

**THE BLOG**

Hillary's Daou Jones

By Marty Kaplan

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No one believes that Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton has hired blogger Peter Daou as a netroots consultant for her Senatorial campaign. That match is in the bag. Like the big bucks Hillary is stockpiling, Daou — who was John Kerry's blogmeister in 2004, and who created the influential Daou Report for Salon.com — is part of HRC's 2008 campaign arsenal.

The move is shrewd, for three obvious reasons: The blogosphere has become an essential element of political organizing, fundraising and media strategy. Daou is smart. And Hillary needs all the online help she can get.

The open question — and it's also posed by W's hiring of Tony Snow — is whether a fresh media face will make a difference. Politicians and administrations in trouble are perfectly happy to admit that they have a "perception problem," that they need to "communicate better." They never say that they made a mistake, or that their policies were wrong; instead, they talk about "reintroducing" themselves to the people.

Hillary likely hopes that the Web-savvy Daou can help her compensate for the negatives that tag her online profile (starting with her Iraq stand, and not ending with her flag-burning triangulation) and accentuate her positives (e.g., her new passion for net neutrality). If he makes Hillary's Web presence an open forum for debate, rather than a Potemkin suck-up site, Daou might be able to coax the online community into making this case: the standard for supporting a candidate shouldn't be agreement on everything (after all, that's the interest-group pander bear that's defeated Democrats for a generation), but rather a broad agreement on values, competence, independence and leadership (after all, that's why people who oppose McCain on one issue after another can still support him).

At this distance from November '08 — in political time, it's light-years — it looks like the Democratic primaries will turn on two issues: electability in the fall, and a clear choice on Iraq.

There are no signs that Hillary thinks "I was wrong" will ever be the right thing to say about Iraq, so it looks like she's banking instead that the '08 general election winner will have an Iraq message more like hers or McCain's, and less like Feingold's or, recently, Kerry's. And Daou can encourage the viral propagation of that argument.

But there's no escaping that Hillary is a polarizing figure on the national scene; the reasons for that have as much to do with people's personal views of her personal history as with her positions on the issues. So Daou will also need to

convince the blogosphere that Hillary's current negatives — however unfair they are, however much they will be repeated by the vast right-wing conspiracy, with its gonad-lock on the MSM — will not prove fatal in the general election. If he does that during the primaries, I sure hope, for his sake, and for ours, that he turns out to be right.

UPDATE: Commenter sez Kerry “blogmeister” the wrong handle for Daou. Here's what Daou wrote about his role: “ I spent a turbulent 2004 bunkered in John Kerry's D.C. war room, at the nexus of blogs, media, and the Washington political establishment. Despite Dean/Trippi's paradigm-shifting work with the netroots, the tension between the online community and the Democrat establishment was - and still is - palpable. One of the first comments that greeted me at the Kerry campaign was, 'I wouldn't know a blog if it hit me in the head.' This was the first general election with blogs as a nascent political force. Assigned with heading the campaign's blog outreach, I had to improvise my way through the election, trying to reconcile two distinct worldviews.”

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