

Webb Victory in Virginia Marks Democratic Phase-Shift

by Nancy Spannaus

The resounding victory of former Reagan Cabinet member and Secretary of the Navy James Webb in the Virginia Senatorial Democratic primary on June 13, marks a “phase shift” in Democratic Party orientation, of a very positive nature. Webb’s candidacy was aggressively supported by national Democratic leaders, including Massachusetts Senator John Kerry, Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee head Charles Schumer, and Minority Leader Harry Reid, despite opposition from the state party leadership, who wanted to nominate IT-lobbyist Harris Miller instead. A former Republican, Webb is the candidate who can reach out to the “Reagan Democrats” and bring them back into the party so that incumbent Republican Senator George Allen can be defeated, the Senate leaders argued. And Virginia Democratic voters agreed.



James Webb

Webb’s campaign focussed on his opposition to the war in Iraq, and his opposition to the dismantling of U.S. industry through outsourcing (which Miller supported, in practice, if not in theory). His margin of victory—53 to 47%—was won heavily in the Washington, D.C. suburbs, in many of which he polled 20% ahead of Miller.

Webb’s credentials against the Bush Administration’s war policy were impressive, since he began campaigning against the invasion of Iraq as much as one year before the war. At that time, he was still a Republican, who joined other former military leaders in pointing out the insanity of the preemptive war.

Warns of a 30-Year Occupation

Former Navy Secretary Webb, who was also a highly decorated Marine during the Vietnam War, weighed in against the impending war against Iraq in September 2002, with an opinion column in the *Washington Post*, entitled, “Heading for Trouble, Do We Really Want To Occupy Iraq for the Next 30 Years?” We quote:

“... America’s best military leaders know that they are accountable to history not only for how they fight wars, but

also for how they prevent them. The greatest military victory of our time—bringing an expansionist Soviet Union in from the cold while averting a nuclear holocaust—was accomplished not by an invasion but through decades of intense maneuvering and continuous operations. With respect to the situation in Iraq, they are conscious of two realities that seem to have been lost in the narrow debate about Saddam Hussein himself. The first reality is that wars often have unintended consequences—ask the Germans, who in World War I were convinced that they would defeat the French in exactly 42 days. The second is that a long-term occupation of Iraq would beyond doubt require an adjustment of force levels elsewhere, and could eventually diminish American influence in other parts of the world.

“Other than the flippant criticisms of our ‘failure’ to take Baghdad during the Persian Gulf War, one sees little discussion of an occupation of Iraq, but it is the key element of the current debate. The issue before us is not simply whether the United States should end the regime of Saddam Hussein, but whether we as a nation are prepared to physically occupy territory in the Middle East for the next 30 to 50 years. Those who are pushing for a unilateral war in Iraq know full well that there is no exit strategy if we invade and stay. This reality was the genesis of a rift that goes back to the Gulf War itself, when neoconservatives were vocal in their calls for ‘a MacArthurian regency in Baghdad.’ Their expectation is that the United States would not only change Iraq’s regime but also remain as a long-term occupation force in an attempt to reconstruct Iraqi society itself. . . .

“These concerns, and others like them, are the reasons that many with long experience in U.S. national security issues remain unconvinced by the arguments for a unilateral invasion of Iraq. Unilateral wars designed to bring about regime change and a long-term occupation should be undertaken only when a nation’s existence is clearly at stake. It is true that Saddam Hussein might try to assist international terrorist organizations in their desire to attack America. It is also true that if we invade and occupy Iraq without broad-based international support, others in the Muslim world might be encouraged to intensify the same sort of efforts. And it is crucial that our national leaders consider the impact of this proposed action on our long-term ability to deter aggression elsewhere.”