

Is Anybody Still Surprised by Joe Lieberman?

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Joe Lieberman's latest announcement that [he will vote against cloture for a health care bill that includes the public option](#) should surprise nobody, as Lieberman, in recent years, has demonstrated that his ideological home is no longer in the Democratic Party. Lieberman has also shown once again that he gets a lot more attention and a higher profile by being a Democrat and taking these positions. While he is no longer viewed as a voice of moderation, maturity and sound judgment from within the Democratic Party, as was frequently the case in the late 1990s, he is still in a stronger bargaining position, and a media favorite, because he is a Democrat.

By wavering between the two parties while never fully abandoning the Democratic Party, Lieberman has made himself far more important than he should be. If he were to formally switch parties, he would suddenly be of little interest to the Republicans as he would be just another member of the minority who would probably be suspect because his right wing credentials would not be strong enough for the Limbaugh-Palin wing of the party. Switching parties would also mean that the Democrats would finally stop courting him on the foolish hope that he will act like a Democrat when it really matters. More accurately speaking, if Lieberman were a Republican, and run that way in 2006, he would not be a senator. That Lieberman still has any power in Washington is a tribute to the failings of the Democratic Party in recent years.

It was only three years ago when Lieberman, seeking his fourth senate term encountered a primary challenge from political neophyte Ned Lamont. Lamont's candidacy was based on the notion that Lieberman, due to his support of much of President Bush's program including the war in Iraq, had been too conservative for too long and was no longer fit to be the standard bearer of the Democratic Party of Connecticut. This rather reasonable premise seemed to outrage much of the Democratic members of the senate as Senators Schumer, Clinton, Dodd and other prominent Democrats, including the then junior senator from Illinois, rushed to support the embattled Lieberman in the primary. Support for Lieberman from Democrats was one of those moments where Democratic senators showed that membership in the club was far more important than a silly thing like consistently taking positions against most of the party or supporting an unpopular Republican President as he dug the country into an ever deeper hole.

The decision of so many leaders of the Democratic Party to support a senator who while opposing most of the party on an increasing number of important issues, was still a colleague and, presumably, a friend, was a mistake, but that mistake was compounded by the failure of any of these prominent Democrats to insist that Lieberman back the winner of the primary before agreeing to support him in that primary. This kind of agreement is very common in primaries and one of the things which helps hold the party together. By not demanding this as a condition for their endorsement, all these Democratic leaders opened the doors for Lieberman, after losing the primary to Lamont, to continue to contest the general election. Most of those prominent

Democrats endorsed Lamont after he won the primary, but because they had not done their political work in advance, had much less leverage with Lieberman as they should have.

Lieberman, of course, went on to win that election as an independent. He made this decision to oppose the Democratic Party nominee partially because he correctly assumed that win or lose there would be no consequences from the leadership of the Democratic Party for any of his actions. He was, of course, right as the Democrats welcomed him and even courted him as part of their efforts to retake the senate after the 2006 election.

Since his election as an independent in 2006, Lieberman has successfully reinvented himself as every Republican's favorite Democrat, always available to endorse a Republican candidate, or support the Republican position on a piece of legislation, but somehow still managing to generate more media attention because he is nominally a Democrat. Lieberman, for example, repaid that senator from Illinois for his 2006 primary endorsement by endorsing his Republican opponent in the 2008 presidential election.

It is astounding that as late as 2009, some still considered Lieberman a Democrat and believed that by offering him good committee assignments, Lieberman could be convinced to work with the Democrats on needed legislation. Lieberman's latest pronouncement makes it clear beyond a shadow of a doubt, what was clear to many a few years ago. There is no sense pursuing Lieberman's support or offering him any incentives because when he is needed most by the Democratic Party he can only be depended to abandon the party, its goals and its leaders.