

Indiana Senator finds solid middle ground

by *The Indianapolis Star*

Sen. Evan Bayh could provide an invaluable service to the nation if he's serious about his desire to temper the Obama administration and congressional Democrats' more radical inclinations.

Bayh garnered national headlines this week with his announcement that he and 14 other Democratic senators had begun weekly meetings to discuss ways to ensure that the White House hears from the party's moderates. Another sign of Bayh's willingness to buck the power structure: Only one other Democratic senator, Ben Nelson from Nebraska, has broken from his party more often on Senate votes this year.

Bayh has always tried to build a reputation as a moderate, first as governor of Indiana and later in the Senate. But observers also have frequently questioned how much of Bayh's maneuvering is politically motivated (he represents a fairly conservative state, after all) and how much is driven by sincere beliefs.

Even now, critics contend that the senator's stand is more about positioning himself for the 2010 re-election campaign than it is principle.

That's a stretch, however, given that the Republican Party is in such sorry shape, that Bayh has more than \$10 million stored away for next year's run and that the GOP has yet to identify a serious challenger.

A more likely explanation is that Bayh is leveraging what he has — that carefully nurtured reputation as a moderate — to gain more influence at a time when his party's left wing controls two-thirds of the federal government. The White House and the Senate leadership still need Bayh's votes to advance their agenda, even though the GOP is the most irrelevant that it's been in 16 years. By refusing to go along with everything the White House wants, Bayh can help force some pullback toward the middle.

With the administration and Congress rushing to add trillions of dollars to the national debt and to extend the

federal government's reach to unprecedented levels, Bayh and other moderates have an opportunity, if not an obligation, to raise concerns about the unintended consequences of such actions.

Will that play well back home in Indiana with many voters? Sure. But it's also in the best long-term interests of the nation.

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