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The Perils of Hoping Against Hope

How Joe Biden undermines Obama's campaign for "change"

[Terry Michael](#) | August 25, 2008

For free market and free mind types resigned to the political system we've got, not the one we want, Sen. Barack Obama's (D-Ill.) cynical choice of Sen. Joe Biden (D-Del.) as his number two sends a serious wake-up call. Never place much faith in a politician with no discernible political philosophy.

That may seem obvious to most libertarians, who are disposed to seeing career politicians as hacks representing a primal threat to liberty. But for pragmatists like me, who believe there's little choice but to use the give-and-take of a two-party system to squeeze as much personal freedom as possible from conventional politics, the decision by the ingenue from Illinois to choose the senior windbag from Delaware is a cold-water-in-the-face reminder that ideas, not men, are what matter most in determining whether the coercive power of the state constrains or allows individual liberty.

Strip away all the slogans about hope and change. Forget the youthful energy unleashed by a perfectly managed campaign. Set aside the historic opportunity to select a black man as leader of a majority white country. In the end, the single most important factor that moved Democrats to select Barack Obama was his claim that he had the judgment to oppose the war in Iraq from the outset, when his principal opponent, Hillary Clinton, had endorsed it.

In his first test of leadership, however, Sen. Obama tapped the man whose failure of judgment as the Democratic Party's front man on foreign affairs led congressional Democrats into collusion with, rather than principled opposition to, the neoconservatives and their criminal enterprise in Iraq. That decision reveals a politician without a compass.

Know thyself is a pretty good rule of thumb for judging leadership potential. By choosing Biden, Obama tells us he doesn't have much of a clue about himself. Obama's fumbling attempt to balance his perceived weakness on foreign policy demonstrates a pitiful failure of nerve from a candidate who claimed he had solid judgment while the rest of his party exhibited wrong-headed experience. Obama's own choice underscores the problem a large number of voters have with the junior (now apparently very junior) senator from Illinois.

The obvious pick for Obama would have been someone who brought synergy to his ticket, a new face, rather than an old Washington hack favored by the party establishment and by neocons like columnist David Brooks, who wrote glowing praise of Biden just a few days before he was selected. Which isn't surprising, since Biden heads the neocon-lite wing of congressional Democrats, yet tried to back-pedal from his war support in a vain attempt to win the presidential nomination.

Of course, pragmatist that I remain, the alternative to Obama in November is even worse news for the republic: A career militarist infatuated with war-making; the co-author of the massive assault on free political speech known as McCain-Feingold; and a septuagenarian whose mental acuity should be of real concern to voters.

At least Obama's election by a mostly white electorate would end racial politics as we know it, striking a death-blow to the victimology practiced by the affirmative action reparationists who focus their narrow minds on identity groups rather than celebrate individual rights and opportunity.

And, as the Not-George-Bush candidate, the glamorous young black man would doubtless help restore America's reputation around the world.

But can a jilted supporter like me hold his nose and actually vote for Obama? Anger—more like fury—seized me this past weekend and told me no, at least for the time being. In the meantime, my advice to less practical libertarians: ideas do matter. Go with a protest vote for Bob Barr or sit this one out, if that's where your heart and your head lead you.

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