

A FIRST LOOK AT THE 2008 DEMOCRATS

OVERVIEW

T-minus 949 and counting. With less than a thousand days until the 2008 Presidential election, we decided it was time to take a serious look at the messages and potential messengers vying for the hearts and minds of Democratic primary voters. What will be the catchphrase, the theme, the issue that wins? Here's a peek into the future.

In the 2004 presidential campaign, we undertook a similar exercise for MSNBC, and the big winner in our research two years before Election Day: John Kerry. So we followed the same methodology, but this time we went to both Iowa AND New Hampshire. It was a fact-finding mission, assembling groups of 30 past and likely Democratic caucus and primary voters. We asked them what they were looking for in a Presidential candidate, and then showed them roughly 10 minutes of each one as they appeared on the Sunday talk shows, C-Span's Road to the White House, and other televised speeches and events. Some were immediately recognizable, others unfamiliar to most of the participants. All had a message, and all generated strong reactions.

When all is said and done, the Democratic nominee will be the person they believe has the best handle on the future and who can best bring about the change and reform they are desperately seeking. In times of war and uncertainty, the people we listened to don't want to feel like victims. They want to feel like soldiers in the battle for a better America. They want to be lifted up, inspired to act, and they want a President who can lead them. They want answers and solutions – not just feel-good rhetoric and definitely not harsh words or scolding. And while it was clear that Democratic voters are not looking for a single issue candidate, certain issues will be more important than others: education, health care, prescription drugs and energy (alternatives and independence). And perhaps most importantly, they want the anti-Bush.

But they don't want a Bush basher. They don't want a grouchy, accusatory, finger-pointing yell. They want someone smart but with good common sense, a leader with new ideas who believes and practices accountability. They're looking deep inside a candidate's character: credibility and personal motives will be more important than ever. Electability is important too – Democrats desperately want to win.

So what are the overall findings? What matters most? What are the leading indicators of the next Democratic nominee?

At this stage of the game, this early pre-primary, water-testing stage, the message and the way it is delivered matter tremendously. To that end we've devised the Ten Commandments for Democratic presidential candidates. This is what really matters to the people who will be choosing the next nominee:

TEN COMMANDMENTS FOR 2008 DEMOCRATS

1. **Don't feel my pain – give me something to alleviate it.** Democrats don't want to be told what's wrong with America. They want to be told what you plan to do about it. They're not looking for the diagnosis – they know what ails them. They want the cure. The candidate most focused on “*solutions*” will have the advantage.
2. **Leave Bush out of it. We know why we don't like him. Tell us why we should like you instead.** They hear enough Bush-bashing and engage in it themselves. They assume all the Democratic candidates feel as they do: it's time for a change. They're looking for the candidate that articulates the answer to the specific problem Bush created.
3. **What would Jesus do? Tell me what YOU would do and leave Jesus out of it.** The time for a conversation about faith and spirituality is in the general election, not the primaries. Democrats don't want to hear about your church. If they really cared, they'd be Republicans.
4. **Don't tell me what's wrong with America unless you can tell me what you're going to do to make it right.** A litany of all that has gone wrong in the past five years is telling them what they already know. The candidate who tells them what they plan to do about it will win their support.
5. **Tell me something new. Tell me something I don't already know.** It may sound like a Gary Hart-esque approach but Democrats are really looking for a nominee with new ideas, someone with an innovative approach. Been there, done that won't sell in 2008.
6. **Be a Deficit Democrat.** Every time a Democratic candidate talked about ending wasteful spending and tackling the deficit, the dials spiked up, as did the approval. In the arena of deficit spending, there really isn't much difference between Democrats and Republicans.
7. **The 2008 Agenda: education, healthcare, prescription drugs, energy independence.** The war in Iraq may grab the headlines and the attention, but Democrats are much more focused on concerns right here at home. ‘*Bring the troops home,*’ they complained. Tell us what you're going to do to improve our quality of life right here in America.
8. **The 2008 Attributes: intelligence, competence, accountability, getting things done, passion, honesty and being ethical.** Attributes matter, as does style. The 2008 contest is not just about the issues. It's also about who the candidates are and what they are truly about. Smart is in. Accountability and integrity are necessities. And passion – yes passion – is a prerequisite.
9. **You are the message. Watch the negativity. Democrats want hope.** Beating up on Republicans will generate applause, but it doesn't generate votes. The candidates focused on the future will have a significant advantage. The candidate that generates the most hope in a better future will win the nomination.
10. **Winning is everything. And the only thing.** As in 2004, Democrats want to win. Unlike 2004, they REALLY want to win. No candidate will secure the nomination whom they fear will lose to the Republican nominee. Electability is going to play a major role in 2008.

We know it's early. And we know that while the message really matters, a lot is determined by other important factors: speaking style, stamina, local organization, fundraising, the whims of the news media, even tabloid discoveries. Osama bin Laden could be captured. Jack Abramoff could start talking. There are dozens of scenarios we can't even imagine. The Democratic primaries don't happen in a vacuum – the GOP will be hashing it out simultaneously, and that could have the greatest impact of all.

But the process of examination has already begun, and we have learned a lot just by listening to the voters in Iowa and New Hampshire who have the power to make the difference. What follows is a first look at the nine most likely candidates. There are many lessons to be learned on the pages that follow.

HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON

If expectations are the queen of the ball, Hillary Clinton left a jilted lover. She was on virtually everyone's top three list as each night began, but half of her support disappeared by the time the night was over, and she won virtually no new converts. Only Edwards fared worse.

The problem for Clinton is that she starts with such high expectations. Democrats expect her to be smart, and she delivers. They expect her to be tough, and she delivers. But there are a number of verbal and visual intangibles that clearly undermine her presentation, her image, and eventually her support. As with many women in public life, her looks and presentation account for a disproportionate percentage of the reactions she elicits.

The tape of Sen. Clinton that we showed in New Hampshire was not a stump speech but rather a public sit-down interview with Jane Pauley in San Francisco conducted earlier this year. This should have been to her advantage. Maybe it was the interview format that kept her from building momentum, but our primary voter audience was not very impressed. When we showed a stump speech to the group in Iowa their reactions weren't much better. Focusing on the year 2020 was an innovative approach, but she never explained how she plans to get there.

Positives: Sen. Clinton is clearly seen to be smart, no two ways about it. She is applauded for her focus and determination. She explains the specifics (if not the minutiae) about the topics she talks about, and primary voters are always looking for details. And unlike other candidates vying for the Democratic nomination in 2008, Hillary Clinton has honest-to-goodness star power. Democratic voters truly believe that with her behind an issue, that issue will get the attention it deserves.

