sows the seeds of conflict.

As for Musharraf, the President and former Army Chief of Staff, he is imperfect but the best option for stability in Pakistan. His government provides an example (relative to his region) of efficiency and meritocracy. He has overseen Pakistan's most successful economy, with 7% GDP growth per year over the past five years (this compared to 3% during the 1990s under civilian rule). The military in Pakistan is and will remain the country's most important political entity, however hard to stomach that may be for advocates of democracy. The military functions as an effective bureaucracy, its ranks for the most part profess loyalty to Pakistan itself and not familial or tribal allegiances. Even under civilian rule, the military maintains its own agenda, as it did with its nuclear weapons program.

The military, like the bureaucracy, is not without its flaws. In order for it to remain effective, Musharraf

must call for a removal of leaders with Islamist tendencies. An international, and credible investigation of Bhutto's death would also help to restore confidence in the regime, and thereby stability. The pressure on President Musharraf must not be for him to resign,

but for him to allow for a government empowered by popular mandate, brought forth by free elections.

How can America support stability and democracy at the same time? Given that democracy in Pakistan is linked to tribalism, and stability to the military the two seem opposed to one another. Our goal can be achieved by leaving our idealism by the wayside. We must accept the reality of the situation in Pakistan, continued support of Musharraf is the proper means of maintaining stability. In other areas of the region, such as Iraq, it has been the empowerment of tribal leaders that has led to stability. The



Benazir Bhutto
Photo: http://cafecrem.files.wordpress.com/2007/12/bhutto_benazir.jpg

United States can no longer press democracy around the globe. Our means must be able to adjust from situation to situation, in either Iraq, Pakistan or elsewhere. The goal however remains a stable regime. Democracy is an institution that must internally evolve within a stable country, if it is brought as an invader it will be resented and never adopted. In seeking stability, we provide a cradle for democracy, empowerment of all citizens, and the downfall of the regimes that we use to incubate that most just means of governance.