OMNI NEWSLETTER: OBAMA WATCH #1
Compiled by Dick Bennett, July 22, 2008. For a Culture of Peace and Justice.

We should search our principles, search for the truth about McCain and Obama, do our best now to make them better candidates, vote, and then continue to do our best to reverse the uncaring, violent, undemocratic policies and practices of the present administration, according to our knowledge and principles. (Two enewsletters have been published on McCain so far.)

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There are many websites for researching Obama

Type Obama into the search field at http://www.factcheck.org
http://www.opencongress.org/people/show/400629_barack_obama

Topic pages and databases about Obama

General
- Chicago Tribune - Candidate coverage
- On the Issues - Issue positions
- Project Vote Smart - Candidate information, including issue positions

Disability issues
- Obama answers questions on disability issues

Environment
- Obama & environmental issues: Comprehensive review from the League of Conservation Voters.

Foreign affairs
- "Renewing American Leadership" - detailed article article by Barack Obama in Foreign Affairs
- Barack Obama's positions on top foreign policy issues - extensive material documented by the Council on Foreign Relations

Health care
- They've Got You Covered? - Obama and Clinton ads both claim all Americans would be covered by their health plans. Clinton's would come close. Annenberg Public Policy Center, University of Pennsylvania.
A reasonably evenhanded biography of Barack Obama, published last year, describes him as "an exceptionally gifted politician who, throughout his life, has been able to make people of wildly divergent vantage points see in him exactly what they want to see." The biographer, David Mendell, reports, "the higher he soared, the more this politician spoke in well-worn platitudes and the more he offered warm, feel-good sentiments lacking a precise framework."

Now, less than four months before Election Day, with growing disquiet among significant portions of Obama's progressive base, the current negative reactions can't be dismissed as potshots from the political margins. Even The New York Times, in a July 4 editorial headlined "New and Not Improved," has expressed alarm: "We are not shocked when a candidate moves to the center for the general election. But Mr. Obama's shifts are striking because he was the candidate who proposed to change the face of politics, the man of passionate convictions who did not play old political games."

But on July 8, Obama made a valid point - even if it wasn't exactly the point he was trying to make - when he disputed "this whole notion that I am shifting to the center" and argued: "The people who say this apparently haven't been listening to me." Overall, his career as a politician has embraced conciliation and compromise rather than pushing against centrist corporate agendas.

These days, an appreciable number of Obama supporters are starting to use words like "disillusionment." But that's a consequence of projecting their political outlooks onto the candidate in the first place. The best way to avoid becoming disillusioned is to not have illusions in the first place.

The more that spotlights move from Obama's uplifting eloquence to his specific policy positions, complete with loopholes and wiggle room, it's predictable that some of his progressive base will become displeased - whether on issues related to the death penalty, fair trade, government funding of religious-based projects, Iraq, Iran, evenhandedness between Israel and Palestinians, gun control or (perhaps most flagrantly) warrantless surveillance.

On Wednesday, when Obama cast a vote in the Senate to undermine the Fourth
Amendment, he fulfilled his frequent prediction during the primary season that "I will make mistakes." This was a very big one. As an attorney who's well acquainted with constitutional law, he participated in damaging one of the most precious provisions in the precious Bill of Rights.

Barack Obama is an extremely smart guy. And I can't remember a major contender for president less inclined to insult the intelligence of the public. Let's return the favor by directly challenging him when appropriate. We'd do him - and the Obama campaign, ourselves and the country as a whole - no favors by opting for silence instead.

We can help the Obama for President effort when we hold him to his good positions - and move to buck him up when he wavers.

While speaking of the Iraq war, Obama made one of the most insightful statements of the primary campaign: "I don't want to just end the war; I want to end the mindset that got us into war." He needs to be held to that wisdom. Obama should feel enormous counterpressure from the grassroots against the forces in the media and foreign-policy establishment that are pushing him to go wobbly on ending the Iraq war.

The vortex of what Martin Luther King Jr. called "the madness of militarism" is enormously powerful - and, in the context of presidential politics, routinely enticing. To the extent that Obama gears up anti-Iran rhetoric that he seemed to have mercifully abandoned months ago, for instance, he may reassure some pundits and other influential power brokers in Washington, but at the same time he's liable to weaken some of the allegiance to his candidacy among progressive constituencies.

As an elected Obama delegate to the Democratic National Convention, I've been hearing from people who are upset by the recent direction of the campaign. Some were always a bit skeptical of Obama, but are becoming much more so. Others have been strong supporters from the outset. In the latter category, an attorney sent an email to me a few days ago: "I must confess that my enthusiasm for Senator Obama has waned in recent weeks with a number of his policy announcements (on FISA, gun control, etc.). While I of course will vote for him and help him get elected, I must say that I feel a bit deflated after having put so much hope, effort and money into his candidacy."

Obama and his top advisers will have to gauge the importance of such deflation and waning enthusiasm. A key factor in the election will be the extent to which the Obama campaign can pull off a massive mobilization of voters. Deflated constituencies don't mobilize as well as inspired ones.

Anyone who assumes Obama will be elected president in November is on ground as solid as the assumption in 2000 that Al Gore would be elected president. On July 9, when releasing new results from nationwide polling, the Democratic research outfit, Greenberg Quinlan Rosner, reported Obama has a mere four-point lead over John McCain. Despite its propensity to spin for Democrats and its eagerness to note Obama seems "well-positioned," the firm acknowledged "some diminished enthusiasm for the presumptive Democratic nominee and only small gains among independent voters."

Some progressives, now disaffected, might consider the prospect of Obama falling short on Election Day to be his problem, not ours. But this isn't about Obama. It's about whether the levers of power in the Executive Branch, and the Supreme Court along with it, are going to be redelivered into the hands of the right wing for yet another four years.

We're facing the historic imperative of keeping McCain out of the White House. If major progressive change is going to be feasible during the next several years, defeating McCain in November is necessary. And insufficient. The insufficiency does not negate the necessity.

Under a McCain presidency, we'd be back to square one, where we've found ourselves since January 2001. Putting Obama in the White House would not by any means ensure progressive change, but under his presidency, the grassroots would have an opportunity to create it.

Along the way, let's strive to eliminate disillusionment by dispensing with illusions. No one who is a presidential candidate can proceed to overcome corporate power or the warfare state. The pervasive and huge problems that have proved to be so destructive are deep, structural and embedded in the political economy. The changes most worth believing in are the ones social movements can make possible.
Dear Dick,

We are guardedly optimistic about the growing consensus for a timeline to withdraw U.S. troops from Iraq. But unlike Barack Obama, we don't want to see our troops removed from the "bad war" in Iraq only to be sent to fight "the good war" in Afghanistan.