WORDS THAT WORK

By 2020 we have a reformed healthcare system that extends coverage to those who did not have it without weakening the coverage for those who did. (60/60) Now we do this by creating a more patient centered health system and by making healthcare delivery more efficient. (69/60) We were wasting about \$200 billion a year in administrative costs, amounting to about 34 cents on each dollar, 15 cents more than any other country spends on administrative costs.

The initiative I put together with Senator Frist and others back in 2005, (64/59) creating electronic medical records while preserving patient privacy, used 21st century technology to eliminate 20th century bureaucracy. (79/73) We also exceeded in getting more people insured in larger pools with easy to administer options like the federal employee benefit plan. (79/73)

WORDS THAT WORK

We're in this big deficit, we're not paying for our wars in the budget, we're paying for them with emergency spending. (69/72) I have young men and women I know who are serving in the military. (70/74) They and their families are sacrificing. And my husband and I are getting tax cuts. (72/78)

WORDS THAT WORK

We have stopped blaming China, India, and other countries for trying to compete with us, but we have restored the vigorous enforcement of our trade laws against unfair competition which the republicans had drastically reduced by 2005.” (67/74) ... And that’s why we require an economic impact statement to be filed with every new trade agreement, outlining the cost of repairing displaced workers, for new and better jobs, and providing the funds to do so. (73/74)

Almost all positive comments about Hillary Clinton come with a qualifier:

- *“Brilliant policy wonk. But she’s completely un-electable, unfortunately.”*
- *“Hillary is educated, informed, articulate and would be perfect, but she could never win. Not only are we not ready for a woman president yet, but too many people hate her. I can’t put my support behind anyone who has no chance. She’s like Ralph Nader.”*
- *“She has the ideas that will help. Unfortunately, she is more concerned with criticizing the current administration. I’m just not as impressed as I thought I would be.”*
- *“As opposed to other candidates so far who’s just emphasized the problems, I liked the focus on the positive but need some concrete evidence or plans.”*

Negatives: Clinton comes across as highly partisan, overly negative – and often bitter. There is a tone of accusation that runs through much of what she says today. Perhaps she is held to a different standard, but regardless, her remarks often come across as bashing, angry, harsh and calculated. Democrats find some of her language to be too wonky and too hard to follow, at times verging on “know-it-all.” And that leads some to dismiss her as unelectable.

WORDS THAT DON’T WORK

You know I have been, absolutely amazed, even shocked at the combination of arrogance and incompetence that marks this particular administration. (51/64) And you know I actually don’t think I’m alone in that and I don’t think that it’s a surprising statement to many. (47/62)

WORDS THAT DON’T WORK

I think that philosophy which has basically driven this government for the last five years is beginning to wear out its welcome. (46/55)

WORDS THAT DON’T WORK

I have said for a number of years now that the current administration has tried to turn Washington into an evidence free zone. (45/63)

All the negative comments had no such equivocation:

- *“Too much information. Too factual. No personality. It bored me.”*
- *“This seemed like it was a Golden Globe speech, but she wasn’t excited about it. She has no personality. Reminded me of Al Gore, boring and not real.”*
- *“Like a decaffeinated scolding.”*
- *“An opportunist, not to be trusted.”*

Prognosis: Hillary Clinton has to get beyond the “but…” of Democratic primary voters. She has an incredible pool of potential support, and the level of respect toward her and what she represents is clearly evident. But just as she is a polarizing force within the overall electorate, she is polarizing even among individual voters themselves. Everyone has something they like, but they are equally quick to point out a flaw. She has got the Bush-bashing down to a science. Now she needs to show primary voters that she has the best alternative approach.

JOHN KERRY

John Kerry has a lot to live down. There is no public outcry for a second candidacy, and we heard loud and clear from many pained Democrats still angry by his loss to Bush. Kerry's 100% name ID is loaded with baggage. Yes, some still think of him as a familiar and trusted standard-bearer but for the majority of the voters we talked to, he is yesterday's news. Democrats are eagerly looking for something new, and to too many of them, he represents something old. This is going to be even more of an uphill climb than in 2004.

Positives: He doesn't pull his punches. He calls it like he sees it when it comes to the Bush administration's failures. Democratic rank-and file acknowledge that he's smart, he has experience on the federal level and he's had exposure to all issues great and small. He's done this campaign before and these people feel like they know him. In some measure he seems to know what they want to hear, he echoes their concerns back to them in a way that gets them nodding their heads in agreement.

WORDS THAT WORK

(74/70) It's been an absence of leadership. You call the leadership down and you say, I'm not going to stand for this. (73/77) You're gonna stay in session or I'm gonna call you back into session until we get the people's business done. The business of our nation is not being done. (77/81)

WORDS THAT WORK

(56/66) We fought for a long time in this country to get people to accept the principle that the polluter pays. (57/68) And these guys have come in, turned it around here, thrown it out. Now you pay for what the big polluter takes away in the largest profits in American history. (62/73) And we're fighting together to turn that around. Polluters should pay for the pollution that they create in this country. (76/77)

John Kerry also knows the importance of a plan. He's been on the presidential stump enough to know that people want a roadmap, directions, leadership and ideas. In the speech we showed in Iowa, he gives them precisely what they want, in the exact bite-size morsels they're looking for. And it tested better than any other segment that evening.

WORDS THAT WORK

And for those people who say, gee, we don't have a plan, they don't have a plan or something, here's a little ten-point plan for you. (53/51) Pretty quick, here's number one: obey the law and protect civil rights in this country. (62/65) Number two, tell the truth and tell it to Americans all the time. (68/71) Number three, number three, fire the incompetents. (72/76) Number four, chase the money lenders and changers from the temple of democracy and reclaim it for the grassroots of this nation. (74/68) Number five, bring our troops home from a stable Iraq which we can do as fast as possible. (79/77)

WORDS THAT WORK (cont.)

