



Written by on August 13, 2008

# Presidential Front-runners



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[John McCain](#)  
[Barack Obama](#)

What would these three major contenders do as president? What do they say they will do? How different are their platforms? And how similar are they, once the political rhetoric is stripped aside? We encourage you to evaluate their positions and judge for yourself.

If after making this evaluation, you are unhappy with the choices or do not find much of a choice at all, please keep in mind that there are other presidential candidates. Republican Congressman Ron Paul, though not expecting to win, continues to campaign to spread his message in support of the Constitution. (See our review of his new book in the article "Revolutionary Ideas.") Rev. Chuck Baldwin recently won the nomination of the Constitution Party (see "Constitution Party Chooses Baldwin"), but he is still largely unknown.

Also, please keep in mind that Congress, not the presidency, is the most important branch of the federal government. It is also the branch closest to the people. That's the branch where Ron Paul already is — and where more constitutionalists need to be.

— EDITOR

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## Hillary Clinton

By: Brian Farmer

Last December, prior to the start of the primary elections and caucuses, every poll showed Senator Hillary Clinton leading all other Democratic Party candidates who were running for president of the United States. There seemed to be a sense of inevitability about her candidacy, which caused her campaign to underestimate the challenge put up by Senator Barack Obama.

As a result, going into the Iowa caucuses in early January, the Hillary campaign apparatus was not as well organized as Obama's. Hillary's advisers were so ambivalent about competing in Iowa that they even considered skipping that state altogether. Since Democrats in Iowa were staunchly opposed to the war in Iraq, her staff worried that Hillary's vote to authorize the war would make it very difficult for her



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to win there, no matter how much time, effort, and money they might spend. Only after realizing the dangers of losing to Obama did Hillary's team finally start to seriously contest Iowa. But it was too little, too late, and Obama's victory caused his candidacy to take off.

After a string of primary victories allowed Obama to take the lead in pledged delegates, it appeared that his campaign's momentum might be stopped in mid-March, when it was revealed that his minister and mentor of some 20 years had been delivering venomous, anti-American sermons to the congregation and videotapes of them were posted on the Internet. Intense media scrutiny induced Obama to deliver a rapturous speech in Philadelphia (home of Rocky Balboa, fittingly enough), in a desperate effort to salvage what appeared to be an irretrievably damaged campaign. He explained that Reverend Jeremiah Wright's sermons reflected a racial divide still existing in America, but that Wright's sermons should not be a distraction from the sufferings of the American people, and that we should move on and not let Wright's comments poison the national dialogue.

That "moving on" was expedited by the late-March fallout from a speech Hillary gave at George Washington University, during which she remarked, "I certainly do remember that trip to Bosnia.... I remember landing under sniper fire. There was supposed to be some kind of a greeting ceremony at the airport, but instead we just ran with our heads down to get into the vehicles to get to our base."

Internet fact checkers quickly debunked the story but, amazingly, Hillary not only clung to the tall tale but even embellished it further: "We had to be moved inside because of sniper fire. There was no greeting ceremony. Now, that is what happened." Within days, a video was posted online that revealed no sniper fire and no running for cover. Instead, Hillary was shown taking part in a greeting ceremony and receiving flowers from a young girl.

Faced with proof of her prevarication, Hillary huffily responded, "You know, I think that a minor blip, you know, if I said something that, you know, I say a lot of things — millions of words a day — so if I misspoke, that was just a misstatement."

The pundits pounced, claiming that landing under sniper fire is the kind of thing that is hard to forget, but harder still for a memory to invent, unless one is a pathological liar. It was pointed out that this was no isolated incident and that *New York Times* columnist William Safire wrote, *12 years ago*, "Americans of all political persuasions are coming to the sad realization that our first lady is a congenital liar."

The expectation that Hillary would have an easy stroll through the primaries, on her way to the Democratic National Convention in Denver, is now gone. The hubris of her earlier campaign has been replaced by panic, as she finds herself on the ropes, desperately trying to stay on her feet in the fight for convention delegates.

But it is said that a week is a long time in politics and that two weeks is an eternity. Given that, there is still plenty of time for Obama to self-destruct and snatch defeat from the jaws of victory, as April's "Bittergate" incident (in which he made the assessment that small-town Americans "get bitter" and "they cling to guns or religion") hinted. Who knows how many more time bombs are out there with Obama's name on them, ready to explode? Just as Bill Clinton became "The Comeback Kid," so could Hillary.

With that in mind, let's see where she stands on the issues of the day, in an attempt to divine what Hillary might try to do as president.

