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**From:** Cheryl Mills <cheryl.mills [redacted]>  
**Sent:** Thursday, May 7, 2009 7:51 AM  
**To:** Cheryl Mills  
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**From:** Edward Hughes <[redacted]>  
**Date:** Wed, May 6, 2009 at 10:21 PM  
**Subject:**  
**To:** Melissa Prober [redacted], Dana Hughes [redacted]

**Obama is morphing into old rival Clinton**

By: Alex Conant

May 6, 2009

**Politico**

A year ago today, Barack Obama won the North Carolina and Indiana primaries, leading the late Tim Russert to famously declare, "We now know who the Democratic nominee will be, and nobody is going to dispute it."

Russert was right, but Hillary Clinton, nevertheless, kept campaigning for several more weeks, fueled by her supporters' convictions that her proposals were better than Obama's.

After barely 100 days in office, it now appears Obama agrees: Since taking office, he has dropped virtually every position that distinguished him from Clinton.

Granted, there were not many policy differences between Obama and Clinton during the campaign. But those that existed were sharply debated and helped Obama define himself as the pragmatic change agent that many voters now believe him to be.

Take Iraq. Obama never missed an opportunity on the campaign trail to remind Democrats that he was the sole candidate to oppose the war in 2002, and — unlike Clinton — he had a hard date for ending the war. Clinton repeatedly questioned the wisdom and sincerity of Obama's pledge to remove all combat troops from Iraq within 16 months of taking office. It was the biggest difference between the two candidates — and one of the top reasons Obama won the nomination.

Yet just weeks after entering office, Obama largely dropped his campaign plan. Rather than withdraw all combat troops on a set timeline, Obama opted for a conditions-based withdrawal that will leave as many as 50,000 troops in the war zone at the end of 2011 — exactly the sort of drawdown he maligned Clinton for proposing.

Health care is another example. While Obama was outflanking Clinton on the left on Iraq, she made up for it by criticizing his health care plan as inadequate. Both candidates claimed to support universal health care, but only Clinton's plan included a government mandate that would force all Americans to have health insurance.

Primary voters will recall Clinton and Obama endlessly debating this, with Clinton accusing Obama of leaving about 15 million people without health care and Obama warning voters that Clinton's plan would require "harsh, stiff penalties on those who don't purchase it."

Just as with Iraq, Obama is now moving toward Clinton's position. His budget outline proposes a health care plan that "must put the United States on a clear path to cover all Americans." That strongly suggests a mandate, since any volunteer system would see some opting out. As Ezra Klein reported in *The American Prospect* when the administration's health care plan began to leak out, "Despite the controversy over the individual mandate in the campaign, [Obama's team] will support it."

Some of the most significant differences between Clinton and Obama focused on governing. One of Obama's first breakthrough moments was at the YearlyKos convention in August 2007, when Clinton defended her relationships with lobbyists, saying "a lot of those lobbyists, whether you like it not, represent real Americans." Drawing a sharp contrast, Obama promised to ban anyone who had recently worked as a lobbyist from serving in his administration.

But that promise was broken even before he took office, when the president-elect chose several lobbyists for high-level posts, including deputy secretaries at the Defense and Health and Human Services departments. (Ironically, Obama even nominated a lobbyist to be an assistant secretary of state under Clinton.)

Obama's campaign also made Clinton's partisanship an issue. In a thinly veiled reference to Clinton's poor standing among Republicans, his stump speech included overt pleas for Republican support. Presenting himself as a post-partisan leader, he promised to forge a new era of bipartisanship in Washington.

As Obama confessed at his prime-time press conference last week, he's fallen short on that front, too. Since taking office, the president's agenda has been demonstrably partisan; nearly every bill he has so far signed into law passed Congress on a party-line vote. If Clinton were sitting in the Oval Office instead of Obama, it's hard to imagine how Washington would be any more partisan.

Clinton lost the battle for the Democratic nomination, but a year later, it appears her campaign has won the war of ideas within the Democratic Party.