Find Osama bin Laden and protect the ports and other facilities in the United States of America. (79/79) Stop stabilizing big oil and stop blaming the American people for being addicted to oil when it's this administration that's addicted to oil and we need to commit ourselves to alternative and renewable fuels. (73/81) Make access to healthcare affordable for all Americans, not as a matter of privilege and ability to pay, but as a matter of right for being an American citizen. (79/89) Reduce the deficit, which is after all, a conservative thing to do. (84/82)

That litany got participants enthused ... some for the first time. It was the highest tested sound-bite of both sessions, and the comments indicate just how effective it is:

- *"Wow! He is now my pick. I forgot a lot of his views. I think a Kerry-Edwards or a Kerry-Clinton ticket would be awesome."*
- *"He has warmed considerably since 2004."*
- *"Human, funny, visionary, smart, great ideas, has a plan. Great '10 things' list, likeable, solid, experienced."*

Negatives: Bush bashing wears thin. Voters are not looking for negatives without solutions, they're not looking for name-calling without answers. Some say that his exuberance on the stump looks rehearsed and doesn't sound genuine and it doesn't take people long to remember what frustrated them about Kerry the last time around. In some ways he has already worn out his welcome. And one specific criticism came to light in these sessions that we don't remember hearing too much about in relation to Kerry's 2004 race: the way he puts way too much focus on religion.

WORDS THAT DON'T WORK

You know, you go back and reread or read, you know, depending on your faith, the New Testament. There is not anything in the ministry of Jesus Christ that remotely suggests, not one miracle, not one parable, not one utterance, (34/45) that says you ought to cut children's healthcare or take money from the poorest people (45/58) in our nation to give it to the wealthiest people in the country. (41/41) Nowhere. There's an evangelical minister by the name of Jim Wallace. He has written a book called *God, Politics* and you should read it. (39/43)

WORDS THAT DON'T WORK

(61/64) But just to make sure as a Christian I wasn't missing anything, having looked at the Qu'ran and the Torah, making sure I saw that interconnectedness, I went back to check the five books that tell you the most about Jesus Christ, well that tell you all, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and Acts. (63/68) And I will tell you nowhere in there, nowhere, not on one page, not in one phrase that is uttered and recorded by the Lord Jesus Christ can you find anything that suggests that there is a virtue in cutting children for Medicaid and taking money from the poor and giving it to the rich. (52/54)

His overt use of religion was hard for some to accept, as was the feeling that Kerry had already given it his best once before and come up short:

- *"Talking too much about religion. Brings up good points but just comes off like any other politician."*
- *"I don't care for the religious examples."*
- *"He was more concerned with the current president's flaws than what he or other people could do to make global issues better."*
- *"He's clearly bitter. Definitely in attack mode. The preaching was out of character."*
- *"I'm tired of faith-based rhetoric. Stick to solutions for current problems. We want ways to improve."*

Prognosis: Any residual goodwill from 2004 is with Edwards. Kerry limps into this race a shadow of what he represented two years ago. He is a terrific critic of the Bush administration and if he continues to play the role of Bush-basher in the primaries, he will leave his fellow Democrats to provide solutions the electorate so badly wants. That's an important role, but probably not the one he wants to play here.

JOHN EDWARDS

Of the nine candidates we tested, none began with positives and expectations as high as former Senator John Edwards. And none fell farther as fast. John Edwards has the potential to be the sleeper candidate in 2008. He comes to this race with a lot of good will and fond memories. But he also comes to this race with Democratic opponents who are more engaging, more exciting and more original than he is. And those comparisons combined with the overall desire for something new might mean disaster for him.

No candidate, not even Hillary Clinton, generated as much open conversation among the participants as Edwards. His words, and the way he delivers them, have impact. Unfortunately for Edwards, that impact is not always favorable. When he talked about specific solutions and concrete ideas – like a WPA-type service corps to help rebuild the Katrina-ravaged Gulf Coast, raising the minimum wage, and labor law reform to protect the workforce rather than the offending corporations – the audience was enthusiastic and reactions were positive. But when he spoke about talking to poor Americans sitting around some table (“the poverty table” our participants joked throughout the evening), his words rang hollow and were met with derision and laughter. And once voters are laughing at you, you’re dead.

Still, he wins points for being a good speaker, comfortable on the stump with a good story to tell and a pleasing way of telling it. And as women continue to note, he is easy on the eyes. Ughhh.

Positives: Let’s face it, John Edwards is a good looking guy and people are drawn to him because of it. It’s still an oft-mentioned attribute when a group is asked to react to an Edwards appearance. His ability to think on his feet and communicate his thoughts effectively comes across loud and clear when he gets going, and he does an effective job of linking his personal history to his political philosophy. Audiences appreciate his passion, and his charisma serves him well. In general, left-leaning Democrats are much more favorable to him than moderate- to right-leaning Democrats.

WORDS THAT WORK

(57/74) My mother and father have healthcare today because of the union, my only brother and his family have healthcare today because of the union. (60/76) We need instead of having employers who violate the law doing an organized campaign get a slap on the wrist two or three years later. (61/76) We need to change the law and have a real labor law reform in this country so that working people can organize and so people who violate the law are held accountable for violating the law. (66/78)

WORDS THAT WORK

(65/67) I don’t know about you but we don’t need another Republican party. We got one and that’s enough. (68/70) We need to be Democrats. We need to stand up for what we believe. (65/74) Listen, I know why I’m a Democrat. I know why I’m Democrat now, I know why I’m a Democrat when they put me in the ground. (65/76) Because this party gives voice to people who have no voice. (63/76) We need to stand up and fight for the people who needs fought for, who need us today, who have always needed us, and need us now more than ever. (69/79)

WORDS THAT WORK

Companies that are owned by foreign governments should not be operating or providing security for our ports. (62/72) I also would like to see us use this as a vehicle to talk about what's actually happening in our ports. (68/73) Five percent of our containers are inspected. We can do much better than we're doing right now. (72/74) Number one, we ought to be moving toward the goal of screening all containers. (75/73) We also ought to make sure that we have a tracking system so that we know what's happened to them in transit. (77/78)

Almost all the positive comments from the participants focused on his speaking style rather than his substance:

- *“Dynamic speaker with great ideas.”*
- *“Southern charm and good looking. An animated, funny, relaxed speaker.”*
- *“He can work a crowd.”*
- *“People like him. I like him.”*

Negatives: In a word: slick. In two words: too slick. Despite the boyish charm and the Southern accent, participants complained that he comes across too much like a lawyer. But presentation aside, nothing hurt him more with our primary voters than the way he talked about poverty and poor people. They know he’s rich and they felt some of his comments about his interaction with the poor were insulting. In some ways his familiarity is a curse – people don’t feel like they’re hearing anything new from him. And few think they’re hearing real solutions from him.