One of the very first actions of CODEPINK when we formed in 2002 was to go to Afghanistan to see, firsthand, the results of our invasion. We were horrified by the "collateral damage" -- the steady stream of innocent civilians killed and maimed by our "smart bombs." We pushed our government to stop killing civilians and to compensate the families of those who we had mistakenly killed or maimed.

Seven years later, innocent Afghans continue to be killed by our troops, more US soldiers are now dying in Afghanistan than Iraq, the Taliban are gaining new strength, opium production has soared, and Osama bin Laden has not been found. The Afghan people continue to be among the poorest in the world, women continue to be oppressed, and the U.S. government reneged on its promise of a "Marshall Plan" to rebuild Afghanistan.

Barack Obama and John McCain are advocating the exact same "solution": Send more troops. But more troops will only mean more violence, more suffering, more killing of innocents, and more recruits for the Taliban.

We know that war is not the answer, but what is? Should the U.S. peace movement call for talks with the Taliban? In Iraq, the U.S. government has not just talked to Sunni insurgent groups that killed U.S. soldiers but it is now allied with them.

Back in 2006, Greg Mills, an advisor to the NATO forces in Afghanistan, wrote: "Countering an insurgency requires a mix of military pressure, institution-building, reconstruction and development, and international aid. But ultimately, the key to defeating it is political accommodation. In Afghanistan, that means talking to the Taliban."

A June 2008 report by Canada's Senate Committee on National Security, said, "The conflict in Afghanistan could go on for a very long time if there is no attempt to resolve the issue through diplomacy."

Would you advocate a timeline for the withdrawal of U.S. troops? How can we best support Afghan women?

Click here to share your thoughts with us and take our survey about the issues that are being brought to the surface by Obama's recent trip to Afghanistan. You can join the conversation by posting your comments on Common Dreams and Huffington Post. We will cull through your responses and comments and promote the best to the presidential candidates. Surely we can come up with a better answer than simply advocating more violence!

Thank you for your insights and your commitment to peace.
Alicia, Anne, Dana, Deidra, Desiree, Farida, Gael, Gayle, Jean, Jodie, Liz, Lori, Medea, Nancy, Rae and Tighe

P.S. While Obama has been in Iraq listening to generals, we are listening to the
soldiers standing up against war. James Burmeister, who suffers from PTSD and other ailments related to traumatic brain injury, was recently court-martialed for refusing to return to Iraq and speaking out against the horrors of war. He is currently serving six months in prison for his courageous stand. You can read more about his story here and send a letter of support- get the address here.

P.P.S. Our website Don'tbuybushswar.org won the 2008 Progressive Source Awards Judges' Choice for Best Microsite, making this CODEPINK's second win in a row! Congratulations to Farida Sheralam, our brilliant webmistress, who continues to make our work shine. Be sure to check out her awesome new homepage redesign at www.codepinkalert.org.

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OBAMA SUPPORTS HABEAS CORPUS FOR GHTMO PRISONERS

“Naivete, thy name is Arkansas Democrat-Gazette” By Richard Drake

Just a few days ago the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette had a pretty good editorial about Dan Coody, and his dark fantasies about running for mayor a third time. With this morning’s editorial -“Willful Blindness  Dept.: Naivete, thy name is Barack Obama” - they managed to wipe out that memory in record time.

Taking Obama - and by extension the Supreme Court - to task for their old-fashioned view that the rule of law, and granting prisoners the right of Habeas Corpus will somehow result in in all of these prisoners being free to attack the U.S. again, they reveal a serious mistrust in the basic rule of law in the United States, that which other nations often look to as an example of how to conduct themselves.

Guilt? Innocence? These are just words! So what if a lot of these guys were just innocent schmucks turned in by people for the reward, who may not be guilty of anything at all, except being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

The new mind-set: Guilty until proven guilty.

DEMS HAVE AN OPTION?
http://imvotingrepublican.com/

Lest we forget that Libs and Demos have a less than perfect candidate, read this Wash Post story on the Court http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/06/28/AR2008062802078.html?hpid=topnews

OBAMA’S FINANCES

Chris D In an article on the Columbia Journalism Review website, Trudy Lieberman writes this about Obama's"stump speeches imply that he is not taking money from people who want things from the government and push for them. The reality is that he has."

The rest of the article is at http://www.cjr.org/campaign_desk/obamas_lobbyist_line.php

RABBI WASKOW TO OBAMA

--- On Sun, 7/13/08, Rabbi Arthur Waskow <Tikvanet@aol.com> wrote:
From: Rabbi Arthur Waskow <Tikvanet@aol.com>
Subject: Open Letter to Obama: the Middle East, Islam, & Ethical Politics
To: livanlern2002@yahoo.com
Date: Sunday, July 13, 2008, 10:49 AM
A Prophetic Voice in Jewish, Multireligious, and American Life
Broadly speaking, the serious contenders for the Democratic nomination are offering similar policy proposals — the dispute over health care mandates notwithstanding. But there are large differences among the candidates in their beliefs about what it will take to turn a progressive agenda into reality.

At one extreme, Barack Obama insists that the problem with America is that our politics are so “bitter and partisan,” and insists that he can get things done by ushering in a “different kind of politics.”

At the opposite extreme, John Edwards blames the power of the wealthy and corporate interests for our problems, and says, in effect, that America needs another F.D.R. — a polarizing figure, the object of much hatred from the right, who nonetheless succeeded in making big changes.

Over the last few days Mr. Obama and Mr. Edwards have been conducting a long-range argument over health care that gets right to this issue. And I have to say that Mr. Obama comes off looking, well, naïve.

The argument began during the Democratic debate, when the moderator — Carolyn Washburn, the editor of The Des Moines Register — suggested that Mr. Edwards shouldn't be so harsh on the wealthy and special interests, because “the same groups are often responsible for getting things done in Washington.”

Mr. Edwards replied, “Some people argue that we're going to sit at a table with these people and they're going to voluntarily give their power away. I think it is a complete fantasy; it will never happen.”

This was pretty clearly a swipe at Mr. Obama, who has repeatedly said that health reform should be negotiated at a “big table” that would include insurance companies and drug companies.