**Iraq War:** Recent testimony on Capitol Hill by Army General David H. Petraeus and U.S. Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker made it clear that U.S. troops aren't going anywhere anytime soon and that getting out



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of Iraq is going to be the next president's problem. Hillary has stated that ending the war in Iraq would be one of her "top three priorities" and has criticized President Bush for not setting an end date. On the other hand, during a candidate debate at Dartmouth College last September, she was offered the opportunity to set an end date anytime before 2013, but declined, adding, "It is very difficult to know what we will be inheriting." Nevertheless, Hillary offers a three-part plan for bringing the war to an end:

1. Phased redeployment of our troops starting within the first 60 days of her administration.
2. As we bring our troops home, stabilize Iraq by directing aid to entities most likely to get it into the hands of the Iraqi people and by supporting the appointment of a high-level United Nations representative to help broker peace among the feuding parties.
3. Launch a diplomatic initiative by convening a group composed of key allies, other global powers, and all of the states bordering Iraq, which would work to develop and implement a strategy for securing Iraq's future.

**Healthcare:** Providing quality, affordable healthcare to all Americans is another one of Hillary's top three priorities. Her American Health Choices Plan "is based on the principles of shared responsibility and choice," as she puts it. If you are already insured and like the plan you have, you can keep it. Otherwise, you would be able to choose from the same plans available to members of Congress or opt for a public plan like Medicare. Individuals would get a tax credit to help pay for their health insurance premiums, and small businesses would also get tax credits to defray the costs of offering their employees healthcare benefits. Insurance companies would not be allowed to deny coverage based on pre-existing conditions.

Hillary claims that her plan will lower costs and improve quality by modernizing the system, focusing on preventive care, coordinating and streamlining care for chronically ill patients, and getting rid of the hidden costs of providing healthcare to the uninsured. However, a comprehensive study from the National Taxpayers Union Foundation found that implementing her healthcare proposals would boost federal spending by at least \$113.6 billion annually.

Hillary also claims that her plan "ensures that all who benefit from the system share in the responsibility to fix its shortcomings." Those who benefit from the system are specifically identified: individuals, employers, healthcare providers, drug companies, insurance companies, and the government. Although one is left to wonder how the government benefits (outside of increasing its control over one-sixth of the economy), Hillary makes it very clear what its responsibilities will be: "Government will ensure that health insurance is always affordable and never a crushing burden on any family and will implement reforms to improve quality and lower cost."

**Economy:** The last of Hillary's top three priorities is strengthening the middle class through "a progressive commitment to shared prosperity." While her healthcare plan is certainly part of her strategy for accomplishing that, there are a number of other planks that make up her "economic blueprint" platform.

The first is tax relief for middle-class families by extending the child tax credit and marriage penalty relief, offering new tax credits for healthcare, college and retirement, and expanding the Earned Income Tax Credit and the child care tax credit. To address her concerns about widening income disparities and the growing gap between the haves and the have-nots, Hillary calls for reinstating the pre-Bush income tax rates for those earning over \$250,000 a year and ending tax breaks for American companies that move jobs overseas.



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Secondly, since the most significant contributor to higher corporate profit margins over the past five years has been a decline in labor's share of national income, Hillary wants to raise the minimum wage, enhance the role of labor unions, and ensure that trade policies work for average Americans by raising our standard of living and having strong protections for workers.

Thirdly, to address the housing crisis, Hillary is proposing a comprehensive plan that would take three immediate steps: impose a 90-day moratorium on home foreclosures; freeze the fluctuating rates on subprime loans for at least five years, until they can be converted into fixed rate, affordable loans; and require regular status reports on the progress lenders are making in converting unworkable mortgages into loans families can afford.

Finally, Hillary wants to restore a commitment to fiscal responsibility. After seven years of President Bush's fiscal irresponsibility, she wants to move back toward a balanced federal budget and surpluses. She believes that we should develop a set of budget rules similar to those we had in the 1990s, which required the federal government to fund new expenditures with new taxes or cuts in other areas.

However, after reviewing Hillary's economic plan and other programs, Len Burman, director of the nonpartisan Tax Policy Center, said that the notion that all the revenue that would be lost in a middle-class tax freeze can be made up by higher taxes on the wealthy "is not tenable." Furthermore, the Congressional Budget Office points out that any revenues coming from expiration of the Bush tax cuts have already been assigned to deficit reduction and will not be available to fund new programs. And freezing the rates on subprime loans will cause the mortgage holders to make back any losses by charging more to new homeowners, making them bear the brunt of that plan.