WORDS THAT DON'T WORK

I was sitting around the table with a bunch of folks who live in poverty and there was a woman there, she must have been seventy-five eighty years old, she lived on a farm all her life. (51/51) Her husband had past away a few years before and she was in a bad place. Her farm was about to be foreclosed on, she tried to go to work, she got a job at McDonalds and worked there for a little while and they told her she was too old to do the job. (48/52) You know I gotta tell you, if this country can't be there for someone like that what do we exist for? (53/57)

WORDS THAT DON'T WORK

I wanna talk today about an issue that's deep inside me, its become recently deep inside the psyche of the American people. The great moral issue of our time. 37 million people in a country of our wealth and our prosperity who wake up every single day in poverty. (54/65)

Said one New Hampshire participant after Edwards' speech, "I heard a lot of issues, but no solutions or how-to's. Watching him tonight left me questioning Edwards." Others reacted similarly:

- "I was not as pleased as I thought I'd be and will reconsider my feelings about his candidacy. He seemed full of ideas but they were too grand. There were no solutions and he seemed too negative for me."
- "Not as sold on him now as a couple of years ago."
- "Full of crap."

Other comments were similar to what some naysayers said in 2004 – charges of being "too lawyerly," "too smooth," and "out of touch." Perhaps the most negative comment about Edwards came in Iowa: "He scares me the way Bush does."

Another problematic issue for him will be the war in Iraq, which he voted for and defended throughout the 2004 campaign. Though he has now said publicly that he regrets that decision, no one likes a flip-flopper or a leader who doesn't advocate for what he thinks is the best course of action even if it's unpopular. With echoes of Kerry's "I voted before it before I voted against it" still ringing in many Democrats' ears, this could be a difficult sound-bite for Edwards to live down.

WORDS THAT DON'T WORK

(Videotape, November 2003):

MR. RUSSERT: Do you regret your vote in giving George Bush, in effect, a blank check for the War in Iraq?

SEN. EDWARDS: No. I voted for what I believe was in the best security interest of the American people. (52/48)
(End videotape)

MR. RUSSERT: That was after the war had begun considerably. We hadn't found WMD. What, what caused the change in your thinking?

SEN. EDWARDS: Well, the truth is I was, then, I was still trying to defend my vote. (49/53) When the election was over and I had time to think about this and reflect on it, it became increasingly clear to me that I talk a great deal about the need for moral leadership in America and for America to provide moral leadership for the world. (40/50) Well, the foundation for moral leadership is the truth. (39/64) And for me, saying that my vote was wrong is the truth. And so I thought it was important to say it. (46/70)

Prognosis: Edwards is like an old friend, or even an old crush – someone you remember fondly, perhaps even more fondly than is deserved. And the closer people watch and the more they listen, the likely voters are to find faults to complain about. His speaking style is still an incredible positive, but the substance thus far comes up short. With primary voters watching and listening so carefully, Edwards will need some message readjustment if he is to break from the pack. Perhaps most importantly, he has to be very careful about how he talks about poverty. It doesn't always sit well with those who know how rich he has become.

JOE BIDEN

Senator Biden's stage presence drifts dramatically between all-star and below par. His matter-of-factness and incredible focus of his delivery are clearly his strong points, but voters complain of his propensity to sound like professor giving a lecture. He must do away with his written notes for his speeches. Democrats expressed a clear disconnect when he repeatedly looked down – which also effected his pacing: another distracting tendency. He has all the pieces, but they're not yet put together.

One sound-bite from Senator Biden stood head and shoulders above all others: his idea for an international conference of world leaders immediately following 9-11. In fact, it was voted the most memorable sound-bite out of more than 90-minutes of Democratic tape. But it's not enough; Democrats want him to go further. More accurately, they want him to be broader. They recognize his understanding of foreign policy, but they need him to expound on domestic issues. Until he does, they will withhold support.

WORDS THAT WORK

I expect you would have heard them say, “we have been dealt a terrible blow, we will overcome this and I, President Roosevelt, President Kennedy, President Reagan, am going to the congress on Wednesday and I’m delivering two messages. (54/62) The first is that I’ve called an international meeting of the world powers to decide how we can unite in an effort to crush this rise of basic Islamic fundamentalism. (65/78)

Positives: Of all the candidates, he was the only candidate to address faith and not score badly. It needs to be short, swift, and above all succinct – and he nailed it. Senator Biden has the best delivery of the all the Senators, but he has gubernatorial competitors as well. When he speaks, primary voters find him believable and knowledgeable, and so they listen.

WORDS THAT WORK

America’s heart, and people know this intuitively, is one that understands that we cannot lead in this century as a nation divided as we are now. (64/63) I believe, as my son believes, that his generation and this country, are poised to do great things. (65/72) I believe the American people intuitively understand that we have an historic opportunity to set the United States and the world on a path in the 21st century that will allow us to avoid the carnage and mistakes of the 20th century. (74/72)

Senator Biden's poised and practiced oratory will keep him one of the front runners and his definite stage presence will keep the public's attention:

- *“I liked him. Will vote for him if he runs... Substantive facts. Experienced.”*
- *“Very professional/unite the party. Unite the country. Informed.”*
- *“Down to earth.”*

When it came to Iraq, he admitted he made a mistake in his vote, *and then moved on*. Unlike Edwards, Biden nailed this one as well.

WORDS THAT WORK

RUSSELL: In hindsight, knowing everything you know now about the absence of weapons of mass destruction, was your vote a mistake?

BIDEN: It was a mistake. It was a mistake to assume the president would use the authority we gave him properly. (55/71) And I brought along that whole quote. I knew you'd ask me this. I said, "We know he continues to attempt to gain access to additional capability, including nuclear capability. (61/70) There's a real debate on how far off that is, whether it's a matter of years or it's a matter of less than that. We don't know enough now." (61/79) That was the rest of my quote. So I never argued that there was an imminent threat. We gave the president the authority to unite the world to isolate Saddam. (61/77) And the fact of the matter is, we went too soon. We went without sufficient force. And we went without a plan. (60/82)

RUSSELL: If there was a vote today, you would vote no?

BIDEN: I--with this president, absolutely I would vote no, based on the way in which they've handled it. (66/87)

Four words set him apart and secured a positive response: "*it was a mistake.*" His admitting he was wrong was crucial in his ability to move past the issue. Sen. Edwards attempted to do the same thing unsuccessfully, leaving a slick and inverse reaction:

Negatives: Biden runs into the problem of reading a speech with the same enthusiasm as if he were reading a conference report on wax build-up. When he looks people in the eye and tells a joke, he connects. When he reads, he doesn't. In an effort to demonstrate intelligence, he loses on the charisma – and it's clear that he could have both.