On Saturday Mr. Obama responded, this time criticizing Mr. Edwards by name. He declared that “We want to reduce the power of drug companies and insurance companies and so forth, but the notion that they will have no say-so at all in anything is just not realistic.”

Hmm. Do Obama supporters who celebrate his hoped-for ability to bring us together realize that “us” includes the insurance and drug lobbies?

O.K., more seriously, it's actually Mr. Obama who's being unrealistic here, believing that the insurance and drug industries — which are, in large part, the cause of our health care problems — will be willing to play a constructive role in health reform. The fact is that there's no way to reduce the gross wastefulness of our health system without also reducing the profits of the industries that generate the waste.

As a result, drug and insurance companies — backed by the conservative movement as a whole — will be implacably opposed to any significant reforms. And what would Mr. Obama do then? “I'll get on television and say Harry and Louise are lying,” he says. I'm sure the lobbyists are terrified.

As health care goes, so goes the rest of the progressive agenda. Anyone who thinks that the next president can achieve real change without bitter confrontation is living in a fantasy world.

Which brings me to a big worry about Mr. Obama: in an important sense, he has in effect become the anti-change candidate.

There's a strong populist tide running in America right now. For example, a recent Democracy Corps survey of voter discontent found that the most commonly chosen phrase explaining what's wrong with the country was “Big businesses get whatever they want in Washington.”

And there's every reason to believe that the Democrats can win big next year if they run with that populist tide. The latest evidence came from focus groups run by both Fox News and CNN during last week's Democratic debate: both declared Mr. Edwards the clear winner.
But the news media recoil from populist appeals. The Des Moines Register, which endorsed Mr. Edwards in 2004, rejected him this time on the grounds that his "harsh anti-corporate rhetoric would make it difficult to work with the business community to forge change."

And while The Register endorsed Hillary Clinton, the prime beneficiary of media distaste for populism has clearly been Mr. Obama, with his message of reconciliation. According to a recent survey by the Project for Excellence in Journalism, Mr. Obama’s coverage has been far more favorable than that of any other candidate.

So what happens if Mr. Obama is the nominee?

He will probably win — but not as big as a candidate who ran on a more populist platform. Let's be blunt: pundits who say that what voters really want is a candidate who makes them feel good, that they want an end to harsh partisanship, are projecting their own desires onto the public.

And nothing Mr. Obama has said suggests that he appreciates the bitterness of the battles he will have to fight if he does become president, and tries to get anything done.

NADER FOR COMPARISON

www.votenader.org
See interviews by Amy Goodman on Democracy Now.

HEDGES’ NEGATIVE LIST

In a recent interview, author, Chris Hedges listed some items from Obama's voting record.

- Carl

1. He's been lauded by the nuclear power industry which is resuming an attempt to build nuclear power plants all over the country (calling it "Green Energy")

2. He's voted to continue to fund the Iraq war.

3. He opposed Murtha's call for immediate withdrawal.

4. He didn't join the 13 Senators who voted against confirming Condoleezza Rice.

5. He voted in 2005 to re-authorize the Patriot Act.

6. He did not support an amendment that was part of a bankruptcy bill that would have capped credit card rates at 30%.

7. He opposed a bill that would have reformed a mining law of 1872 that essentially allows mining companies to lease federal land for pennies an acre (which is a complete rip-off of the American taxpayer).

8. He did not support the bill Kucinich and Conyers introduced for "Single-Payer health care."

9. He supports the death penalty.

10. He worked to support a class-action reform bill which allows financial firms to escape accountability (a huge lobbying effort by the financial industry who are Obama's second largest donors) by effectively shutting down state courts as venues to hear class-action suits (this has long been a goal of corporations and the Bush administration). This bill effectively denies redress in state courts where most cases have a chance of defying powerful corporate challenges and moves them into corporate-friendly Federal courts which are now dominated by right-wing Republican judges (even Hillary Clinton voted against this bill which allows corporations to engage in flagrant discrimination, consumer fraud, and wage violations).
In the past 24 hours, specifically beginning with the moment Barack Obama announced that he now supports the Cheney/Rockefeller/Hoyer House bill, there have magically arisen -- in places where one would never have expected to find them -- all sorts of claims about why this FISA "compromise" isn't really so bad after all. People who spent the week railing against Steny Hoyer as an evil, craven enabler of the Bush administration -- or who spent the last several months identically railing against Jay Rockefeller -- suddenly changed their minds completely when Barack Obama announced that he would do the same thing as they did. What had been a vicious assault on our Constitution, and corrupt complicity to conceal Bush lawbreaking, magically and instantaneously transformed into a perfectly understandable position, even a shrewd and commendable decision, that we should not only accept, but be grateful for as undertaken by Obama for our Own Good.

Accompanying those claims are a whole array of factually false statements about the bill, deployed in service of defending Obama's indefensible -- and deeply unprincipled -- support for this "compromise." Numerous individuals stepped forward to assure us that there was only one small bad part of this bill -- the part which immunizes lawbreaking telecoms -- and since Obama says that he opposes that part, there is no basis for criticizing him for what he did. Besides, even if Obama decided to support an imperfect bill, it's our duty to refrain from voicing any criticism of him, because the Only Thing That Matters is that Barack Obama be put in the Oval Office, and we must do anything and everything -- including remain silent when he embraces a full-scale assault on the Fourth Amendment and the rule of law -- because every goal is now subordinate to electing Barack Obama our new Leader.

It is absolutely false that the only unconstitutional and destructive provision of this "compromise" bill is the telecom amnesty part. It's true that most people working to defeat the Cheney/Rockefeller bill viewed opposition to telecom amnesty as the most politically potent way to defeat the bill, but the bill's expansion of warrantless eavesdropping powers vested in the President, and its evisceration of safeguards against abuses of those powers, is at least as long-lasting and destructive as the telecom amnesty provisions. The bill legalizes many of the warrantless eavesdropping activities George Bush secretly and illegally ordered in 2001. Those warrantless eavesdropping powers violate core Fourth Amendment protections. And Barack Obama now supports all of it, and will vote it into law. Those are just facts.

The ACLU specifically identifies the ways in which this bill destroys meaningful limits on the President's power to spy on our international calls and emails. Sen. Russ Feingold condemned the bill on the ground that it "fails to protect the privacy of law-abiding Americans at home" because "the government can still sweep up and keep the international communications of innocent Americans in the U.S. with no connection to suspected terrorists, with very few safeguards to protect against abuse of this power." Rep. Rush Holt -- who was actually denied time to speak by bill-supporter Silvestre Reyes only to be given time by bill-opponent John Conyers -- condemned the bill because it vests the power to decide who are the "bad guys" in the very people who do the spying.