**Education:** Hillary's education agenda ties in with her priority to strengthen the middle class. In addition to the college tax credit, she proposes annual increases in the maximum Pell Grant (federal aid for low-income students). She wants to end the No Child Left Behind program because schools are struggling to meet the mandates imposed by the NCLB Act without the resources that were promised. In its place would be a system that measures the progress of every child and rewards schools that make progress towards the proficiency goals. She also proposes spending \$10 billion to ensure that all four-year-olds attend pre-kindergarten classes.

**Immigration:** Hillary favors comprehensive immigration reform that includes toughening security at our borders, cracking down on employers who hire illegal immigrants, and providing a path to earned legal status for those who are working, paying taxes, respecting the law, and willing to learn English and pay fines. Seeing that our immigration policies have a direct impact on American workers, she opposes a guest-worker program that creates a supply of cheap labor that undermines the wages of U.S. workers. That raises an interesting question: "If Hillary opposes a guest-worker program, then why doesn't she, for the same reason, oppose legalizing the millions of aliens who have entered the United States illegally?"

**Energy:** Hillary has three major goals: to reduce greenhouse gas emissions 80 percent below 1990 levels by 2050, to cut foreign oil imports by two-thirds, and to transform our carbon-based economy into a green economy. Those goals would be accomplished primarily through the establishment of a \$50 billion fund for investments in alternative energy (the money coming primarily from oil companies) and through increasing motor vehicle fuel efficiency standards to 40 miles per gallon by 2020 and 55 miles per gallon by 2030. She would also support tax credits for home improvements that make houses more energy efficient (such as the installation of rooftop solar panels) and call for a cap-and-trade system that would set a cap on total carbon emissions. Businesses would be allowed to trade credits for emissions



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among themselves, allowing the market to help regulate costs. Given that the U.S. Senate unanimously rejected the Kyoto Protocol in a 1997 resolution because it would cripple the American economy, it's hard to imagine how Hillary's even more stringent greenhouse gas emission standards could avoid doing the same.

**Social Security:** Hillary is strongly opposed to Social Security privatization. To solve the long-term insolvency crisis, she wants to set up a bipartisan process that would consider a range of fixes to strengthen the program. In addition, she wants to promote retirement savings by introducing an American Retirement Account with matching tax cuts of up to \$1,000 for middle-class families.

**Second Amendment:** Hillary claims to respect the right of law-abiding citizens to keep and bear arms. She also believes that we need protections in place to prevent guns from getting into the wrong hands. To protect Americans from gun violence, she supports background checks at gun shows, reinstating and extending the assault weapons ban, and giving law enforcement access to data that helps track down guns sold to criminals.

She claims these are common-sense regulations, yet Americans who rely on guns for personal protection or who wish to own guns for sport are leery of Hillary's gun plans for several reasons: other countries around the world — like England and Australia — that have tracked guns have eventually confiscated the guns, increased gun tracking has not led to more criminal arrests, and it's very costly. Hillary has repeatedly voted for antigun proposals, and cosponsored many of them. For example, when the U.S. Senate voted 84-16 for a homeland security appropriations rider stating, "None of the funds appropriated by this Act shall be used for the seizure of a firearm based on the existence of a declaration or state of emergency," she was one of the 16 who voted "no."

## **John McCain**

By: Alex Newman

During the primaries, Republican presidential candidate John McCain has variously been called a liberal, a bipartisan leader, a maverick, and even a conservative. The media has bashed and praised him.

McCain, on the one hand, was an easy choice as far as Republican candidates went for the *New York Times*, the editorial board writing in its endorsement for the GOP nomination: "With a record of working across the aisle to develop sound bipartisan legislation, he would offer a choice to a broader range of Americans than the rest of the Republican field." On the other hand, his positions have been criticized by a diverse group of Republicans including Rush Limbaugh, Ann Coulter, Rob Haney (a Republican Party chairman in McCain's home district who called McCain's "Straight Talk Express" bus the "Forked Tongue Express"), and constitutionalist GOP presidential candidate Ron Paul, who refused to support McCain unless he has a "change of heart," citing policies McCain advocates that he finds "un-American, un-Constitutional, immoral and not Republican."

But most GOP and major-media criticism of McCain has been very nuanced, balanced by a lot of positive words about him. Some former GOP frontrunners who eventually dropped out of the presidential race have even endorsed him. "I am honored today to give my full support to Senator McCain's candidacy for the presidency of the United States," said Mitt Romney at a joint press conference with him. "This is a man capable of leading our country in this dangerous hour." After being booed for mentioning the Arizona senator's name at a Conservative Political Action Conference, Romney did cite differences "on a





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number of issues.” Rudy Giuliani also endorsed McCain while ending his failed run for the nomination. “John McCain is the most qualified candidate to be the next commander in chief of the United States,” he said.