WORDS THAT DON'T WORK

In his second Inaugural Address, President Bush spoke eloquently to, and I praised the speech, about the need to increase democracy in the world. (50/54) But today, we're paying a price for a short side of policies that equates democracies with elections and has no stomach for the hard slogging of democracy-building. (45/57) In the Middle East, Islamic groups have made huge strides, Hamas, on the west bank, in the Palestinian territories, the Muslim brotherhood in Egypt, religious parties. (41/51) In Iran and I mean Iraq and Hezbollah in Lebanon. Ladies and gentlemen, holding elections without doing the hard work of building democratic institutions, in these cases, has left us less, not more secure. (41/48)

No one doubts Senator Biden's intellect or passion for public service, but they complained that he was up and down in tone, intensity and delivery. They also wanted less of what was wrong with current policy and more of what he would do to fix it.

- *"Uninspiring. What are you doing to fix things? Too preachy. Monotonous."*
- *"Took him a while to warm up. Had bursts of brilliance, albeit not sustained ones. I needed eye contact, connection. When he was inspired, we felt it, otherwise I felt like I was at a college lecture."*
- *"Great speaker, very inspirational but didn't speak of how to solve specific issues. He was interesting enough that I would watch him again and see what his platform is."*

Prognosis: Senator Biden earned the respect of participants in both sessions, but there is still a gulf between respect and support. He is competing with resumes of governors, the energy of younger candidates, and the established popularity of other politicians. The ingredients are there, but they are not there together. New Hampshire and Iowa Democrats want a candidate to capture their hearts and minds. Biden's got the intellect – and he owns the minds. But he's not firing up the flames ...yet.

MARK WARNER

Starting with a clean slate has its advantages – and Mark Warner takes full advantage. His stump speech, as articulated at the National Press Club earlier this year, is about as good as it gets for Democratic primary voters. He started off with almost no support (or name ID) at both Iowa and New Hampshire sessions. But after the sessions, when all the candidates had been heard for ten minutes and all the positives and negatives of each candidate discussed by the participants, Warner had gained more ground than any other opponent.

There is something real happening here.

Warner has a good personal story to tell and he does a terrific job of talking about how it drives his political beliefs and his commitment to service. His career as a venture capitalist gives him a way to talk about looking for the next great thing. His early stint at the Democratic National Committee gives him decent party bonafides even if his governance could be construed as somewhat moderate. He past as a public school student gives him an everyman touch that his Harvard law degree might not. He effectively combines vision, ideas, and results.

WORDS THAT WORK

Now throughout my whole life, if there has been any single thread that has run- it has always been that I got a fair shot at my dreams. (52/57) And I can't think of anything that is a more basic American value. (62/60)

I got a fair shot. I got a fair shot because there was that good public schools and that student loan program. I got that fair shot because in our country, I even had a chance to fail and learn from those failures and pick myself up and go on. (66/73)

And one of our challenges, as a people and as a country to make sure that everyone gets their own fair shot at their own version of the American dream. (69/70) And getting that chance oughta be more important than who you parents are, what race you are, or where you worship. (71/71)

Positives: First, his own personal story beyond politics is endearing – more so than any other candidate we tested. The fact that he acknowledged and poked fun of his failures made his successes seem all that more real ...and important. (*A sense of humor is not a prerequisite, but it certainly helps.*) He comes across as polished, experienced and upbeat. He looks the part, he speaks well, and voters note that he has not just real experience but a “track record” and “success” at what he has done in his life. He has the right partisan tone: not bashing the Republicans every chance he gets, but not above a tough shot from time to time.

From a policy standpoint, Warner talks convincingly about education and has the statewide experience to back it up. Though he lacks a military background he effectively uses his experience as governor of the state with the “most military installations per capita in the whole country.” He has the perfect combination of down-to-earth sensibility and can-do executive gravitas that people want and trust.

WORDS THAT WORK

As Chairman of the National Governors Association, I lead an effort to redesign the American High School. (72/84) We started on that in Virginia. Let me give you a quick couple of comments. In every high school in Virginia, no matter how rural or how urban, every student can earn a minimum of a full semester of college credit in high school and get a jump-start on college. (75/81) First generation kids get a chance at more rigorous coursework. (73/81) Save parents five thousand dollars off the cost of an education.

WORDS THAT WORK

When I left as governor, Virginia had posted the largest increase in math SAT scores in the country. (75/82) We posted double-digit increases in the number of students taking AP courses – 24% increases in African-American students and 21% increase in Latino students. (75/80) We’ve gone from 42% of our schools accredited to 92%. (74/80) And even with higher standards, we ended up with a 94% graduation rate from our high schools. (81/84) That’s what we need to do all across the country. (82/88)

WORDS THAT WORK

I’m a Democrat because fighting for the working men and working women in our country is always the right fight. (64/64) I’m a Democrat because the struggle for civil rights, we were the party to lead that struggle. (64/69) And we must acknowledge that discrimination and bigotry are not dead in this country. (67/76) And we must always redouble our efforts to make sure that everyone gets that fair shot. (70/83)

He received rave reviews from both Iowa and New Hampshire audiences:

- *“Seemed like someone who can get results.”*
- *“I really liked hearing about the success he’d had in his state. That’s what I wanted to hear – what they’ve done and what worked. I’m keeping him on my list.”*
- *“Liked his plan. He’s the only one who seemed to have one.”*
- *“He hit home with education plan. He showed results. Let’s hear more.”*
- *“He could be our next president.”*

Negatives: For all of his gifts, Warner is not well known. And his political experience, though it allows him to cite concrete examples of past successes, is but one term as governor of Virginia. Just as 2008 Democratic primary voters will demand an unusually high level of intelligence from their nominee, they will insist on political experience as well. The worst reaction to Warner came when he tried to give them a history lesson. These voters are much more interested in the future than the past.