This bill doesn't legalize every part of Bush's illegal warrantless eavesdropping program but it takes a large step beyond FISA towards what Bush did. There was absolutely no reason to destroy the FISA framework, which is already an extraordinarily pro-Executive instrument that vests vast eavesdropping powers in the President, in order to empower the President to spy on large parts of our international communications with no warrants at all. This was all done by invoking the scary spectre of Terrorism -- "you must give up your privacy and constitutional rights to us if you want us to keep you safe" -- and it is Obama's willingness to embrace that rancid framework, the defining mindset of the Bush years, that is most deserving of intense criticism here.

* * * * *

Last night, Greg Sargent wrote that the most infuriating aspect of what Obama did here "is that since the outset of the campaign he's seemed absolutely dead serious about changing the way foreign policy is discussed and argued about in this country"; that Obama's "candidacy has long seemed to embody a conviction that Democrats can win arguments with Republicans about national security -- that if Dems stick to a set of core principles, and forcefully argue for them without blinking, they can and will persuade people that, simply put, they are right and Republicans are wrong"; and that "this time, he abandoned that premise," even though:

if there were ever anything that would have tested his operating premise throughout this campaign -- that you can win arguments with Republicans about national security -- it was this legislation. If ever there were anything that deserved to test this premise, it was this legislation. This superb piece from The Technology Liberation Front makes the same argument:

We are, in other words, right back to the narrative where being "strong" on national security means trashing the constitution. . . . . This is doubly disappointing because until now Obama has been a master at re-framing national security debates to
MoveOn believes Obama should be held to his word and is thus conducting a campaign urging Obama to do what he promised: support a filibuster to stop the enactment of telecom amnesty. You can email Burton here to demand that Obama comply with his commitment not just to vote against, but to ignore you and your political interests.

Beyond that, this attitude that we should uncritically support Obama in everything he does and refrain from criticizing him is unhealthy in the extreme. No political leader merits uncritical devotion -- neither when they are running for office nor when they occupy it -- and there are few things more dangerous than announcing that you so deeply believe in the Core Goodness of a political leader, or that we face such extreme political crises that you trust and support whatever your Leader does, even when you don't understand it or think that it's wrong. That's precisely the warped authoritarian mindset that defined the Bush Movement and led to the insanity of the post-9/11 Era, and that uncritical reverence is no more attractive or healthy when it's shifted to a new Leader.

What Barack Obama did here was wrong and destructive. He's supporting a bill that is a full-scale assault on our Constitution and an endorsement of the premise that our laws can be broken by the political and corporate elite whenever the scary specter of The Terrorists can be invoked to justify it. What's more, as a Constitutional Law Professor, he knows full well what a radical perversion of our Constitution this bill is, and yet he's supporting it anyway. Anyone who sugarcoats or justifies that is doing a real disservice to their claimed political values and to the truth.

The excuse that we must sit by quietly and allow him to do these things with no opposition so that he can win is itself a corrupted and self-destructive mentality. That mindset has no end. Once he's elected, it will transform into: "It's vital that Obama keeps his majority in Congress so you have to keep quiet until after the 2010 midterms," after which it will be: "It's vital that Obama is re-elected so you have to keep quiet until after 2012," at which point the process will repeat itself from the first step. Quite plainly, those are excuses to justify mindless devotion, not genuine political strategies.

Having said all of that, the other extreme -- declaring that Obama is now Evil Incarnate, no better than John McCain, etc. etc. -- is no better. Obama is a politician running for political office, driven by all the standard, pedestrian impulses of most other people who seek and crave political power. It's nothing more or less than that, and it is just as imperative today as it was yesterday that the sickly right-wing faction be permanently removed from power and that there is never any such thing as the John McCain Administration (as one commenter ironically noted yesterday, at the very least, Obama is far more likely to appoint Supreme Court Justices who will rule that the bill Obama supports is patently unconstitutional). The commenter sysprog described perfectly the irrational excesses of both extremes the other day:

MORE NEGATIVE CRITICISM--FROM ADOLPH REED
From: adolph reed <alreed2@earthlink.net>
> Date: Sat, 12 Jul 2008 08:03:46 -0400
> Yeah, you're right. I'm not arguing that it's
> wrong to vote for him, though
> I would say it's wrong-headed to vote for him with any
> lofty expectations. I
> would also say that it's not an open and shut case that
> - all things
> considered - he's that much better than McCain. I do
> think that in some ways
> Obama would be better for us in the short run, just as
> Clinton was better
> than the elder Bush. As the attached op-ed underscores, in
> some ways his
> presidency could be much worse in the longer term, again
> like Clinton, for
> some of the reasons I at least allude to below. It's
> marginally likely that
> Gore wouldn't have invaded Iraq, but we don't what
> other military
> adventurism - like Clinton -- he'd have undertaken to
> make clear that he
> wouldn't be seen as a faggoty Dem. As to Kerry, even
> though like all the
> other Dem presidential aspirants who voted for it, except
> Edwards, he
> claimed that he thought he was voting for something else,
> he voted to invade
> Iraq, didn't he? And, moreover, during his campaign
> didn't he say that, even
> if he'd known then what he knew in 2004, he'd still
> have voted for it? I'm
> not convinced that the right wouldn't have been able to
> hound either of them
> into invading Iraq. Sure, they wouldn't have done it as
> stupidly and venally
> as Bush, but that's no comfort to the Iraqis, is it?
> Nor does it suggest a
> break from the military interventionism - old school
> imperialism - that's
> defined our foreign policy increasingly since Reagan. Obama
> is on record for
> being prepared to expand the war into Pakistan and maybe
> Iran, after he does
> the Randolph Scott move and talks to them a couple of
> times. He's also made
> pretty clear that AIPAC has his ear, which does it for the
> Middle East, and
> I wouldn't be shocked if his administration were to
> continue, or even step
> up, underwriting covert operations against Venezuela, Cuba
> (he's already
> several times linked each of those two governments with
> North Korea and
> Iran) and maybe Ecuador or Bolivia. This is where I
> don't give two shits for
> the liberal criticism of Bush's foreign policy: they
> don't mind imperialism;
> they just want a more efficiently and rationally managed
> one. An Obama
> presidency would further legitimize the imperialist
> presumptions - as well
> as the galloping militarization of the society (have you
> noticed being
> called on by flight attendants to give a round of applause
> to the military
> personnel on board a flight - it may be only a matter of
time before
pretending to be absorbed in reading will no longer work,
and I'll be
handcuffed for not cheering them on - or the scores of
other little, and not
so little, everyday gestures that give soldiers, or more
accurately the
image of soldiers, priority over the rest of us, in the
mode of returners
from the Eastern Front?) under the guise of
"supporting the troops" -- by
inscribing it as liberalism or the "new kind" of
progressivism. You know,
the black is white, night is day kind. All in all, I'd
rather have an
inefficient imperialism, one that imposes some cost on the
US for its
interventions. Clinton, like Bush pere and Reagan, was able
to pull it off
with "surgical" (i.e., broadly devastating and
terroristic to the objects,
relatively painless for the subjects) actions and had the
good sense both to
select targets that couldn't really fight back and to
avoid the hubris of
occupation. To that extent, no one complained; this was the
new Pax
Americana that in principle could have gone on
indefinitely, with successive
US governments creating and lighting up demon regimes and
societies abroad
as needed.

