

**THE BLOG**

Feingold for President

By Marty Kaplan

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I know, I know — it's nuts. Jewish, twice-divorced, Republicans salivating to turn him into McGovern, can't get the moderates and independents he needs to break 40%... Anything else? Okay, now that the Beltway wisdom has spoken, let's try take two.

He's authentic, unafraid, says what he believes. He's as pissed off as most Americans. He doesn't just pay lip service to bipartisanship; he actually has a track record. He wants to save democracy from the Washington sewer it has become. He's got deep roots in the midwestern progressive tradition. He's a good fiery speaker. If you wish Paul Wellstone or Bill Moyers were running, he's as close to them as they come.

The current MSM-enabled anti-Dem meme - "they've got no ideas" - is an easy two-step for Feingold to knock down.

First, you call what the GOP offers "ideas"? "Cut government" isn't an idea; it's a lie — they bloated it, and they criminally ballooned the deficit. "Strengthen defense" isn't an idea; it's a betrayal, worthy of censure: they've actually weekend us. "Cut taxes"? Excuse me, have you looked at how the alternative minimum tax is killing the middle class? "Family values"? What — as in Terri Schaivo?

The second step is a strong, simple platform.

1. RESCUE DEMOCRACY. Campaign finance reform. Media reform. Voting reform. Integrity. Accountability. If you want to throw the money-changers out of the temple, you've got to eject big money from the political process. You've also got to make television stations' licenses contingent on their living up to their public interest obligations instead of letting them rake in billions from a broken system. If you want to get more than a third of the country to vote, why not make sure their votes actually get counted? Oh - it'd be nice if the President and his appointees actually obeyed the law, too.

2. REAL NATIONAL SECURITY. Get our troops out of harm's way in Iraq. There's already a civil war; the whole world needs to create a working coalition there, or to face the reality of partition. Focus on countries that really endanger us. Stop nuclear proliferation, instead of spreading it. Get our economy out of hock to foreign investors and out of jeopardy to the foreign energy market. Give the military the pay and equipment they need, and give veterans the

rewards they've earned. Realize that the war on terror is also a positive struggle for the world's hearts and minds, not an Oedipal vendetta, and not an excuse to shred the Constitution.

3. REAL PERSONAL SECURITY. That means national health insurance. Pensions that corporations can't rob. Educations that don't cost as much as a house and aren't outclassed by global competitors. The right to an environment that doesn't kill you. The right to privacy. A truce in the culture wars.

Did I leave out your favorite program? Then put it in somewhere, but please try not to add more headings.

Do you hate my headings? Then by all means rename and reorganize them, but resist the laundry list urge, and the interest-group pander trap.

Didn't see a catchy enough slogan? Go for it. But please don't suggest National Democrats' tripe like "Together, America Can Do Better": imagine how tin your ear needs to be to think that's music. (Personally, I like "Let America Be America Again" - the one Kerry abandoned after a nanosecond, seemingly because he was too wussy to stand up against an attack on Langston Hughes.)

If we can get past the phony media debate about whose ideas are better, and the phony meta-media debate about whose slogans are better, we can focus on what Americans actually do when they vote, which is to trust their guts about someone's character. People have pretty good antennae for bullshit and opportunism. We can count on Republicans to attempt to personally demonize and destroy anyone put up against them. Who fares best in that onslaught — someone who seems safe, or someone who seems real? Someone calculating, or someone singing?

McCain, like Reagan before him, isn't popular because people agree with him. He's liked because he's comfortable in his own skin, and says what he thinks. On the authenticity meter, if you set aside newcomers like Barack Obama and Brian Schweitzer, and if you believe Al Gore 2.0 means it when he says he's not running, is there anyone more likely to move the needle into the sweet spot than Russ Feingold?

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Marty Kaplan 

USC Annenberg professor and Norman Lear Center director