WORDS THAT DON'T WORK

I'm a Democrat because, since Jefferson wrote the declaration of independence, since Jackson spoke out for the common man, our party has never been the party of the status quo. (56/56) We've always been the ones to see a challenge and do something about it. (64/60)

I'm a Democrat because the most noble political experiments of our time were birthed in our party. (63/60) I'm a Democrat because the New Deal, and I've seen and met a few people here who remember the New Deal, literally saved the lives of hundreds of thousands of Americans. (62/62)

I'm a Democrat because, a generation after a Democratic president created the Peace Corps, there are still faded photographs of John F. Kennedy on the walls of homes from South Africa to South America. (64/64)

And a few post-video comments were less than stellar:

- *"Visual perception was not favorable, he didn't look strong or trustworthy."*
- *"Dorky. ... Self-deprecating shtick doesn't work for a presidential candidate."*
- *"Riding on passé Democrats coattails."*

Prognosis: Watch out for Warner. He's the not so dark horse in this race. His talk about giving people a "*fair shot*" might be the shot that propels him to the nomination. He's like the new kid at school who moves in and becomes popular on his first day – no awkward moments, no missteps in the cafeteria. And while a single gubernatorial term under his belt might make his candidacy appear to be a bit premature, no one complained. He has the story and campaign chops to make a big impact.

BILL RICHARDSON

Gov. Bill Richardson's story is the complete package. The question is, is that enough? His resume, for those who know it, is perfect. He's an outsider with an insider's knowledge. But despite his stellar credentials and easy speaking style, his presentation is seen to be somewhat unfocused, and his greatest challenge is to prove that what he did in the small state of New Mexico can translate to a national stage. He's got a good message and the right platform, but the delivery isn't quite right – yet.

Positives: Richardson, when he's 'on' is really on. He connects with audiences. He is simultaneously folksy and expert. He has ideas and answers. He has a big voice and a big personality. And increasing the death benefits for National Guard members killed in Iraq is a real home run. Being Governor of New Mexico is no big deal. But as Chairman of the Democratic Governor's Association, he carries a big stick.

WORDS THAT WORK

I believe that it's not enough to criticize Republicans, (55/69) that if we're going to stand for something, we should spell it out, (65/80) that we should have policies that affect people, (71/79) that we're making a difference in people's lives and this is why I say that governors are doing that. (77/82) We're balancing budgets, we're dealing with health care. (72/77)

WORDS THAT WORK

I believe that government has an obligation to be fiscally responsible, and be prepared for unforeseen events or economic downturns. (72/70) That's why we need to put money away. (65/71) I also believe that when government has the resources, it should return those resources to taxpayers, invest in people, and invest in the future. (72/74)

WORDS THAT WORK

Gas prices are huge, they are too high, (78/75) sixty percent of our energy comes from foreign oil, from countries in the Middle East that are not stable, (77/77) that are not necessarily our friends and we're extremely vulnerable, but we can resolve this problem, not by drilling ourselves out of the problem as the administration wants to do, (73/81) but as developing new technologies in solar, wind, and biomass, distribution, by becoming more energy efficient, by having more energy efficient air conditioners, by having more fuel-efficient vehicles, (80/87) by having investments in new technologies that will enable our country to be not just energy self-sufficient but competitive. (80/86)

The comments for Richardson are of the caliber of a credible presidential hopeful:

- *“He talks about key issues and what he has done about them. More importantly he talks about what he has done.”*
- *“No Republican bashing. Showed unity.”*
- *“Very caring. Never heard him before. Convincing.”*
- *“A man of action. He talked about his accomplishments instead of slamming others.”*
- *“Not the greatest speaker but he has an excellent message.”*
- *“Many good ideas. I like his position on renewable energy. If he was more charismatic and a better speaker, he could be a force.”*

Negatives: *“If he was more charismatic and a better speaker, he could be a force”* – a participants words, not ours. But that raises his essential challenge. He’s another example of style undermining the substance. If Biden is too serious, Richardson is too boring. Democratic primary voters wondered aloud if he can get the votes if the style doesn’t improve. Only one person brought up the issue of race. More of a concern was his home state of New Mexico, which voters complained was too small to apply his success to the national picture.

WORDS THAT DON’T WORK

Who we are defines what we do. We are pro-growth and pro-business: We’ve used our entrepreneurial spirit to create jobs, to cut taxes for every New Mexican and for small businesses, (56/54) and to bring cutting edge industry to our state—such as film and media, aviation and aerospace, and groundbreaking high-tech businesses. (54/55)

WORDS THAT DON’T WORK

We are diverse: we’re a multi-cultural capital that, in many ways, resembles the future of our country. (55/51) In the past, we were disregarded, ignored, or considered as outsiders. (54/57) But that’s why we all know the importance of opening doors, investing in opportunity, and giving a helping hand. (56/55)

So while the message was good, the messenger needs work:

- *“He spoke a lot on education, which is good but he’s unknown and not a good speaker.”*
- *“Some passion but not a good speaker. Fire his speech writer! I know it’s harsh but he needs to lose a few pounds.”*
- *“How much more boring could this guy be? He’s done a lot for New Mexico but what about the rest of the country?”*
- *“Used car salesman, not believable. I did like his insurance policy and educational stance though.”*

Prognosis: A resume makes the man, and it makes a credible presidential candidate, but it doesn’t necessarily make a Democratic nominee. If Richardson were the only governor in the race, he’d be one of the top tier. But with Warner in the mix, Richardson will need more than the best resume. He has a good message, and he is a good messenger, but the difference between good and great is the difference between the front-runner and an also-ran.

RUSS FEINGOLD

In many ways he may well become the Howard Dean of 2008. No one knows who he is. No one knows what he's done. Primary voters appreciate his principled positions, but they aren't ready to award him their vote. His presentations engendered the sharpest divide between moderate and liberal Democrats of any of the candidates we tested, and while they approved of his positions, they weren't ready to switch to his candidacy. The issues he's talking about *should* help him with Democratic primary voters, but so far they haven't. So while they generally liked what they saw, he did not rise above the rest.

Positives: "*Passionate.*" Maybe not fire and brimstone passionate, but his convictions come through. "*Smart.*" Maybe not policy wonk smart, his intellect is undeniable. "*Articulate.*" Not a gifted orator but he's logical and he gets his point across. He is clearly someone who wants to do the right thing – and that trait is appreciated by Democrat primary voters.