This brings to mind Lila Lipscomb, the woman in Michael
Moore's "Fahrenheit 9/11" whose son was killed in Iraq. She had proudly
and quite happily sent
two or three of her kids into the military before this one
because it seemed
like a reasonable bet for their being able to make the
bases for better
lives for themselves from the perspective of borderline
poverty and general
economic distress in Flint. Sure, the military no doubt lied about how all
their cool gear would keep them out of harm's way as they fired up bad guys
all over the world who were threatening our or somebody else's "freedom."
And all the politicians, Dems and Republicans, supported
every deployment on
those terms. And she would likely never have been moved to question the
propriety of traipsing all over the world fucking with people - killing them
and destroying their lives -- who hadn't done anything
to us. I don't mean
to make light of deaths of American soldiers or to make one
of those
sneering "maybe this will make them understand"
points (though we certainly must recognize why people on the receiving end of this
country's bipartisan
foreign policy would feel that way). I do want to
underscore that the
bipartisan "support the troops" rhetoric that has become a scaffold for
discussing the war is a ruse for not addressing its
foundation in an
imperialist foreign policy. Obama, like other Dems,
doesn't want that
discussion any more than the Republicans because
they're also committed to
maintaining that foundation. "Antiwar" arguments
that begin with clauses
like "since the troops are there" or "if
they're going to be there" are no
antiwar arguments at all. To the extent that Obama and his
like will
christen them as such, they'll have legitimiz ed as
"responsible" an
"antiwar" discourse that reduces to a more than
likely technocratic focus on
fighting wars in ways that minimize American casualties.

As to the courts, you're right; that's exactly
where the liberals go, the
bloody shirt they wave. Hasn't Obama already aligned
himself with the
right-wing of the current Court, three times in the current
session, and on
three pretty breathtaking issues? I know, the response
would be that he's
just posturing and on balance he'd appoint more
"centrist" -- as even his
running dogs put it -- judges. (This is the "I know
he's always out with her
in public and looks like he's enjoying himself, but he
told me he really
loves me and is just sticking around for the kids"
argument.) Frankly, the
courts bugbear is beginning to look played out. Past a
certain point of
giving away the store programmatically and ideologically,
it doesn't much
matter who's on the Court. And the more ideological
ground is given away,
the farther right will be the boundary of acceptable
"centrism." Could
Obama now nominate someone with a record of favoring gun
control or
late-term abortions for mental health reasons or opposing
the death penalty?
And this isn't even to raise all the other, property
and contract related
areas where the Courts' actions are significant with
respect to people's
lives. There's no reason to expect anything from him
in this area,
especially when you factor in all the hedge fund and
investor class money he
gets and the Chicago Law School connection. (I suspect Cass
Sunstein may be
haroring fantasies of winding up on the bench, but I
suspect he'll just
have to content himself with Samantha Power as his prize.)

I'm increasingly convinced that the courts issue looms
so large because the
liberals have given away everything else. It feels ever
more the property of
Dem hacks who have to strain to find any basis for
plausible product
differentiation during election season. It's a
deal-maker only if you accept the premise that formal preservation of Roe v. Wade is the paramount issue, the sine qua non, of gender justice in the United States or that holding on to the shreds of a mangled, "mended" version of affirmative action is the same for blacks. Add up everything they've caved on that has more direct and injurious effects on black people and women, often with more direct and persisting impact on reproductive freedom - or "choice" in the liberals' capitulationist parlance - and economic security than abortion rights, which are exercised, at best, episodically, and affirmative action, the meaningful scope of which is effectively reduced by retreats in other policy areas. (I don't need to run a catalogue here, but just think of comparable worth, welfare reform, publicly supported child care, cuts in Federal urban aid, education, the War on Drugs, NAFTA, HOPE VI, corporate health care, privatization, abetting union-busting, fetishizing deficit reduction, as only among the most obvious areas where they've rolled over). For most blacks and women, most of the time, those two issues are at best more symbolic than practically meaningful, particularly in a context in which all those other areas that affect their lives directly, the Dems have already given away the store. Waving those bloody shirts looks more and more like a feeble attempt to deflect attention from that fact, and to convince people who don't stand to get much from a Dem victory that they should commit to them anyway.

