

PUTTING IT IN PERSPECTIVE

By David Winston



A Party in Disarray: Democrats Turning on Each Other Over Iraq

So the majority of the Democratic Senate is out of touch with the American people? Tim Russert asked Sen. Russ Feingold (D-Wis.) on NBC's "Meet the Press" on Sunday.

"Yes, it is at this point," the Senator and presidential hopeful responded. "Those who vote against bringing the troops home don't get it." Apparently, Feingold didn't get the Democratic talking points claiming, contrary to political logic, that his party's astonishing display of disunity last week on the Iraq war was really a "good thing."

Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-N.Y.), however, clearly did. On Friday, she let the spin begin by putting a happy face on her party's total inability to coalesce around a single policy for winning the war in Iraq, saying, "I actually think we have come out for a more effective road map to the goal that all of us want, which is a successful outcome — an Iraqi government that can govern itself, keep its country together and fend off insurgents and sectarian violence."

Given what's become a bitter intraparty fight over the Iraq war that's got Democrats sniping at each other, it's no surprise that dividing the Democrats' Iraq war position has become Washington's favorite parlor game these days.

Think "Survivor: Nantucket." The tribe battles Republicans and each other as they jockey for strategic advantage in '06 and '08. Will

Hillary and Connecticut Joe be banished to Exile Island? Will the tribe forgive and welcome back John K? Can Al stop global warming and save the island? Who will be the ultimate survivor — Hoyer or Murtha?

This Democratic reality show almost would be an amusing summer season replacement were the issue at hand — the war against terror — not so serious. But the end-of-the-week buzz, pushed by the Democrats, that their splintered anti-war votes on the House and Senate resolutions last week were, in reality, a show of unity, is right out of the "P.T. Barnum School of Political Spin."

No political party in its right mind wants this level of infighting. Does anyone, outside of the rest of the Democratic presidential wannabes, really think news reports showing far-left Democrats booing Clinton over her war position are helpful? Or the stories of disgruntled Senate Democrats carping that Sen. John Kerry (Mass.) put presidential ambitions ahead of the party with his ill-timed "cut and run" amendment?

Who honestly believes that Sen. Joe Lieberman's (Conn.) primary battle, rooted in his support for the war, is good for the Democratic Party any more than Feingold's shot at his own Democratic colleagues as being "out of touch"? Spin all you like, but the reality is that the Democrats' disunity on the war is causing fratricidal internal fights within the party — primary fights, leadership fights and battles among the party's many presidential candidates.

The Democrats clearly fumbled the ball last week. Given an opportunity to lead, they failed to offer American voters an alternative strate-



File Photo

Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton seems to buy the spin that divisions are good for Democrats.

gy for success in Iraq.

Their solution simply was to leave — some saying now, others a little later — but at its core, theirs was a policy of surrender, not success. As Kerry put it to Don Imus, "Our plan is very simple. It's redeploy to win the war on terror."

Republicans want the troops out as soon as possible, too, but they believe the mission ought to be accomplished first — establish a stable, secure and democratic Iraq that will be a strong ally against our enemies in the future. There is no question that the war in Iraq

hasn't gone as well as everyone had hoped. Like every war, mistakes were made in this one, too.

Over the weekend, it was reported that Gen. George Casey has indicated that possible troop reductions may begin later this year thanks to successes made on the ground — free elections, a new unity government in place, and more than 250,000 Iraqi troops trained and ready to stand up. That is quantitative progress and proof of a policy that is beginning to show results. It is also the Democrats' worst nightmare because if troops do begin to come home, as everyone hopes, they are left with no policy at all.

Democrats have made it clear they want to nationalize this election. Last week, they had a perfect opportunity to sell the American people on their alternative plan to win the war on terror. They failed to deliver.

Instead, what voters learned was that the Democrats have no solution, no strategy other than to leave Iraq while offering up hollow platitudes such as "work closely with our allies," "refocus our efforts" and "change to succeed." You can't beat something with nothing, and family feuds don't lead to election victories.

Healthy debate within a political party over policy can have its upsides, but not when a party is incapable of producing a unified strategy that addresses the defining national security issue of our time — how to win the war on terror.

Beyond that, with all due respect to Clinton's happy talk, the rest is all spin.

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