

Jewish Studies Scholars in Support of Barack Obama

As Americans we support Barack Obama for president because we believe that he is the best person to lead our country through these difficult times. Senator Obama's firm grasp of the issues, his ability to work with diverse groups of people, and his humane and progressive social vision will bring a welcome change from the governing style and policies of the last eight years.

As scholars of Jewish Studies, we are concerned that distortions of Senator Obama's record and biography have caused undue anxiety among American Jews about what an Obama presidency would mean for Israel and the Jewish community here. We urge Jewish voters to see through the partisan attacks and recognize how much they have in common with the senator.

Jewish Americans have long played an important role in efforts to achieve a more just society not only for themselves, not just for other minority groups, but for all Americans. The Obama candidacy offers us the chance to play such a role once more. In fact, Senator Obama shares many of the values and positions held by the majority of American Jews:

Senator Obama supports policies which promote equality of opportunity and social justice:

- ◆ the defense of social security against attempts to privatize it.
- ◆ a fairer tax system, including tax cuts for the elderly.
- ◆ expanded health coverage and defense of Medicare.
- ◆ aid to education at all levels.

He calls for energy independence through the development of renewable and environmentally friendly energy sources.

He is consistently pro-choice and pro-civil liberties, resisting attempts to blur the boundaries between church and state.

He opposed the misguided Iraq war from the beginning, understanding it as a distraction from the true war on terror.

Most importantly, Senator Obama has dedicated himself to promoting racial and religious tolerance and coexistence, speaking out against anti-Semitism and bigotry of all kinds. He embodies the Jewish hope for a society in which race, ethnicity, and religion are not barriers to achievement, a dream shared by African Americans.

We urge Jewish voters to vote with their minds as well as their hearts, and not to allow themselves to be misled by pernicious lies concerning the candidate's religious and ethnic background. We know that most American Jews realize the danger presented by such lies. The truth is that Senator

Obama is a strong friend of Israel, a position recognized by many Israeli leaders during his visits to that country. They understand that Senator Obama's foreign policy is more conducive to Israel's security than is the bellicose Bush-McCain approach. The Jewish Americans who know him best, those in the Chicago community, also count him as a longtime ally and friend. They know that the rumors that have been circulating among Jews for months – that Senator Obama is a Muslim who would be hostile to Israel and Jewish interests – are patently false attempts to play to Jewish fears.

Finally, we are concerned about the possibility that John McCain's running mate, Sarah Palin, might become president. Not only has she shown herself to be unready to take over should something happen to Senator McCain, but she shown herself to be at odds with the values of most American Jews throughout her political career: She supports the teaching of creationism in the public schools, failed to acknowledge the human role in climate change, and opposed the right to an abortion even in cases of rape or incest.

The stakes are high in this election. Hillary Clinton got it right in her convention speech: We can move forward, or we can have four more years of the disastrous Bush policies of war, economic crisis, and cronyism. We hope that Jewish Americans, and all Americans, will choose to move forward by electing Barack Obama president.

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