Clinton's "success" underscores this point. Like baseball managers, presidents probably get too much credit for economic growth and too much blame for downturns. Yes, the growth of inequality may have been tempered in some ways during his administration. But how was Clinton able to pull off his triangulation that combined stimulating the economy while sharply reducing the deficit? I may be a little out of my depth here, but it seems to me that part of the answer is his support for another burst of deregulation in the financial sector, which generated the speculative stock market boom and its inevitable bust that wrecked so many small investors' lives. Another part apparently was his administration's role in stimulating housing market speculation - including encouraging in a couple of different ways the proliferation of subprime lending. And, by the way, if you add the
> fact that the steepest cuts in the federal meat inspection
> program occurred
> under Clinton (Tyson's Chicken, after all), then the
> libs' halcyon, nay
> Edenic, days of the Clinton presidency lose a lot of their
> prelapsarian
> splendor, as its fingerprints are all over three of the
> biggest domestic
> crises of the decade.
> And there's no reason, other than the will to believe,
> to expect that Obama
> would be any better, and, as I maintain below, it's
> entirely likely that in
> some ways — including those bearing on racial justice —
> he'll be worse,
> again by moving the boundaries of thinkable liberalism that
> much farther to
> the right.
>
> All that said, I reiterate that I'm not arguing that
> people shouldn't vote
> for him. I do think, though, that we need to approach this
> presidential
> electoral stuff, and not just this time around, with no
> illusions about the
> trade-offs involved and recognize that it's not as
> simple a matter as Obama
> being better than McCain in the here-and-now on a select
> menu of issues. I
> can understand the impulse to rally the troops to produce
> the outcome that's
> better on immediate tactical grounds, if we had some troops
> to rally.
> Perhaps the one luxury of the left's weakness now on is
> that we're absolved
> of the need to hew so closely to such tactical
> considerations because we
> can't influence the outcome of the election anyway.
> Pretending that we can
> is a convenient excuse for laziness and opportunism, on
> both intellectual
> and political fronts. (That, by the way, is a central
> reason I can't abide
> most left media.)
>
> a.
>
> Sorry to repeat, but there is only one reason to vote for
> Obama: b/c he's
> not McCain. And for all their horrible limitations, neither
> Gore or Kerry
> would have invaded Iraq or given us Roberts and Alito. This
> is the argument
> your hectorers will throw at you, not that voting is a
> solemn democratic
> obligation or a substitute for direct action. This
> doesn't mean that you
> should squelch criticism until "we" get him
> elected—vanden Heuval's
> delusion—but I do think this is the argument that you have
> to engage, if
> only to rebut.
>
> Steve
Here is, fyi, a further amplification of my comments yesterday.

Dean Robinson called me yesterday, astounded at a WBUR program featuring Glen Greenwald from Salon.com, Katrina vanden Heuvel and Tom Hayden, in which Katrina and Hayden were not only actively and insistently defending Obama's bullshit of the last few weeks against Greenwald's criticism, but also doing it from the right. Hayden apparently insisted that O's "a progressive, but a new kind of progressive" and K's big defense is that he speaks "from his heart." This is what passes for a left now in this country. Both insisted, apparently, that his FISA vote, going out of his way (after all, he could simply have followed the model of Eisenhower on the Brown decision) to align himself -- twice -- with the Scalia/Thomas/Roberts/Alito wing of the Supreme Court, declaring that social problems, unlike foreign policy adventurism, are "too big for government" and pledging to turn over more of HHS and HUD's budgets to the holyrollers are both tactically necessary and consistent with his convictions. So, if those are his convictions, or for that matter what he feels he must do opportunistically to get elected, why the fuck should we vote for him?

I'd been thinking about doing a "See, I told you so" column; now I'm more inclined to do a "Fuck you, you deserve what you get" column, except that the yuppie groupies we encounter in foundation offices, faculty meetings, soccer games and dinner parties and on MSNBC and in the Nation aren't the ones who'll pay the price for their self-indulgent idiocy. Int. al, as I saw ever more clearly while watching Rachel Maddow talk about O and his family, etc, etc with another of their Dem ilk a few nights ago on Olberman's show, an Obama presidency (maybe even just his candidacy) will likely sever the last threads of any connection between notions of racial disparity and structurally reproduced inequality rooted in political economy, and, since even "left" discourse in this country seems capable of conceptualizing the latter as a politically significant matter only in terms of the former (or its gender or similar categorical equivalent), that could
just about do it for purging the notion that economic inequality is rooted fundamentally in capitalism's political and economic dynamics entirely out of legitimate political discourse. Underclass ideology -- where left and right come together to embed a common sense around victim-blaming and punitive moralism, racialized of course but at a respectable remove from the familiar phenotypically based racial taxonomy -- will most likely be the vehicle for effecting the purge: Obama's success embodies how far we will have come in realizing racial democracy, and, as he constantly indicates, the inequality that remains is most immediately a function of cultural -- i.e., attitudinal, and behavioral -- and moral deficits that undercut acquisition of "human (and/or social, these interchangeable mystifications shift according to rhetorical need) capital." In this context, the "activism" necessary to attack inequality: 1) rationalizes privatization and demonization of the public sector through accepting the premise that government is inefficient and stifles "creativity;" 2) values individual voluntarism and "entrepreneurship" over collective action (e.g., four of the five winners of the Nation's "Brave Young Activist" award started their own designer NGOs and/or websites; the fifth carries a bullhorn around and organizes solidarity demos); 3) provides enrichment experiences, useful extracurrics, and/or career paths (the Wendy Kopp/Samantha Power model trajectory) for precocious Swarthmore and Brown students and grads, and 4) reduces the scope of direct action politics to the "all tactics, no strategy," fundamentally Alinskyite, ACORN-style politics that Doug Henwood and Liza Featherstone have described as "activistism" and whose potential for reactionary opportunism SEIU has amply demonstrated; Obama goes a step further in deviating from Alinskyism to the right, by rejecting its confrontationalism," which entirely severs its rhetoric of "empowerment" from political action and contestation and merges the notion entirely into the pop-psychological, big box Protestant, Oprah Winfrey, Reaganite discourse of self-improvement/personal responsibility. All of the above salves the consciences of our new petit bourgeois peers and co-workers who want to think of themselves as more tolerant and enlightened than their Republican relatives and neighbors, even as they insulate...
themselves, and their families, as much as possible from undesired contact
with the dangerous classes and define the latter in quotidian practice
through precisely the same racialized and victim-blaming stereotypes as the conservatives to whom they imagine themselves superior.
This hypocrisy, of course, is understood within the stratum as unavoidable accommodation to social realities, and likely to be acknowledged as an unfortunate and lamentable necessity, while those lamenting at the same time reject out of hand as impractical any politics that would challenge the conditions that reproduce the inequalities underlying those putative realities. Obama, in the many ways I'm sure I don't need to catalogue here, is an ideal avatar for this stratum. He has condensed, in what political dilettantes of all stripes rush to call a "movement," the reactionary quintessence that Walter Benn Michaels identifies in a politics of identity or multiculturalism that substitutes difference for inequality as the crucial metric of political criticism. (It's apt in this connection that even elites in the Mississippi Delta, down to the level of the the Cotton Museum in Lake Providence, LA, and the blues museums that dot every hamlet on US 61 in Mississippi between Greenville and Memphis, have come to appreciate the political and commercial benefits of and to embrace multicultural celebration and even civil rights heritage tourism.) Indeed, he represents a class politics, one that promises to cement an alliance of the professional-managerial class (including, perhaps especially, the interchangeable elements of which now set the policy agendas for what remains of the labor, women's, environmentalist, public interest and civil rights movements) and the "progressive" wing of the investor class.

