

Obama in perspective

by Robert_J_Caldwell

Give Barack Obama his due. He won a smashing victory in Iowa, then gave a stirring speech framed as a transformational moment in American history. Millions watching him speak Thursday night presumably saw a plausible president, quite possibly the next president.

But first, a few gritty details.

Obama is still the presidential contender with a one-page resume. The Illinois state legislature and half of one term in the U.S. Senate is scant preparation to be president of the United States. In his brief Senate tenure, Obama has no legislative accomplishments, mainly because for most of that short time he's been running for president.

For a candidate aspiring to the toughest, most important job in the world, shouldn't experience count for something?

Foreign policy and national security are a president's top responsibilities, especially in time of war. Obama is devoid of experience in either field. His gaffes - threatening to invade Pakistan, offering prompt negotiations with anti-American despots - bespeak his amateur standing on matters vital to the safety and security of the American people.

Obama's inconsistency on Iraq is amply documented. He's been alternately for and against withholding funding for the troops, for and against setting timelines for withdrawal, and for and against a quick retreat from Iraq.

Whatever one's views on Iraq strategy and homefront support, these vacillations on a war in progress don't inspire confidence; in Obama's judgment, his grasp of Iraq realities and his constancy of purpose. Whatever this is, it isn't leadership.

All of this betrays Obama's lack of experience; a glaring deficiency that should be raising profound questions about his qualifications and fitness, at least now, for the presidency.

Then there's the disturbing disconnect between Obama's carefully crafted persona as a unifier and a supposed "trans-ideological" agent of change, and his actual record in office.

Obama is running, quite effectively, as both a change agent and an unconventional politician. That fits his campaign motif, a fresh-faced, idealistic outsider running against the Washington establishment voters so distrust. That, in turn, also suggests that Obama is a different kind of Democrat; one perhaps less reflexively partisan and divisive than, say, Hillary Clinton or John Edwards. Certainly that was an implicit message sent in his eloquent Iowa victory speech.

What's troubling, however, is that Obama's record doesn't match his reassuring persona.

The liberal Americans for Democratic Action rates Obama's voting record in the Senate at 97.5 percent, near perfection for liberal Democrats. The American Conservative Union, the ADA's ideological opposite, rates Obama's voting record at a rock-bottom 8 percent. Both ratings leave no doubt that Obama's actual votes mark him as a traditionally liberal Democrat, not a moderate.

Where in these votes is the evidence of trans-ideological change that Obama is selling so successfully on the campaign trail? Where in this record is the evidence that Obama is the unifier he claims to be?

On domestic, economic, foreign policy and national security issues, Obama's actual record is consistently liberal and consistently orthodox in Democratic Party terms. Obama typically talks like a centrist but votes like a liberal.

Obama's record also raises another disturbing matter - his penchant for ducking tough issues. In the Illinois Legislature, Obama compiled a record of voting "present" on controversial and politically explosive bills. However politically convenient, this isn't leadership. Obama's three years in the U.S. Senate are similarly devoid of any leadership examples on legislation of consequence.

This doesn't necessarily indict Obama's claimed leadership skills as fraudulent. It does demonstrate that those skills have not yet been in evidence in his legislative work. That's a curious, and worrying, fact.

Cataloguing the doubts about Obama isn't nit-picking or partisanship. It's the sort of scrutiny every presidential candidate should get. This is information that every voter deserves, and should want before making fateful decisions about this country's future.

Barack Obama is showing that he's a skilled campaigner with a deeply inspirational message. His appeals to hope, to change and to less divisive politics are proving compelling and popular, as arguably they should be. Obama is poised, possibly, to surpass Hillary Clinton as the odds-on favorite to win the Democratic Party's

presidential nomination.

Before that sale is made, however, voters should be looking closer and learning more about Barack Obama.

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