WORDS THAT WORK

Democrats have to be as tough as they can on national security. (58/64) This whole Dubai thing has indicated that but we also have to be the party that stands up for the rule of law and for protecting the civil liberties of innocent Americans. (67/82) We are the party if we do it right that can do both of those things, and I think that's the right message for the American people. I agree with you, though. There is a possibility -- I've even heard some Democratic potential presidential candidates saying, you know, the president might have broken the law but, you know, we shouldn't touch that. (68/80) We have an absolute obligation as members of Congress and public servants to stand up for our system of government and that overrides any political considerations that might exist. (70/86)

WORDS THAT WORK

Do you think that the budget that's going through in Washington which includes cruel cuts to Medicaid and student grants, and student loans, (70/77) but actually has even more for the wealthy, do you think that that's going to get us a lower deficit? (74/81) Do you think that's going to bring us fiscal responsibility? Absolutely not. (77/75)

Some of the most positive comments from dial session participants have a not so hidden caveat, but the positives were just that – intensely positive. He clearly exceeded expectations.

- *"Better than I thought in reflecting my views. Takes a stand."*
- *"He is articulate and logical, but no spark."*
- *"Genuinely good thoughts and is a party man. But not much charisma."*
- *"Feisty, not afraid to go out on a limb."*
- *"Liked him overall. Better than I thought. He kept my attention."*
- *"Patriotic, ethical."*

Feingold's move to censure President Bush was well received, though few had heard much about it. That someone is demanding accountability from Washington is very welcomed.

WORDS THAT WORK

ABC TV: "Resolved that the United States Senate does hereby censure George W. Bush, president of the United States, and does condemn his unlawful authorization of wiretaps of Americans." That is a big step. Why are you taking it now?

FEINGOLD: It's an unusual step. It's a big step, but what the president did by consciously and intentionally violating the constitutional laws of this country with this illegal wiretapping has to be answered. (64/72) There can be debate about whether the law should be changed. There can be debate about how best to fight terrorism. (64/78) We all believe that there should be wiretapping in appropriate cases but the idea that the president can just make up a law in violation of his oath of office has to be answered. (69/83)

Said one Iowa voter: *"I liked that he stood up on principle to stand up against the President."* Another added, *"He's not afraid to speak out when something is not right. He doesn't go with the flow and he speaks with the voice of the people he represents."*

Negatives: He has passionate rhetoric, even though he is not passionate. He is extremely tough on Bush, but participants complained that he didn't offer much in the way of specific alternatives. He appeals to more liberal Democrats, but he leaves the moderates cold with his harsh criticisms. He is thin on solutions, which is what these voters are truly starving for.

WORDS THAT DON'T WORK

This simply isn't the proper conduct of this fight against terrorism. (52/61) So what do they do? The same thing again. Anybody criticizes it, even a hero like Jack Murtha, they just go into attack mode. (55/61) In fact they even had Peter Pace say...yesterday the chairman of the joint chief of staff say that anybody who criticizes this war or talks about maybe some kind of a way to finish the military mission is depressing the troops and is hurting recruiting. (55/61)

The Democratic moderates were particularly critical of his delivery and his tone:

- *"Redundant. I'm not hearing what he would do, only the negative about Bush."*
- *"Wants to demean others. He hasn't said one thing he would do."*
- *"Needs to focus on himself positively."*
- *"He knows the problems but isn't offering any solutions."*
- *"Very critical of the present administration but no substance yet. What are your specifics? How will we know where he stands if he never tells us."*

Prognosis: Right now, there isn't enough there there. Just because the electorate is angry doesn't mean they want to elect an angry man. Sure, Democratic primary voters find him determined, but determined to do what? Everyone wants to get rid of the Bush administration, but they're waiting to learn what Feingold stands for. Bush bashing will surely get him noticed, and his Senate record will get people to listen, but voting no is not enough to get Democrat primary voters to vote yes for Russ Feingold.

EVAN BAYH

Senator Bayh is probably the single toughest Democrat to analyze. His impact on primary voters was exactly the *opposite* of Hillary Clinton's. When she was done, voters either loved her or hated her. After seeing 20 minutes of Evan Bayh, there wasn't much love or hate. It was all ... like. They appreciated his down-to-earth appeal, but they wanted to see more passion. His ideas about tax fairness and reining in Washington's wasteful spending struck a chord – even as they were complaining about his delivery. They appreciated his success as governor and how that qualified him for the presidency, even as they questioned his ability to win the election.

Many of our participants had never seen Bayh speak, so he was an unknown quantity. He does not present himself poorly, but as voters see more of him, his style does nothing to improve his standing. However, he is the most successful of all the candidates zinging the Bush administration because he doesn't sound as negative.

Positives: The substance is there and the Senator has the potential to talk the talk – though he actually performs better in speeches where he can demonstrate more passion. He has all the right ingredients and could be a contender. He effectively describes his record as governor, and listeners find him a credible candidate. Primary voters find him realistic, down to earth, and means what he says.

WORDS THAT WORK

I don't like raising taxes, I've got a record of not raising taxes (70/73) and I have no problem looking to the most fortunate one percent of the folks and saying you know what, I'm sorry at this moment in time we just cant afford to cut your taxes anymore. (75/74) Until we get the budget balanced, until we get the funding we need for healthcare and education in balance. (75/80) And you know what, I think most Americans are reasonable enough and sensible enough to understand that. (75/81)

WORDS THAT WORK

In 1990, we enacted something called the "21st Century Scholarships," (50/51) which today say to every child growing up in the State of Indiana, whose family qualifies for the free or reduced lunch program, each and every one of them, (53/56) that if in 8th grade they sign a written pledge to graduate from high school with passing grades, (52/58) and did not break the law by getting involved with illegal drugs, each and every one of those children is entitled to a full college scholarship to the public university of their choice, (67/70) and those scholarships are fully transferable to any private university in our state. (69/73)

And as a result of that, we've moved Indiana from 40th in the percentage of our young people who've gone to college to 9th in the United States of America. (74/75)

Negatives: Style. In an electorate that is as concerned about style as substance, the Senator suffers, particularly in comparison to some of the other candidates. He is saying the right things, but just not in the right way. His casual feel enhances his credibility, but Democrats want something more in their nominee. They need to be secure in the candidate's electability. "*Nondescript*," "*plainspoken*," and "*ho-hum*" were the gist of the words used to describe him. The Democratic primary is not a race between the tortoise and the hare: slow and steady will not win this race.