It is ironic in the short term -- i.e., considering that he pushed HRC out of the way -- that Obama would be the one to complete Clintonism's redefinition of liberalism as conservatism. So there's no way I'm going to ratify this bullshit with my participation, and I'm ready to tell all those liberals who will hector me about the importance of voting that it's the weakest, most passive and least consequential form of political participation, and I'm no longer going to pretend it's any more than that, or that the differences between the Dem and GOP candidates are greater than they are, just to help them feel good about not doing
Voters say **McCain better suited to handle Iraq** than Obama By JIM KUHNHENN, Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — John McCain's stance on the war is unambiguous: He voted for it, supports the current enhanced U.S. troop presence in Iraq and vigorously opposes any timetable to withdraw.

The public's stance on the war is as equivocal as McCain's is not: A strong majority of Americans oppose it and believe it was wrong in the first place, but more find McCain better suited to handle Iraq than his Democratic presidential rival, Barack Obama.

"He's more experienced militarily," said Ann Burkes, a registered Democrat and retired third-grade teacher from Broken Arrow, Okla. "And I don't know if I agree with stay-the-course (policy), but I think the good probably outweighs the bad with him, experience-wise."

Burkes illustrates the conflicted voter, one who is as likely to be influenced by McCain's policy positions as by his personal biography as a former Navy pilot who spent more than five years in a North Vietnamese prison.

For McCain, there is a major complication. Not all those voters who perceive him as stronger on Iraq say they will vote for him for president.

Unlike the 2004 presidential contest, this is not shaping up as a national security election. Neither the war nor terrorism is foremost in the public's mind. The economy and energy prices are the pre-eminent issues of the day. And on those, Obama has the edge.

Still, this hate-the-war, love-the-warrior strain runs through the American electorate. In a new Associated Press-Yahoo! News poll, more than one out of five of the respondents who said they opposed the war also said they support McCain for president. The sentiment does not discriminate by gender or by age. Most significantly, it splits independent voters in favor of McCain.

Respondents said McCain would do a better job in Iraq than Obama by a margin of 39 percent to 33 percent. Undergirding that response is a strong sentiment that McCain would be a better leader of the military than Obama. One out of three respondents said that description matched McCain "very well," whereas only one out of 10 said the same of Obama, who did not serve in the armed forces.

The Iraq findings track McCain's advantage on the issue of terrorism. Of those surveyed, more than twice as many believe McCain can better handle terrorism than Obama. As such, McCain is emerging clearly as a candidate of national security, a conventional role for a Republican.

The public's views about Iraq are especially notable because many voters appear to separate McCain's past record of support for the war from their perception of his performance as a military leader. What's more, it points to a potential Obama vulnerability......

Only 6 percent of those who say they will vote for Obama say McCain would do a better job on Iraq. But among "weak" Obama supporters, that figure rises to 15 percent. Moreover, among undecided voters, McCain is preferred 25 percent to 15 percent over Obama on Iraq.

Leeann Ormsbee, a registered Democrat from Waterford, Pa., believes the United States rushed to war, but now does not believe troops should simply withdraw. The 29-year-old self-employed house cleaner says she has never voted for a Republican. She might this time.
"I do believe that he will do better in Iraq," she said of McCain. "Because he's served in the military and he has said we can't just pull out. ... I think we're just kind of stuck with it now and we have to finish."

Republican pollster Neil Newhouse calls these voters "nose-holders."

"They don't like the fact that we're over there, they don't think the decision was the right one, but they understand that if we simply withdraw our troops it would leave things worse off," he said.

Aware that national security is one of McCain's strongest features, Democrats and their allies have tried to portray his Iraq stance as a mere continuation of President Bush's policy. They have seized on his comments earlier this year when he speculated that U.S. troops could remain in Iraq for 100 years. Though he was talking about a presence of non-combat troops akin to those in South Korea, the remark has been used against him in television commercials.

Earlier this month, McCain kicked off his general election advertising campaign with an ad that featured his and his family's military service and his years in captivity but cast him as a man with a distaste for war.

"Only a fool or a fraud talks tough or romantically about war," he says in the ad.

McCain supported the resolution in 2002 that allowed Bush to use force in Iraq. He later criticized then-Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld for his management of the war and went on to become one of the Senate's leading advocates of last year's buildup of troops. He has said he could envision troops withdrawing around 2013 but has refused to fix a date.

"We were losing in Iraq; now we're winning," he has said.

The troop expansion, which is about to end, has left Iraq safer and given Iraqi forces greater responsibility for security. But Pentagon and congressional reports issued this week also warned that the gains are delicate and could be reversed.

McCain's Iraq advantage could evaporate if violence and chaos resurface and U.S. casualties mount. Conversely, even greater successes in the country could make withdrawing troops more palatable.

Obama has argued that the troop buildup has not helped resolve Iraq's political problems. He wants to remove all combat brigades from Iraq within 16 months of becoming president. But he has said that if al-Qaida builds bases in Iraq, he would keep troops in the country or in the region to carry out "targeted strikes."

"As the American people get to know Obama and McCain better, they will see that the difference is Obama's desire to fundamentally change American policy in Iraq and John McCain wants to continue George Bush's policy," Obama spokesman Bill Burton said.

Democratic pollster Anna Greenberg said the evidence of improvements this year presents a double-edged sword for McCain and Obama.

"Obviously, people don't like the war in Iraq; they want it to be over and they don't like all the money we're spending there," she said. "On the other hand, people also don't want to retreat or lose. ... In 2006, (the public's view of the war) was much more clearly a net positive for Democrats. I think the landscape has changed."

At the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, which has also polled on Iraq and the presidential candidates, associate director Michael Dimock said the public has a perception that McCain "is not completely on board with Bush."

What's more, he said, Obama faces lingering concerns about his experience, about not being tested and about not having foreign policy experience -- themes Hillary Rodham Clinton pushed during their prolonged primary contest.

"What you see is that Americans themselves are conflicted about Iraq," he added. "They are very hesitant to say that we need to get out now. They understand the
June 24, 2008  “What is to be Done?  Obama's Rightward Lurch”

By GREGORY KAFOURY

Barack Obama arrived on the political scene with a smile as beautiful as salvation itself, like a visitor from an idealized future, one where the races have combined to a golden hue, sent here to show us the way. Of course people fell in love with him. Yet now we see Obama drawn into the great room where the Democratic/Corporate establishment dwells, and the door is slowly closing behind him. This is not how it was supposed to be.

