

Joe Lieberman: The Progressive Who Lost His Way



A Report by ThinkProgress.org

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Despite his strong endorsement of Sen. John McCain's (R-AZ) conservative policy platform in the 2008 presidential election, a number of prominent senators are now defending Sen. Joe Lieberman's (I-CT) place in the Democratic caucus, arguing that progressives should unite in order to further the progressive cause.

For example, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV), argued last weekend, "Joe Lieberman is one of the most progressive people ever to come from the state of Connecticut." Similarly, Sen. Evan Bayh (D-IN) said, "I think we had to just let bygones be bygones. We're going to need him on healthcare and energy independence and education and a whole lot of other things."

Such defenses, however, ignore the reality that Lieberman has abandoned progressive policy principles. In this report, ThinkProgress documents Lieberman's significant shift to the right in both foreign and domestic policy.

UNDERMINED PROGRESSIVES

Said progressive economic plans would bring about a depression: "Lieberman compared Democratic presidential candidate Senator Barack Obama's economic plan to former president Herbert Hoover's approach, which he said 'turned a recession into a depression.'" [10/24/08]

Lieberman said progressive bloggers add "vituperation toxicity" to politics: Sitting next to Rep. John Boehner, Lieberman complained about "the kind of divisiveness of the cable news coverage of politics, talk radio." He said "the bloggers have added another dimension of vituperation toxicity to it. The majority of people are sick of it." [4/30/08]

Said bloggers are so harsh they would have bashed Moses: Defending Pastor John Hagee, Lieberman said that Moses had his shortcomings, too. "Dear friends, I can only

imagine what the bloggers of today would have had to say about Moses and Miriam.”
[7/22/08]

Said progressive candidates would cower to terrorism: In an interview with Salon.com, Lieberman said, “I worry that whoever gets the Democratic nomination will have a hard time scampering back to assure people that they’re prepared to take on the Islamist extremists and [any] other nation that threatens our security.” [8/3/07]

Suggested that Obama could be a Marxist: When asked if Obama is “a Marxist as Bill Kristol says might be the case,” Lieberman replied, “Well, you know, I must say that’s a good question.” [4/14/08]

Linked Obama’s policies to socialism. “There are ways I suppose you can make an argument that there are some similarities between what Sen. Obama is talking about (‘spreading the wealth’) and classic, what used to be known as socialist theory...[but] I’m not going to use the name calling,” Lieberman said. [10/23/08]

Praised radical right-wing radio hosts: “I’m real proud of you,” Lieberman told Glenn Beck. “You’re a good man,” he said to Hugh Hewitt. [11/04/08; 5/21/08]

Fears a 60-seat Democratic majority: Lieberman made clear that he firmly opposes Democrats gaining 60 seats in the Senate, saying that the survival of the country is in doubt if Democrats break the filibuster threshold. [11/04/08]

Criticized progressives for not using “Islamic Extremists”: Lieberman said, “They don’t use the term ‘Islamist extremism’ or ‘Islamist terrorism’ in the debates.” [8/3/07]

DOMESTIC POLICY

On Energy: Drill Baby, Drill

Called for increased offshore drilling: Echoing the Bush administration’s line, Lieberman said offshore oil drilling is a “sensible” way to “to try to lower prices.” Offshore drilling “would have a downward affect on oil futures.” He said, “I now view this kind of drilling as a bridge to the next chapter of our energy history.” [7/25/08]

Flashback: In 2005, Lieberman said we can’t “drill our way” out of the problem: “The second reason was that drilling for oil in ANWR perpetuates a dangerous myth, which is that we can drill our way out of dependence on foreign oil. We cannot.” [12/19/05]

On Taxes: ‘I Think It’s Wrong To Raise Any Taxes Now’

Cited domestic priorities in supporting McCain: Lieberman claimed that the United States is going to “make progress on health care and the energy crisis and climate change” under a McCain administration. “John McCain is more ready to be president on

foreign and domestic policy because of his extraordinary experience.” [\[6/29/08; 8/03/08\]](#)

Praised McCain’s pro-rich tax plan: “John McCain believes in tax cuts for business and individuals because when you’re in a recession, as we are, that’s one way to get us out of the hole,” he said. [\[10/6/08\]](#)

Said McCain’s tax plan and health care plan is “good for the middle class”: “And in fact, you know, Senator Obama has really been spreading falsehoods about John regularly since then about his tax plans, about his health care plans, which are good for middle-class America,” he said. [\[10/6/08\]](#)

Opposes raising the capital gains tax: “Lieberman claimed that Obama would take a protectionist policy towards trade and raise capital gains taxes. Obama’s plan would hurt stocks and retirement plans even more, he said.” [\[10/24/08\]](#)

Opposes lifting the Bush tax cuts: “I think it’s wrong to raise any taxes now,” Lieberman said. [\[10/24/08\]](#)

On Health Care: Supported McCain’s Tax On Employer Health Care

Defended McCain on health care. Lieberman declared that it is “not true” that the health care plan McCain put forward as a candidate for president will not do anything for those without health insurance. [\[8/03/08\]](#)

On Social Security: ‘Individual Control...Has To Happen.’