So with author and GOP enthusiast Ann Coulter saying publicly that she would become a “Hillary girl” before supporting McCain because, according to Coulter, Hillary “is more conservative than he is,” and with McCain himself telling MSNBC’s Tim Russert that “Senator Clinton would make a good president,” where does McCain really stand on the issues? Despite constant exposure to the sharp rhetoric of his critics and the dedicated support of his backers, a brief perusal of his words and his past reveal that there is more to the “maverick” than meets the eye.

### **Some Conservative Stands**

McCain’s least contentious stands among conservatives are these three: he wants to end affirmative action programs because they are discriminatory, balance the budget, and reform the U.S. healthcare system through less government involvement in the system, not more. He said about affirmative action in a *Washington Post* presidential candidate poll: we must “aggressively enforc[e] our nation’s anti-discrimination laws. It means taking seriously our commitment to educate all of America’s children so they have the necessary tools to compete and succeed in life. It means building a strong, vibrant economy where opportunity is always abundant for all who seek it. It also means rejecting affirmative action plans and quotas that give weight to one group of Americans at the expense of another.”

On the budget, in the *Post*’s presidential candidate survey, he said: “If I’m elected President, I won’t leave office without balancing the federal budget. And I won’t do it with smoke and mirrors. When I leave office, I want to leave a budget that stays balanced after I’m gone, and can weather the occasional downturn and unexpected contingency. I’ll do it by spending less and encouraging economic growth.” His plans include stimulating the economy through lowering corporate taxes from 35 to 25 percent, reforming the Alternative Minimum Tax to ease taxes on much of the middle class, and making permanent the Bush tax cuts. All told his tax cuts would lower government tax receipts \$3.3 trillion during his theoretic eight years in office. He believes his tax cuts will be offset by economic growth, vetoing all pork-barrel legislation (\$18 billion per year), closing tax loopholes (\$30 billion per year), having a one-year spending freeze for many programs (\$15 billion per year), canceling \$65 billion of unspecified federal programs, making government spending “transparent,” and reforming Medicare. His plan has been lambasted from both sides of the political aisle as unworkable. Conservatives say he isn’t cutting enough spending to offset his tax cuts, thereby setting the country up for more deficits.

On at least two of these three pro-conservative issues, McCain’s present stands are at odds with stands he has taken in the recent past. After an interview in 2005, the *Wall Street Journal*’s Stephen Moore wrote that McCain’s perspective “often leads to populist and parasitic economic policy conclusions like higher taxes on the rich.” Despite his current defense of the 2003 tax cuts, McCain actually voted against them. He also stood with Democrats on continuing the slow and incremental expansion of socialized medicine. “We’ve got to expand the children’s health insurance program,” he proclaimed during a debate.

### **Other Controversial Stances**

McCain’s stances on other issues are more contentious. John McCain the politician would be the first one to tell you that he is an ardent supporter of treaties like the North American Free Trade Agreement and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. In a November/December 2007 article published in



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*Foreign Affairs*, the journal of the Council on Foreign Relations, an organization to which he belongs, he suggested using the Central American Free Trade Agreement to “move the process of completing a Free Trade Area of the Americas forward.” McCain is relying on these trade agreements to boost the U.S. economy so that he, as president, can balance the budget. But these trade agreements have many critics because “free trade agreements” are really treaties that are called “agreements” so they can be unconstitutionally ratified, containing hundreds and thousands of pages of regulations that establish what critics refer to as “managed trade.” And while proponents of NAFTA, including John McCain, stand by the claim that the trade agreement has boosted the economies of the three countries, there is little doubt that the poor and middle-class citizens of the three countries hitched as NAFTA partners are not benefiting from the agreement.

The United States saw the massive relocation of whole industries — such as North Carolina’s textile plants — to Mexico, while in Canada manufacturing jobs declined by eight percent and Canadians saw a major decline in per capita income. In Mexico, NAFTA resulted in huge numbers of small farmers being put out of business, prompting a spike in illegal immigration to the United States. As THE NEW AMERICAN reported in 2007, the Mexican economy stagnated after NAFTA, “never coming close to the healthy 6.5 percent average growth in GDP from 1950 to 1980. Real wages, in fact, are lower now than they were 25 years ago, and overall economic growth has averaged a paltry 1.3 percent per year, more than 30 percent behind the average growth rate of comparable middle-income countries around the world.” Opponents to such free-trade agreements also point to consequences of a decades-old trend of surrendering national sovereignty to regional and global authorities.