Obama has just opted out of public financing, the first presidential candidate to do so since 1972. /NewsHour’s/ Mark Shields, keeper of the flame for all that is good in the Democratic Party, called it "a flip-flop of epic proportions,” noting that Obama’s argument about a GOP financial advantage was "bogus." Shields even said it raised issues of Obama's "character." The New York Times editorialized that 2008 may now be "the year public financing died." In seizing a tactical advantage, Obama has handed an enormous strategic victory to corporate power.

Many progressives will argue that Obama, having raised huge amounts from small contributors, is akin to getting public financing, which liberates the candidate from dependence on corporate support. Yet just the opposite is happening. In the three weeks since Hillary Clinton fell upon her sword, Obama has lurched far to the right. Consider:

- Obama announced a new financial team of supply-side economists led by Jason Furman, famous for declaring that it would be "damaging to working people" if Wal-Mart were to raise its wages and benefits. Obama had
recently criticized Clinton for serving on the Wal-Mart board, declaring, "I won't shop there." In the Audacity of Hope, he sympathized with “Wal-Mart associates who hold their breath every single month in the hope they’ll have enough money to support their children.”

- When questioned in a /Fortune/ interview about his promise to renegotiate NAFTA to protect workers and the environment, Obama replied, "Sometimes during campaigns the rhetoric gets overheated and amplified."

- In a close congressional primary race in Georgia, Obama endorsed a troglodyte incumbent – a “Bush enabler” – over an exemplary progressive insurgent.

- In a speech to the Israeli lobby, he moved to the right of Israel’s government by ruling out negotiations with Hamas. A day earlier, Obama had told Cuban exile groups that he would only sit down with Raul Castro if the exiles had a seat at the table, a precondition that Cuba will never agree to.

- Obama refused to criticize recent Israeli war maneuvers and accompanying threats to launch massive air attacks on Iran. He failed to even urge restraint.

- Just as a move was growing in the Senate to strip the House-passed Telecom bill of its immunity provisions, Obama declared his support for the House version. Obama's opposition to immunity had been our best hope to learn whose phones and emails had been wiretapped by the Bush administration, and to punish those Telecom companies that assisted this massive criminal enterprise.

Is he lost to us? Was he ever ours to lose?

Progressives were all too eager to overlook the warning signs in Obama's brief career, his support for the Patriot Act, for nuclear power, his vote against limiting credit card interest to 30%, his calls for increased defense spending, and his equivocation on full withdrawal from Iraq. These decisions were mere matters of political expediency, we were assured, not to be taken seriously.
Yet how can political expediency explain Obama's retreat on NAFTA? Michigan, Ohio and Pennsylvania are all in play - how many of those voters have been broken on the wheel of NAFTA? Those who contend that the real Obama will suddenly emerge after the election to overturn an imperial foreign policy and to bring justice to the home front, might be advised not to hold their breath.

Obama desperately needs pressure from the left, and he is amenable to pressure. Once we on the left agree that this analysis is correct, then we must choose the correct strategy.

So far, blind support of Obama has yielded the same kind of benefits that we got from John Kerry. With the united left in his pocket, Kerry went from a declared "anti-war" candidate to a thoroughly hawkish one, berating Bush for wimping out in the face of massive civilian casualties in Falluja, and promising to win the Iraq war. Unconditional support for the Democratic nominee is unconditional surrender, with all the utter powerlessness that the terms imply.

As one alternative, we can complain, write and blog, for all these have their place. But we are all too good at talking to ourselves, and disparate efforts without a focus are all too easily dismissed.

We must consider support for Ralph Nader's campaign. Nader has been as high as six percent in recent national polls, something he has achieved with only modest support from left intellectuals, and virtually no recognition by corporate media.

Yet Google has announced its intent to hold at least one presidential debate, and has set the bar at 10% support. It is hard to imagine Obama or McCain snubbing Google, and the prospect of such a debate carries more promise than anything the left has seen in recent memory.

For those who claim that Nader can only hurt Obama, I suggest the opposite is true. Gore and Kerry were both doomed by the accurate perception that they were corporate to the core. People knew in their gut that these guys were not on their side. (In 2004, Kerry fled from a living wage initiative in Florida; it passed nearly three to one.) It must also be remembered that in 2000, when Nader was at 5%, a full 15%
believed he was the best candidate. More importantly, Nader's positions are not just majoritarian ones, most enjoy overwhelming public support. Full military and corporate withdrawal from Iraq, major reductions in the defense budget, a crackdown on corporate crime, single-payer health care, massive investment in renewable energy and conservation, a living wage - these would provide a platform that would send Obama to a historic victory, and all are available for the taking.

Those who insist we must work only within the Democratic Party have clearly failed to hold Obama to his promise. We must get outside the box. Obama needs a great big push, and we are the only ones who can give it to him.

Obama Supports FISA Legislation, Angering Left

By Paul Kane

Sen. Barack Obama (D-Ill.) today announced his support for a sweeping intelligence surveillance law that has been heavily denounced by the liberal activists who have fueled the financial engines of his presidential campaign. In his most substantive break with the Democratic Party's base since becoming the presumptive nominee, Obama declared he will support the bill when it comes to a Senate vote, likely next week, despite misgivings about legal provisions for telecommunications corporations that cooperated with the Bush administration's warrantless surveillance program of suspected terrorists. In so doing, Obama sought to walk the fine political line between GOP accusations that he is weak on foreign policy -- Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) called passing the legislation a "vital national security matter" -- and alienating his base. "Given the legitimate threats we face, providing effective intelligence collection tools with appropriate safeguards is too important to delay. So I support the compromise, but do so with a firm pledge that as president, I will carefully monitor the program," Obama said in a statement hours after the House approved the legislation 293-129.

This marks something of a reversal of Obama's position from an earlier version of the bill, which was approved by the Senate Feb. 12, when Obama was locked in a fight for the Democratic nomination with Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-N.Y.). Obama missed the February vote on that FISA bill as he campaigned in the "Potomac Primaries," but issued a statement that day declaring "I am proud to stand with Senator Dodd, Senator Feingold and a grassroots movement of Americans who are refusing to let President Bush put protections for special interests ahead of our security and our liberty."

http://blog.washingtonpost.com/the-trail/2008/06/20/obama_supports_fisa_legislatio.html