

# Positive politics

It is still summer. But, last week marked the official kickoff the 2004 fall presidential campaign season as Democrats gathered in Boston for their National Convention.

If you are like me, you were particularly intrigued by the convention speeches of U.S. Sens. John Edwards and John Kerry. Both speeches were well-delivered. And, at first glance, their rhetoric gave strong cause for optimism as we head into the fall campaign season.

On July 28, Vice Presidential nominee John Edwards challenged Americans to "embrace the politics of hope" and "reject the tired, old, hateful, negative politics of the past."

On Thursday, Presidential nominee John Kerry sounded a similar tone, saying: "In the weeks ahead, let's be optimists, not just opponents. Let's build unity in the American family, not angry division...My friends, the high road may be harder, but it leads to a better place. And that's why Republicans and Democrats must make this election a contest of big ideas, not small-minded attacks. This is our time to reject the kind of politics calculated to divide race from race, group from group, region from region..."

Sounds great, doesn't it? We all know that nothing big can be achieved without hope and confidence. And, if this new approach means a shift away from the shrill, negative campaigning of the spring presidential primaries, then even better.

But, why the sudden switch to a kinder, gentler image? Pundits indicate that the Kerry-Edwards campaign team has done a lot of polling since the close of the spring primary season. Their



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research indicates that independent voters — the voters in the middle who decide nearly every national Presidential election — are tired of negative campaigning. They want leaders with new ideas and an optimistic vision for the future of our country.

It is hard to disagree with that sentiment. After several decades of increasingly negative campaigning by Democrats and Republicans alike, we would all like to see something better.

However, as we move into the fall campaign season, I hope voters are not fooled by Sen. Kerry's rhetoric. Because the sad truth is that other portions of Sen. Kerry's convention speech were designed to exploit the very same "angry divisions" he was lamenting.

In maybe his most politically loaded turn of phrase, Sen. Kerry said, "I will be a commander in chief who will never mislead us into war. I will have a vice president who will not conduct secret meetings with polluters to rewrite our environmental laws. I will have a secretary of defense who will listen to the best advice of our military leaders. And I will appoint an attorney general who actually upholds the Constitution of the United States."

Sen. Kerry may deserve a few style points for being polite enough to not name names directly. But, in just four sentences, Kerry managed to suggest

that: (1) President Bush deliberately mislead America into war, (2) Vice President Cheney is a big fan of pollution (3) Defense Secretary Rumsfeld consistently ignores the best advice of our military leaders, and (4) Attorney General Ashcroft routinely violates the Constitution for sport.

In other portions of the speech, Senator Kerry implied that Republicans support "denying real prescription drug coverage to seniors, so big drug companies can get another windfall" and "kicking kids out of after-school programs and taking cops off our streets, so that Enron can get another tax break."

Not exactly words of unity. In fact, Michael Moore (the controversial director of "Fahrenheit 9/11") would have struggled to write it any better.

I would like to believe that Sen. Kerry was sincere in saying he wants to return to a positive, ideas-driven campaign. I would even like to believe that his fall campaign will "reject the tired, old, hateful, negative politics of the past" and focus on the future. No matter who will win the fall election, it would be great for America if that debate happened this year.

But up to now, Senator Kerry's rhetoric has not even matched his own rhetoric, let alone his actions. Once again, it appears that Kerry is trying to have it both ways. The image that comes to mind so far is one of Senator Kerry smiling and trying to shake President Bush's hand with one hand, while punching him in the ribs with the other.

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