Like the early foundations of the European and African Unions, one of NAFTA’s stated purposes is to “establish a framework for further trilateral, regional and multilateral cooperation.” The European Free Trade agreement accomplished precisely this in Europe while Section 511 of NAFTA has already forced the United States, Canada, and Mexico to adopt “Uniform Regulations regarding the interpretation, application and administration” of laws on everything from cars to food products. Along with the regulations come the supranational enforcement mechanisms. The United States has, in fact, already been sued in a NAFTA tribunal for “allowing” North Carolina to violate United Nations’ standards with “right-to-work” laws. In another more recent case, a NAFTA panel ruled 3-2 against America, claiming U.S. and even State Supreme Court decisions are not binding on the “trade” tribunals. According to the 2007 ruling, “Provisions of the agreement constitute international law, or ‘law of nations’ obligations of the United States.” (Emphasis added.)

McCain describes the effects of the treaties on America as “positive,” but how much more “cooperation” with Mexico, Canada, and other foreign nations would he support? His own words offer a clue. According to the *New York Times*, McCain called the agreements “the future of America’s economy” in February of this year. “The U.S. should engage in multilateral, regional and bilateral efforts to reduce barriers to trade, level the global playing field and build effective enforcement of global trading rules,” McCain said on his campaign website. In a speech to the National Press Club, he proposed entering into trade agreements “with any country except security risks.” In addition to pushing the Free Trade Area of the Americas, McCain also announced in *Foreign Affairs* his support for “creating a transatlantic common market tying our economies more closely together” with the European Union and even establishing “a worldwide League of Democracies” because the American military is serving with international forces and “these troops are not all part of a common structure.” He also supports Bush’s plan to build a “free trade area” in the Middle East by 2013, stretching from Morocco to Afghanistan.



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### **Very Internationally Minded**

McCain is a strong advocate of all types of legislation that he believes forward international cooperation. Consider his open support for global regulations on carbon dioxide. He recently proposed a “bipartisan plan” that he claims would “ensure a sustainable future for humankind.” The bill he proposed, the McCain/Lieberman bill, which would cap the amount of carbon dioxide the country would emit and set up a carbon-trading program amongst entities that release carbon dioxide. McCain “would require a reduction in carbon dioxide emission levels to 2000 levels by the year 2010 by capping the overall greenhouse gas emissions from the electricity generation, transportation, industrial, and commercial economic sectors,” according to a McCain press release.

He obviously understands that such a mandate would stifle U.S. economic growth because he makes clear that the United States must not be allowed to be penalized by such an agreement; we must enforce such restrictions on all nations, not on just some of the developed nations. “We need a global agreement, but it has to include India and China,” he told MSNBC’s Tim Russert at a GOP candidates’ debate. Then he added, “Suppose that we are wrong, and there’s no such thing as climate change, and we hand our kids a cleaner world.” But we must consider whether we really want to stifle economic growth worldwide in order to accomplish this.

Whether all nations get on board with his plans or not, here in the United States, he intends to set up a system of government rewards for technological innovation to encourage car companies to improve gas mileage. He says he will reduce government regulation so that companies can build new power infrastructure, like new nuclear power plants.

An avid internationalist, McCain favors a world where the United Nations has the ability to tax, legislate, and even raise armies. On the 2004 Congressional National Political Awareness Test, McCain said the United States should continue to contribute U.S. troops for UN missions. He recognizes that the UN has problems but adds that the United States “should pay arrears” to the UN after it “implements management reforms.”

McCain has earned the enmity of many concerned Americans in his stance on illegal immigration. For years, he has worked with Democratic Senator Kennedy on a bill to give illegal immigrants amnesty and even citizenship as a reward for ignoring the border and breaking the law. He also voted to let them collect Social Security benefits upon being granted legal status. Now he says that he has learned the error of his ways and will safeguard the border before giving illegal immigrants “comprehensive immigration reform.”

In other areas where he has shown “bipartisanship,” McCain has taken verbal lashing as well from constitutionally minded Americans. Much criticism of McCain stems from legislation called the McCain/Feingold Act. Working with Democratic Senator Russ Feingold (Wis.), McCain sponsored what opponents have dubbed a “federal speech code” enforced with up to five years in federal prison. The “Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act” has given the Federal Election Commission unprecedented new powers to regulate political speech before elections, and it has already been used in countless cases to suppress useful information. Among other things, the bill essentially prohibits unions, corporations, and nonprofits from running ads 60 days before an election if they refer to a federal candidate and reach a certain number of people. By contrast, the First Amendment prohibits Congress from making laws abridging the freedom of speech or of the press.

