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From The Sunday Times
May 6, 2007

Republicans defect to the Obama camp

Sarah Baxter, Washington

DISILLUSIONED supporters of President George W Bush are defecting to Barack Obama, the Democratic senator for Illinois, as the White House candidate with the best chance of uniting a divided nation.

Tom Bernstein went to Yale University with Bush and co-owned the Texas Rangers baseball team with him. In 2004 he donated the maximum \$2,000 to the president's reelection campaign and gave \$50,000 to the Republican National Committee. This year he is switching his support to Obama. He is one of many former Bush admirers who find the Democrat newcomer appealing.

Matthew Dowd, Bush's chief campaign strategist in 2004, announced last month that he was disillusioned with the war in Iraq and the president's "my way or the highway" style of leadership - the first member of Bush's inner circle to denounce the leader's performance in office.

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the leader's performance in office.

Although Dowd has yet to endorse a candidate, he said the only one he liked was Obama. "I think we should design campaigns that appeal, not to 51% of the people, but bring the country together as a whole," Dowd said.

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Bernstein is a champion of human rights, who admires Obama's call for action on Darfur, while Dowd's opposition to the war has been sharpened by the expected deployment to Iraq of his son, an Arabic-speaking Army intelligence specialist.

But last week a surprising new name joined the chorus of praise for the antiwar Obama that of Robert Kagan, a leading neoconservative and co-founder of the Project for the New

American Century in the late 1990s, which called for the overthrow of Saddam Hussein.

Kagan is an informal foreign policy adviser to the Republican senator John McCain, who remains the favoured neoconservative choice for the White House because of his backing for the troops in Iraq.

But in an article in the Washington Post, Kagan wrote approvingly that a keynote speech by

Obama at the Chicago Council on Global Affairs was "pure John Kennedy", a neocon hero of the cold war.

In his speech, Obama called for an increase in defence spending and an extra 65,000 soldiers and 27,000 marines to

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“stay on the offense” against terrorism and ensure America had “the strongest, best-equipped military in the world”. He talked about building democracies, stopping weapons of mass destruction and the right to take unilateral action to protect US “vital interests” if necessary, as well as the importance of building alliances.

“Personally, I liked it,” Kagan wrote.

Disagreements on the war have not stopped John Martin, a Navy reservist and founder of the website Republicans for Obama, from supporting the antiwar senator. He joined the military after the Iraq war and is about to be deployed to Afghanistan.

“I disagree with Obama on the war but I don’t think it is a test of his patriotism,” Martin says. “Obama has a message of hope for the country.”

Financiers have also been oiling Obama’s campaign. In Chicago, his home town, John Canning, a “Bush pioneer” and investment banker who pledged to raise \$100,000 for the president in 2004, has given up on the Republicans. “I know lots of my friends in this business are disenchanted and are definitely looking for something different,” he said.

Not to be outdone, Hillary Clinton has many Republican defectors of her own, including John Mack, chief executive of Morgan Stanley, who helped raise \$200,000 for the president’s reelection, qualifying him as a “Bush ranger”. He said last week that he was impressed by Clinton’s expertise. “I know we’re associated mainly with the Republicans but we’ve always gone for the individual,” Mack said.

According to figures compiled by the Center for Responsive Politics in Washington, Obama and Clinton have vacuumed up more than \$750,000 (£375,000) in individual contributions from former Bush donors.

TOWN TO DISNEYLAND for a Thanksgiving parade. Would they not have preferred death?”

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Bronwen Maddox,
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Some of the donations reflect the natural tendency of those with power to shift to the likely White House winner. Penny Pritzker, the staggeringly successful head of fundraising for Obama, voted for John Kerry, the 2004 Democratic candidate, but also donated that year to Bush. As she was a head of the family-run Hyatt hotel chain, it was considered a prudent move.

With the Democrats widely expected to win in 2008, Clinton's status as frontrunner is encouraging Wall Street money to migrate to her, while Obama may be picking up some mischievous "Stop Hillary" donations from still-loyal Republicans. But there is plenty of genuine enthusiasm to go around.

A poll released by Rasmussen last week showed Obama overtaking Clinton for the first time by 32% to 30%, although another poll by Quinnipiac showed her with a 14-point lead over the Illinois senator, her nearest rival.

The current issue of the New Yorker contains a profile of Obama, which highlights his appeal to conservatives.

For his optimism about the future, Obama has been dubbed the "black Ronald Reagan". He frequently challenges the black community to support two-parent families and encourage school students, instead of criticising them for "acting white".

HAVE YOUR SAY

I once thought that Obama might be that "shining light" that this country has not seen in nearly a half century. This impression came to me following his speech before the Democratic National Convention in 2004. Wow! I thought, not really knowing much about him, or politics either for that matter, at the time. Another JFK! But, now I am totally convinced by looking at the facts of his record and his political connections that this was a staged production. It was orchestrated to attract the masses who will

not look behind the veneer of the man who has become the latest "Super Hero" to save the world. Never fear, "SUPERBAMBI" is here!!!

Likkerish, Honolulu, Hawaii, USA

John of Stevens Point, WI wrote:

"If there was a republican who was principled, and actually practiced fiscal responsibility and tried to get the government out of our personal lives...I would vote for him in a heartbeat."

John, have you not heard of Congressman Ron Paul??? He is the epitome of a principled legislator, having maintained his values to the point of voting alone at times throughout his twenty years in Congress. He voted against the war. He voted against the Patriot Act, when others were voting for it without even reading it.

He is the most fiscally candidate that you will find. And his primary message is that of individual freedom and liberty which requires getting the government out of our personal lives across the board. And, further, he practices what he preaches. He would not allow his children to accept government loans for college. He refuses to take a government pension. And, he returns a portion of his congressional office budget every year.

Alan, Honolulu, Hawaii, USA

Anyone who thinks Barak Obama will herald a significant change in politics-as-usual is buying into the washington shell game. Read the article again. Barama supports aggression, a war crime, in pursuit of US 'national interests'. Why do you still trust the washington elite to define your national interests? Iraq never was a military threat to the united states, yet US destruction of that country has only served to keep its oil offline until the multinationals can pump the sweet oil out at \$100+/barrel profit. Invading Afghanistan didn't profit the US but instead restarted the flood of heroin worldwide. And we are not to worry at the prospect of this spineless juvenile holding his finger over the button of the world's largest nuclear arsenal because he's assured us "I'm not

planning to nuke anyone *right now*?"
 Democrats, republicans and independents
 please consider *very carefully* this time
 what you believe in, and who you are willing
 to trust.

Benjamin Shapiro, Giessen,

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