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THE FAILED SEDUCTION OF JOHN McCAIN



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By *Ted Rall*

How Democrats Are Their Own Worst Enemy



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NEW YORK--Now we know what John Kerry ([news](#) - [web sites](#)) has been up to this spring. Other politicians, having wrapped up their party's nomination early in March, might have devoted those extra months to honing their stump speech, shaking down contributors and strategizing for the long slog to November.

Not Kerry. Kerry, it seems, spent the last three months begging Republican John McCain to run as his vice president. He didn't ask officially (whatever that means) but he asked seven times. "I don't want to formally ask because I don't want to be formally rejected, but having said that, would you do it?" an aide who ran messages between the two senators quoted Kerry's approach to *The New York Times*. Each time, each of seven times, McCain's answer was the same: an unequivocal no.

Hey, John, wanna be my veep?

No thanks.

I'm gonna pretend I didn't hear that. So. Shall we print up some buttons?

No.

Come on, man. I need you.

Nope.

You're kidding! You know the Republicans will *never* nominate you for the presidency! They hate your ass!

Whatever. I said no.

Dude! Don't be like that. Yes is such an easy word to say. Say it.

Get a life, John. Don't contact me unless it's about legislation. Got it?

Look, I'll be honest. The CBS poll says you'll give me a 14-point boost if you join the team. I gotta have you. I can't take no for an answer.

No means no, John. No. No. No.

Hey, thanks, I appreciate it. I'll call a press conference for noon. Kerry-McCain 2004!

I'm getting a restraining order against you, you jowly bassett-hound-eyed freak!!!

Seven times. Has John Kerry lost his mind?

The last time Americans elected a cross-party ticket was 1796, and with good reason. President Adams, a Federalist, feuded over matters personal and political with vice president Jefferson of the Democratic-Republican Party. The resulting spectacle was so appalling that Congress amended the Constitution to minimize the chances of such a fiasco reoccurring.

Not since 1932 has it been so important for Democrats to win the presidency. George Bush, a dangerous, deranged demagogue, has got to go. Anybody But Bush: I coined the phrase, and I still mean it. But it would be the height of folly to brush off the implications of the Kerry-McCain dalliance. The Democratic nominee-

apparent's judgment, and that of his advisors, has been grievously compromised.

Liberals believe that McCain is a soft-spoken moderate Republican. The shabby treatment he received in 2000 at the hands of Bush and Karl Rove, whose operatives falsely claimed that he had fathered an illegitimate daughter with an African-American hooker, earns him sympathy from the left. So does the maverick style he employed to push for campaign finance reform.

But McCain isn't what people think he is. "At the end of the day," said the chatty aide, "he's a Republican." His campaign finance reform banned soft money contributions, a much bigger source of funds for Democrats than Republicans. Later in 2000 he played Bush's bitch, campaigning for the man whose staffers had smeared him. By all accounts his understated tone quickly rises to accommodate a sharp temper. Most of all, McCain's Arizona constituents vote for him because his conservative politics match theirs.

"I am pro-life," McCain wrote on his 2000 campaign website. "I oppose abortion except in the case of rape, incest or when the life of the mother is in danger. I support the constitutional amendment to prohibit the physical desecration of the American flag. [I will] curb the gratuitous violence in the media that is desensitizing our culture to violence. Bearing arms is a constitutionally protected right."

How could liberal voters support Kerry-McCain knowing that a pro-life, flag-burning-obsessed, pro-censorship gun nut was a heartbeat away from the big leather chair? Why should anyone trust a candidate or a party so uncertain about their principles that they're willing to sell them out for a short-term jump in the polls? Kerry should thank McCain for turning him down; in doing so a Republican may just have rescued the Democratic Party from suicidal oblivion.

Both parties, and Democrats in particular, are in trouble. The last few decades have witnessed a rise in ideological blurring. Aping the Republicans has made the Democratic Party less appealing to increasingly apathetic liberals. This has occurred during a period of unprecedented polarization, when swing voters have all but vanished. As I prescribe in my book "Wake Up, You're Liberal: How We Can Take America Back From the Right," the key to Democratic success this fall is motivating the long-neglected left-wing base. That means stronger, not weaker, party identification. Democratic Congressmen who vote along with the Republicans should be thrown out of the party. Democrats must act like Democrats. And you don't do that by nominating, or running with, Republicans.

(Ted Rall is the author of "Wake Up, You're Liberal: How We Can Take America Back From the Right," out this week. Ordering information is available at amazon.com.)

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