### **Walking the Conservative Walk or Just Talking the Talk?**





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According to his critics, even on some bread-and-butter conservative issues where he takes a seemingly strong conservative stand, McCain is not genuine. For instance, Senator McCain stated strongly that he wants “no gun control.” Yet despite that campaign assertion and the fact that Congress has no constitutional authority to arbitrarily forbid certain types of guns, McCain actively supported bans on so-called “assault weapons” and “Saturday night specials,” two classes of guns demonized by anti-gun activists for their affordability, magazine capacity, and other irrelevant characteristics such as having military-style “looks.” He also helped Democrats in an effort to further regulate gun shows. Gun Owners of America gave him an F- rating in 2006 for his positions on gun rights and reported that a bill McCain supported (S. 890) would have threatened gun-show operators with a five-year prison sentence if a single show attendee “were not notified of his obligations under the Brady law,” meaning that “an organization would be foolish to even sponsor a gun show.”

Though McCain’s record on life issues is better than his Democratic counterparts and he has said he would support ending *Roe v. Wade*, some of his statements about abortion could have easily come from Hillary or Obama. “Certainly in the short term, or even the long term, I would not support repeal of *Roe v. Wade*,” McCain told the *San Francisco Chronicle* after claiming he was hoping for an eventual end to the demand for abortion. He also supports federal funding for embryonic stem-cell research.

Like Bush, McCain is a firm believer in the doctrine of “preemptive” war. He didn’t just vote for “Operation Iraqi Freedom”; when asked about another 50 years in Iraq, McCain said it would be fine with him to make it 100. He later issued a “clarification,” saying he supports permanent bases in Iraq, not 100 years of active war.

Under a President McCain, the U.S. military would continue policing the world with American lives and treasure. About rogue states, he announced on *Larry King Live*, “I would arm, train, equip, both from without and from within, forces that would eventually overthrow the governments.” He didn’t rule out further undeclared military strikes and nation-building either. “You really kind of have two choices: you react militarily, risking American lives, or you try to overthrow that government.”

When asked if he would need to seek congressional authorization for an attack on Iran, McCain said it “depends on the scenario.” Even Bush asked for permission. Iran is currently deepening its ties and alliances in the region with powerful countries like Russia and China. A nation-building project kicked off by McCain could easily escalate into a wider conflict, and according to analysts, the U.S. military is already stretched too thin.

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## **Barack Obama**

By: Gregory A. Hession, J.D.

Just four years ago, when Barack Obama was an obscure Illinois state senator running a long-shot campaign for the U.S. Senate, he quipped regarding his then-largely unfamiliar name, “Just call me Alabama.” That same year he was invited to give the keynote speech at the Democratic National Convention, and he gained valuable name recognition and glowed in the national limelight when he delivered that widely acclaimed speech. He then went on to capture a Senate seat. Today, everyone



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recognizes his name and knows how to pronounce it.

In the late 1980s, Obama also glowed at Harvard Law School, where he became president of the prestigious *Harvard Law Review*. That means that he occupied the most elite student position in the most elite legal education establishment in the world. That is like being the first violinist in the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, the best of the best.

Prior to Harvard, Obama worked for three years as a community organizer in Chicago in the mid-80s, where he strived for “change” in hopeless ghettos and bleak housing projects. However, change did not materialize as he had hoped, and he entered Harvard Law School in 1987. During his first summer, he obtained an internship at a large Chicago corporate law firm. It was there that he met his wife, Michelle, who had just completed her own law degree at Harvard and was a young associate at the same firm. As fate would have it, she was the one assigned to monitor his summer internship there. They were later married, and soon Barack Obama became restless to enter elective politics, launching his political career with his election to the Illinois state Senate in 1996. He is now not only running for president but has more pledged delegates than Hillary Clinton and appears much more likely than she to capture the Democratic nomination.

Obama has pulled ahead of Clinton, contrary to the political wisdom of just a few months ago, by effectively projecting himself as a reasonable populist who transcends race, religion, and ideology. But what exactly does that mean in the world of real politick? If his stance transcends the political divide, where does he stand?

