

My Advice for

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John McCain

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*A long-time
Washington political
and policy strategist,
in an open letter to
the likely Republican
presidential
candidate, offers this
advice: Create a
New Reagan Majority.*

Dear John—

You are a very special conservative Republican with unique populist appeal among independents and Democrats as a straight-talking maverick. You alone can re-create the broad national Reagan majority. You are in danger of blurring your identity by echoing the fading Bush loyalists. After November 2006, election polls indicate that the Republican establishment will be discredited by the worst GOP election defeats since the November 1974 post-Watergate wipeout.

You should focus clearly on Ronald Reagan as your model and adopt his 1976–80 outsider’s strategy. Direct your message to the likely stay-at-homes, whose non-voting could decide the next two elections. You can mobilize these millions of Republicans, independents, and conservative Democrats to support you as a principled, consistent conservative who speaks his mind.

But you must give your potential supporters among the turned-off non-voters truly inspired “straight-talk” messages on Iraq, the economy, jobs, and the budget deficits destroying our grandchildren’s futures. Tell them why you will be a different kind of president who keeps his promises.

Your opportunity to lead arises from your heroic military service. As a proven warrior, you are regarded as especially qualified by skill, experience and sound judgment to be able to lead us honorably from

Iraq. You must validate that faith by your unflinchingly honest assessment of Iraq. Inescapably, Iraq will be your defining, decisive issue in the 2008 campaign.

Like Reagan, you are the feisty outsider untainted by Washington scandals and the record of the past eight years—especially Defense Secretary Donald

Rumsfeld's "war on the cheap" losing strategy in Iraq. Go on the attack against the mistakes you'll correct and share your dreams for the positive changes we can achieve together.

You have shown enough loyalty to Bush, now focus on Reagan as your model and make your messages future-oriented and boldly optimistic. Emphasize

that you carry the libertarian banner of Reagan's authentic domestic legacy as a limited-government conservative. You must stay in character, be true to yourself, and say and do nothing that might impair your all-important image of integrity and independence.

You said from the start of the Iraq war that Secretary Rumsfeld was gambling by deploying too few troops. You said: "I have strenuously argued for larger troop numbers in Iraq, including the right kind of troops—linguists, special forces, civil affairs, etc. There are very strong differences of opinion between myself and Secretary Rumsfeld on that issue."

Now is the time to state these differences clearly. Rumsfeld's gamble has failed. In December 2004, you declared that you had "no confidence" in Rumsfeld, but did not then call for his resignation. Now, as the incoming Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee in 2007, you should declare that you expect to oversee Rumsfeld's retirement. In Iraq, our

troops have performed magnificently but they are too few and stretched too thin. They and the nation have been

failed by civilian Pentagon officials and Secretary Rumsfeld must accept responsibility.

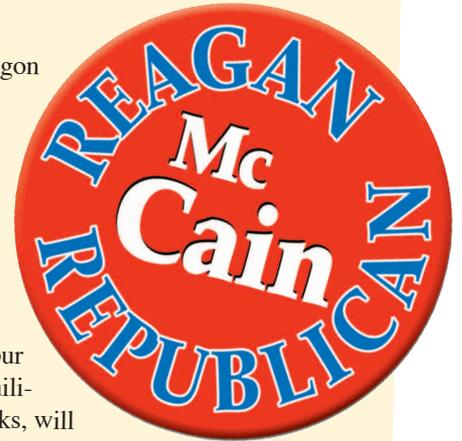
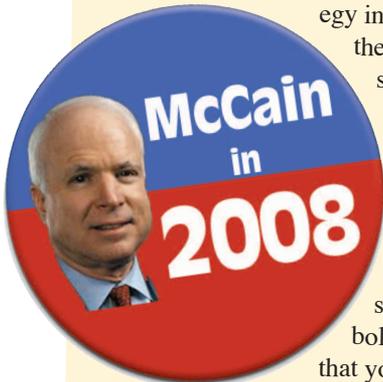
You must have a realistic plan to achieve our objectives and honorably conclude our military involvement in Iraq. Your plan, based on expert military advice from all ranks, will be presented in the coming national debate on the peaceful future America seeks in the Middle-East and the world.

In human and financial terms, the Iraq intervention, now in its fourth year, is costing Americans much more than anyone ever forecast. A veteran Pentagon budget official, now retired, guesses the cost at one trillion dollars before we ultimately can say "mission accomplished." In the years ahead, America faces unprecedented social, demographic and economic challenges as the "baby boomers" turn 65 and qualify for Social Security and Medicare benefits. There can be no more "trillion-dollar surprises" like Iraq in our fiscal and budgetary planning if we are to finance and resolve our problems at home.

Your goal in 2008 is not only to win the presidency but also to create an expanded, enduring new majority of voters who share your confidence in America's future. You would re-create the kind of broad bipartisan coalitions that Reagan mobilized, with presidential coattails for Congressional allies whose support is essential to fulfill our country's plans and achieve our dreams.

Reagan believed that vital, dynamic leadership can make all the difference. You can create an expanding and winning New Majority in 21st century America—a truly principled, conservative governing party worthy of our nation's traditions.

By adopting this optimistic, inclusive and expansive Reagan approach, you can be in an extraordinary position on the morning after the November 2006 elections—able to carry out your strategy. As the outsider who speaks his mind, you can be the clear frontrunner, headed toward an historic victory and a powerful mandate in 2008. ♦



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