Defended McCain’s privatization plan: Lieberman falsely claimed that Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) “is not for the private accounts to take the place of social security.” “He’s for what Bill Clinton used to call Social Security plus,” said Lieberman. [\[3/30/08\]](#)

Said we eventually will have “individual control” of Social Security: In a May 4, 1998, interview, Lieberman said “it doesn’t make sense” not to broaden the Social Security portfolio, and added, “Same is true of this idea of privatizing.” “I think in the end that individual control of part of the retirement/Social Security funds has to happen,” he told the Copley News Service. [\[5/4/1998\]](#)

On Alberto Gonzales: He ‘Deserves Our Appreciation’

Voted to confirm Gonzales. Despite specifically referencing Gonzales’s failure to object to the Justice Department’s torture memos, Lieberman said of Gonzales, “I’m going to vote for Judge Gonzales and confirm his nomination, because nothing that I see in the record rises to a level high enough to overcome the presumption in favor of him as a nominee of the President.” [\[2/3/05\]](#)

Voted against a “no-confidence” resolution on Gonzales. Lieberman voted against a no-confidence resolution regarding Gonzales’s role in the U.S. Attorney scandal.

[\[6/11/07\]](#)

Said Gonzales “deserves our appreciation.” Reacting to Gonzales’s resignation in the wake of the U.S. Attorney scandal, Lieberman remarked, “The Attorney General’s resignation removes a distraction from the important work of the Department of Justice,” but added, “As he leaves public service, the Attorney General deserves our appreciation for his work for our nation.” [\[8/27/07\]](#)

On Leading The Homeland Security Committee: ‘We Don’t Like Investigating.’

Lieberman on oversight duties — “We don’t like investigating”: Responding to criticism of his committee’s record, Lieberman said, “We like to do legislation,” Lieberman said. “We don’t like investigating ... just to see who is at fault.” [\[7/15/08\]](#)

Held zero oversight hearings on Bush administration in 2007: Lieberman conducted zero “proactive investigations into Bush administration malfeasance” in 2007. [\[12/24/07\]](#)

Backed away from pre-election demands to investigate White House response to Katrina: Lieberman “quietly backed away from his pre-election demands that the White House turn over potentially embarrassing documents relating to its handling of the Hurricane Katrina disaster in New Orleans,” Newsweek reported. [\[1/12/07\]](#)

Said investigating Katrina was like “playing gotcha”: Lieberman said he was not interested in “looking back, and assigning blame would be a waste of Congress’ time.” Lieberman said he was reluctant to mount an investigation of the failures of the initial response, saying “We don’t want to play ‘gotcha’ anymore.” [\[1/30/07\]](#); [1/30/07](#)

Refused to investigate Blackwater shootout in Iraq: After Blackwater came under fire for allegedly killing several Iraqi civilians in September 2007, Lieberman refused to hold oversight hearings on the matter. “You’ve got to set your own priorities, and it was clear to me that other committees were going to pick this up,” said Lieberman. [\[10/10/07\]](#)

On The Christian-Right: Defended Pastor Hagee

Lieberman defended radical pastor John Hagee: Last year, Pastor John Hagee made headlines after referring to Catholicism as “The Great Whore” and when it was revealed that he previously said that “Hitler was a hunter” sent by God to get “the Jewish people” to “come back to the land of Israel.” Lieberman defended Hagee, saying his comments were taken “out of context.” Lieberman spoke at Hagee’s Washington-Israel Summit in July and compared Hagee to Moses. Even McCain denounced Hagee’s comments. [\[7/29/08\]](#)

Campaigned Against Progressive Candidates

Spoke at 2008 Republican National Convention: Lieberman spoke at the 2008 RNC, criticizing Obama for not being “willing to take on powerful interest groups in the

Democratic Party.” [\[9/2/08\]](#)

Penned op-ed for Norm Coleman during tough reelection race: In October 2008, Coleman came under fire for not adequately investigating reports of widespread abuses by Halliburton in Iraq. Lieberman wrote an op-ed, stating, “Any suggestion Sen. Coleman stymied Democrats’ investigations into Iraq-related matters is unfair and unfounded.” [\[10/13/08\]](#)

Gave at least \$5000 to Sen. Susan Collins’ reelection: Lieberman donated \$5,000 to the re-election campaign of Sen. Susan Collins (R-ME). “I’m going to support Sen. Collins’ re-election,” he said in April 2007. “This is without regard to who the Democratic nominee would be.” [\[4/13/08\]](#)

NATIONAL SECURITY

On Torture: ‘The Person Is In No Real Danger.’