### **Man of the Government**

Most everyone looks at government in one of two ways: one group wants government to do something for them, while the other group seeks either to have government stop doing something *to* them or taking something *from* them. Obama came from political obscurity and wants to be the next president, so he can run the government. He is smart enough and well spoken enough to have convinced a majority of the first group — the ones who want government to help them — that he is the one to make it happen. The members of the second group, those who must pay for those sparkling promises, are not so enthused. However, both groups have a great curiosity about this man who would operate the levers of power. What does he believe? What are his core values?

Fortunately, Obama has written two books, *The Audacity of Hope* and *Dreams From My Father*, which give insight into his mind, soul, and politics. The information in these books is supplemented by a long stream of campaign speeches and position papers. The oft-repeated media line that Obama is a great orator but says nothing is inaccurate. Before and during his presidential bid, he has given us a reliable record of his beliefs and their historical development. Thus, we have clarity on his general political philosophy, as well as his positions on most of the significant issues in the current presidential race.

“My job is to inspire people to take ownership of this country,” Obama said in *Essence* in March 2004. “Politics is not a business. It’s a mission. It’s about making people’s lives better.” Obama is a man of the government. By taking “ownership of this country,” he does not mean limiting government to its constitutional size so that the people can take care of themselves and manage their own lives; he means instead empowering government to manage the economy and provide for the people, thereby (in his view) “making people’s lives better.”

In his 2004 senatorial election night victory speech, Obama said, “What we know is that government can help provide us with the basic tools we need to live out the American Dream.” Such a perspective



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signals a profound and disturbing trend — that only by involving government in all aspects of life, instead of getting government out of the way, will we be able to achieve the American dream.

It is easy for Obama to promise government help to his rapt audiences, as long as he never talks about who pays or how much. His speeches foster a culture of entitlement, directed toward empathetic targets such as “working families.” Thus, he can appear to be oh-so-compassionate as he lays forth the goodies for those who are willing to be enticed to accept money that has been forcibly taken (dare one say “stolen”) from their fellow citizens. Obama’s government gets a commission as middleman in the transactions.

He disguises this process well. In *The Audacity of Hope*, Obama describes the hopes and dreams of those who seek state intervention in reasonable-sounding words: “Although they didn’t expect government to solve all their problems, and certainly didn’t like seeing their tax dollars wasted — they figured that government should help.” But government cannot provide help to someone without hurting someone else. That is, government cannot give to “Peter” without taking from “Paul.” There is no such thing as a free lunch. Yet the hopes and dreams that Obama offers come across with such force and conviction that it almost seems as if there could be. Which has caused economist Thomas Sowell, who like Obama is black but who unlike Obama supports market solutions, to observe: “While Hillary Clinton tells lies, Barack Obama is himself a lie.”

Many perceive Hillary Clinton to be more liberal than Barack Obama. But when it comes to the amount of money that would be required to pay for all of the goodies both candidates have promised on the campaign trail, Obama is actually the more liberal of the two according to a study released in late January by the National Taxpayers Union that examined the proposals of both Republican and Democratic Party candidates. According to the NTU, Obama’s proposals would boost federal spending by \$287 billion annually, as opposed to Hillary Clinton whose proposals would boost spending by \$218 billion, making her the second-biggest spender.

### **The Issues**

In a 1996 candidate questionnaire submitted during his Illinois state Senate run, Obama set forth some of his views with sparkling clarity. He believes that government schools should “nurture and support” young people, and receive a lot more tax money. Homosexuals and lesbians should be “actively recruited” for government jobs. He favors a graduated income tax to redistribute the wealth, and a government-controlled healthcare system with more tax funding. He wants to “ban the manufacture, sale, and possession of handguns.” And he wants publicly funded abortions, with no parental notification or any restrictions whatsoever.

Recently, on the campaign trail in Pennsylvania, Obama revealed how strongly pro-abortion he is when he said he would not want his daughters “punished” with an unwanted baby. “I’ve got two daughters, nine years old and six years old,” he said. “I’m going to teach them first of all about values and morals. But if they make a mistake, I don’t want them punished with a baby.”

The Obama campaign website proposes one socialistic program after another. By way of illustration, just in the field of education Obama would:

- “create Early Learning Challenge Grants to promote state ‘zero to five’ efforts”;
- “quadruple Early Head Start, increase Head Start funding”;
- “provide affordable and high-quality child care to ease the burden on working families”;
- “reform NCLB [No Child Left Behind], which starts by funding the law”; and



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- “create new Teacher Service Scholarships that will cover four years of undergraduate or two years of graduate teacher education.”