WORDS THAT DON'T WORK

Too many people say "Ah, we know we have a problem with national security so we need to change the subject. Let's talk about something else." But it's a dangerous world, and they're going to continue regrettably to be things to remind people of that like that attacks in London, Madrid and Amman. (54/50) God forbid there may be something else in this country. In an age of global terror we can't pretend that the national security issue is not an important one. (61/52)

Here are a few examples of the participants' lackluster responses that the Senator's style sometimes inspires:

- *"Who? What'd he say? So not interested."*
- *"Reminded me of Jimmy Stewart. You know, in that movie. Not a good impression."*
- *"Boring – ho hum – not dynamic. Nothing to catch my attention. Same old, same old."*
- *"Very uncomfortable in front of people. Not confident. Almost appears as if he's trying to convince himself of the issues."*

Prognosis: If Bayh wants this nomination, his number one challenge is to prove to Democrats that he has the passion to win the general election. He has a political pulse. The theory that he's too moderate in his philosophy or tone was not borne out by what we heard. It's the moderation in his style that is his greatest challenge. If the Democratic electorate continues to look for a smart candidate with a political resume and record they appreciate, then Sen. Bayh could be the guy. But the other candidates who can drive them to their feet cheering will have an advantage.

TOM VILSACK

Iowa Governor Tom Vilsack is too focused on religion and spirituality for New Hampshire Democrats, and his home state doesn't take him seriously. The Iowa reaction was particularly telling. He should have a hometown advantage, but he doesn't. In fact, after viewing and discussing a Vilsack National Press Club speech, almost all the participants expressed surprise about his humor, intensity and passion. Apparently they don't see it at home. And despite their pleasantly surprised reaction to him as a presidential contender, what small amount of support he had in our pre-group balloting had all but eroded after hearing from the rest of the Democratic field.

New Hampshire voters were much less familiar with Vilsack and they were even less impressed. His rhetoric about religion rubbed our participants the wrong way, and his lack of experience as anything but a "small state governor" sealed the deal.

Positives: Vilsack's appeal for fiscal responsibility and the Democrats' ability to do it better than the Republicans hit the sweet spot for Iowa voters, as did his talk about trust and integrity. (It should be noted that all the positive reactions to Vilsack came from Iowa. Nothing in New Hampshire tested particularly well.

WORDS THAT WORK

It is important and necessary for us to recognize that because we are out of power, we have the privilege and the honor and I think the duty to point out where things could be done better. (61/67) I believe that we can start with the fiscal disorder of Washington, DC. (65/73) It is unacceptable that future generations of Americans are being burdened with heavy debt, high interest rates and a crippled economy (80/88) because we are providing tax relief to folks who frankly do not need it. (80/89) It is wrong, wrong, wrong. (74/85)

WORDS THAT WORK

Is there any doubt in this room that we could do a lot better job, a more competent job of homeland security after what we saw in New Orleans? (67/66) In fact, I would suggest that we, as Democrats, consider creating a new award. (72/75) It's called the "Brownie, you've done a heck of a job" Award. (70/74) ... We ought to just issue it every once in a while, you know, Karen, you could start issuing it here in Florida for people who do a "heck of a job." (71/79) I would suggest we might want to give it today to our U.S. House of Representatives for having the gall to vote for tax relief for the most wealthy Americans at the same time they cut Medicaid and college loans. (71/83)

His constituents were impressed with his sense of humor ("*There is now a new standard of employment at the White House. All you have to do is avoid indictment.*") They've voted for him before and they're proud to see him on a national stage.

Among the comments:

- *“Surprised at his sense of humor. He looked presidential – it’s the first time I’ve thought so. He played on the truth and he’s been truthful in Iowa.”*
- *“I thought he was funny. I didn’t know he was so ballsy.”*
- *“Insightful. Good sense of humor. Down-to-earth. Spoke to the audience, not down to them.”*
- *“He has a good sense of humor. I truly think he has what’s important to the American people.”*

Negatives: My God, leave the religion at home. In the speech we showed to New Hampshire voters, most of whom had never seen or heard Vilsack before, he spoke eloquently if not exhaustively about the role religion has played in his life – and these primary voters were not interested in it. Not at all. Even a discussion of “values” was poorly received. In fact, whatever else he had to say was overshadowed by the God talk. His personal story is compelling, but the preaching suffocated the rest of the story. Even his lofty pro-American., pro-Democrats passages didn’t impress, not after the sermon that came before it and not without specifics to back it up. His mannerisms came across to both audiences as awkward and nervous.

WORDS THAT DON’T WORK

I was in church not to long ago, with my wife Christie, sitting in the back pew of the church and the priest came out and wanted to visit with the children before the mass started. (35/31) He wanted to explain to the children the Gospel he was going to read in ways that they would understand it. (31/30) And, it was a wonderful and powerful story about community. (31/25) It was the story of the loaves and fishes.

The story of Christ giving a sermon and seeing thousands of people and, recognizing that they were hungry, and saying to his disciples, “Go and feed the people.” (30/25) The disciples said, “But we have only a few loaves of bread and a few fish how can we possibly feed five thousand people?” (32/24) Christ said, “Pass the basket; feed the people.”

And, they did indeed pass the basket and what they found was that all five thousand were fed and when they collected the baskets back they actually had more than when they started. (31/29) They learned that, by relying on one another and a sense of community, not only were the individuals taken care of, but collectively, we were better off. The priest turned to the children and said, “What Christ did was he removed the fear of sharing.” (31/28)

WORDS THAT DON'T WORK

First and foremost, Democrats ought to be proud. We ought to be proud of the fact that community is our value. (50/52) It is a value that we cherish. It is a value that we care about. It is a value that we know is important to America's future. (46/50) It is a value that helps to create this American Dream and this American promise. (43/48) It is the essence of America. And, it's a Democratic value and we should embrace it and we should use it in all of our campaigns. (39/41) To make sure that Americans understand that what care about, the policies that we propose are tied to a value that is important and relevant to their lives. (34/39)

Complaints about his overtly religious message dominated the post-speech voters' comments almost as much as it dominated the speech:

- *"He'd be better on a pulpit. What are your ideas?"*
- *"Very scary. Too Christian."*
- *"Does he think he is going to the U.S. Jesus and lead us? Give us some ideas on what you're going to do."*
- *"I'm sick of religious rhetoric and the unnecessary correlation between God and patriotism. At least he's not a smug, entitled frat boy like Bush. But enough about Christ!"*

Prognosis: Vilsack's message is simply not attuned to the Democratic primary voters of New Hampshire or caucus voters of Iowa. Even when he stays away from the lightning rod of religion, he doesn't move his primary constituency. Not enough specifics. Not enough focus. Not enough new ideas. Community is good, but it's not great, and it won't take you to the nomination. Right now, anyway, Vilsack isn't yet ready for prime time.