Said waterboarding is not torture: “It is not like putting burning coals on people’s bodies. The person is in no real danger. The impact is psychological,” Lieberman said of waterboarding. “You want to be able to use emergency tech to try to get the information out of that person.” [\[2/15/08\]](#)

Voted against banning waterboarding: [Senate Vote [22](#), 2/13/08]

On Iran: Bomb Iran

Escalated possibility of military confrontation with Iran: In Sept. 2007, Lieberman co-sponsored an amendment declaring Iran’s Revolutionary Guard Corps a terrorist organization at a time when analysts warned that “the growing US focus on confronting Iran in a proxy war inside Iraq risks triggering a direct conflict.” [\[9/15/08\]](#), [\[9/26/08\]](#)

Glorified bombing Iran: Lieberman once asserted that there is “an appeal” to bombing Iran. Iran “ought to believe that we’re going to hit those training camps,” Lieberman has said. [\[6/10/07\]](#), [\[5/14/08\]](#), [\[4/09/08\]](#)

Fearmongered by saying Iran will attack the U.S.: Lieberman declared that Iran represents an “existential threat” to Israel and that Arab countries in the Middle East are “next” because “they’re worried about the Iranian [nuclear] program and want us to ask strongly to stop it.” Lieberman concluded, “And we’re next! Because Ahmadinejad in Tehran constantly leads the mobs in shouts of death to America. And they mean it.” [\[7/06/08\]](#)

Worried that Obama will not use military force against Iran: When asked if Barack Obama had “the right stuff to bomb Iran if it came to that level.” Lieberman added, “Well, I worry about that. I worry that Sen. Obama’s world view is naive.” [\[10/07/08\]](#)

Expressed support for Bush if he strikes Iran: When asked, “if President Bush

announced he felt compelled to take military action against Iran, would you support him,” Lieberman replied, “Yeah, of course I would.” [\[7/13/07\]](#)

On Syria: Bomb Syria?

Said victory in Iraq runs through Syria: In a Wall Street Journal op-ed last year, Lieberman wrote that the U.S. “road to victory” in Iraq goes through Damascus, and urges Congress to “send a clear and unambiguous message to the Syrian regime.” [\[8/20/07\]](#)

On Iraq: U.S. ‘Did The Right Thing’

Claimed the U.S. “did the right thing” in invading Iraq: Lieberman said, “I know mistakes were made in the way the administration advocated for the war with an almost exclusive emphasis on WMD [weapons of mass destruction]. But I think they did the right thing in overthrowing Saddam Hussein.” [\[8/3/07\]](#)

Claimed critics of the Iraq war were engaging in a “kind of harassment”: Lieberman said, “Some people are genuinely against the war. And I say to them if you are genuinely against the war, then you ought to be fighting to cut the funding off instead of entering into a kind of harassment that’s involved now.” [\[4/12/07\]](#)

Urged critics of the Iraq war to try to cut off funding, then criticized them for trying to cut off funding: “Some people are genuinely against the war. And I say to them if you are genuinely against the war, then you ought to be fighting to cut the funding off instead of entering into a kind of harassment that’s involved now.” [\[4/12/07\]](#)

During his RNC speech, Lieberman criticized Obama for voting against funding for the war: “[W]hen others wanted to retreat in defeat from the field of battle, when Barack Obama was voting to cut off funding for our troops on the ground, John McCain had the courage to stand against the tide of public opinion and support the surge, and because of that, today, our troops are at last beginning to come home, not in failure, but in honor!” [\[9/2/08\]](#)

Claimed victory in Iraq was imminent: “This is the third time I have been in Iraq since last December. And last December, Al Qaeda was winning — it’s as simple as that — and we were losing. Today, Al Qaeda is on the run. We are winning.” [\[11/27/07\]](#)

“A strategy for victory”: I “can report real progress there... Progress is visible and practical. ... Does America have a good plan for doing this, a strategy for victory in Iraq? Yes we do.” [\[11/29/2005\]](#)

“A turning point”: “The last two weeks have been critically important and I believe may be seen as a turning point in the war in Iraq and the war on terrorism.” [\[12/17/2005\]](#)

Claimed critics of Iraq war are invested in ‘retreat and defeat’: Lieberman claimed that for progressives, “the guiding conviction in foreign policy isn’t pacifism or isolationism, it is distrust and disdain of Republicans in general, and President Bush in particular.” And said progressive critics of the war are “invested in a narrative of defeat

and retreat in Iraq.” [\[11/8/08\]](#)

Linked Iraq to 9/11: Lieberman explained his resolution praising the supposed success of the troop surge in Iraq saying, “Senator Graham and I are introducing a resolution recognizing the strategic success that the surge has achieved in a central front — the central front of the war on terror against the enemies who attacked America on 9/11/01.” [\[7/31/08\]](#)