On foreign aid, Obama supports the Millennium Development Goal of cutting global poverty in the world in half by 2015 and has called for doubling U.S. foreign aid to \$50 billion to achieve this goal. Regarding healthcare, he would establish a new national health plan which will guarantee eligibility to everyone regardless of pre-existing illness or conditions. On global warming, he would impose a “cap-and-trade system” to reduce carbon emissions 80 percent below 1990 levels by 2050.

This bundle of issues places Obama at the absolute far-left edge of the political spectrum. While he is personally affable and is an acknowledged natural leader, the content of his message is radical in the extreme. Leadership does not consist only in being able to persuade others to follow, but also in persuading them to go in the correct direction.

### **Recent Stumbles**

In the space of a few weeks leading up to the Pennsylvania primary on April 22, Barack Obama went from champ to chump in the eyes of many mainstream Democrats because of a series of well-publicized gaffes and the exposure of some politically embarrassing associations.

His recent sequence of problems started when a sermon by Rev. Jeremiah Wright, his longtime pastor and mentor, was posted on YouTube and caused such a sensation that the story was picked up by mainstream news. In his sermon, Reverend Wright, who is black, ranted, fulminated, and screamed venomous epithets at what he views as racist America. “Barack knows what it means to be a black man living in a country and a culture that is controlled by rich white people,” Wright preached. He even went so far as to say: “The government ... wants us to sing *God Bless America*. No, no, no. Not God bless America; God d\*\*\* America.... God d\*\*\* America for treating us citizens as less than human.” Obama’s decades-long association with Rev. Wright raised questions regarding Obama’s own message of racial equity and collaboration, and how he could reconcile that message with the message of hatred and anti-Americanism emanating from the pulpit of his church. In fact, the title of Obama’s book *The Audacity of Hope*, as Obama himself states in the book, comes from a sermon by Rev. Wright.

Obama devoted his Philadelphia speech of March 18 to trying to defuse the time bomb Rev. Wright had thrown his way. He said that “Reverend Wright’s comments were not only wrong but divisive.” However, he also said that “as imperfect as he may be, he has been like family to me” and “I can no more disown him than I can disown the black community.”

He even tried to explain Rev. Wright’s anger in terms of “the reality in which Reverend Wright and other African-Americans of his generation grew up” — segregation, discrimination, and a lack of economic opportunity. Yet Wright did not grow up in a segregated neighborhood; his parents had good jobs (his father was a pastor and his mother a high-school vice principal); and he attended an elite high school in Philadelphia called Central High School where, according to other black attendees, there was no discrimination.

More recently, after Wright began speaking out and making other inflammatory comments, Obama further distanced himself from Wright, calling the comments “appalling” at an April 29 press conference.

After the initial Wright “YouTube” bombshell came the so-called “bitter” comment, made at a closed forum in San Francisco. Explaining why he has trouble attracting white working-class voters, Obama



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said: "It's not surprising they get bitter, then they cling to guns or religion or antipathy to people who aren't like them, or anti-immigrant sentiment, or anti-trade sentiment, as a way to express their frustrations." Unfortunately for Obama, the remark was taped and later became public.

Many people interpreted this remark as revealing a secretly held elitism and gross condescension toward "regular Americans," while hypocritically trying to sound like he identified with them and their troubles. Particularly troubling was his mockery of religion as something that people cling to only because they are frustrated.

The hits just kept on coming. Obama was also linked with a radical Weather Underground couple, William Ayers and Bernardine Dohrn (Ayers), who boasted of involvement with 30 bombings in the '60s and '70s, at places like the Pentagon, police stations, and banks. Not only are the two revolutionaries unrepentant about their bombings, but they have asserted that they didn't go far enough. Mr. Ayers has also been quoted as saying, "Kill all the rich people. Break up their cars and apartments. Bring the revolution home, kill your parents, that's where it's really at." Now married, they are both university professors and Mrs. Ayers teaches law.

The relevant datum here is that Mr. Ayers hosted a fundraiser for Obama to help launch his 1995 state senate campaign, and they allegedly maintain a close or at least a cordial relationship. Such sentiments by avowed revolutionaries, if tolerated by Obama, cast doubt upon the veracity of his soothing rhetorical emoluments.

These disclosures have tarnished Obama's image in the eyes of many voters, but the fallout has not enabled Hillary Clinton to catch up in the delegate count. Clinton's campaign has been plagued with its own problems, in particular Clinton's embarrassing embellishment of her Bosnia trip. Though Clinton breathed some hope into her campaign by winning Pennsylvania on April 22, she swapped victories with Obama on May 6 when Clinton captured Indiana and Obama North Carolina. With few primaries remaining and the number of uncommitted delegates dwindling, the odds are now heavily in Obama's favor.





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