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## ***Edwards Picked Over Obama as 'The Un-Hillary'***

*Also appeared on Democratic Underground*

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## **Former North Carolina Senator Nabs Coveted Iowa Endorsement**

**TEDDY DAVIS**

**Nov. 8, 2007—**

DES MOINES, IA -- Iowans for Sensible Priorities, a group seeking to redirect spending from the Pentagon to domestic needs, plans to endorse John Edwards Friday in Des Moines.

The decision to endorse Edwards over Illinois Sen. Barack Obama came down to "courage versus caution," according to the group's executive director.

"There's a rhetoric gap with Obama," executive director Peggy Huppert told ABC News. "He told me personally: 'Trust me. Ideologically, I'm with you.' But people have told him to be afraid of being pushed too far to the left. He doesn't bring up [cuts in Pentagon spending] on his own. He doesn't incorporate it into his speeches. He skirts around it. He talks around the edges. He never gets to the heart of it in strong, bold language."

Edwards, by contrast, won over the group with his harder edge.

He impressed the group on Oct. 26 when he demonstrated during an Iowa town-hall meeting that he would not back down in the face of Republican attacks. The day before, during an interview with a conservative talk-show host, Giuliani said that Democratic support for lower Pentagon spending showed a lack of concern for what Giuliani calls "the terrorists' war on us."

"Edwards gave an excellent answer," said Huppert. "He said we have to stop buying into their frame which equates spending money on the Pentagon with keeping us safe. He also said we can't have a Democratic candidate who cowers and runs away from this issue."

"For whatever reason," she said, "John Edwards has decided he is going to take this on and he has staked out the position quite convincingly of being the un-Hillary."

Although Clinton filled out the group's detailed policy questionnaire, she was not among the final two candidates under consideration for the endorsement.

"She didn't answer any questions 'yes' or 'no,'" said Huppert. "She has a refusal to commit to anything."

The Edwards endorsement is a blow to Bill Richardson.

The New Mexico governor has gone further than Edwards in backing specific Pentagon cuts (\$57.5 billion vs. \$31 billion); he is alone among the major candidates in promising "no residual forces" in Iraq, and he wore the group's pin and touted its work during an AARP forum held in September.

But in the end, Richardson, who lags in state polls, was snubbed because he is not viewed by the group as having a realistic chance of winning the Iowa caucuses.

The overriding goal of Sensible Priorities, a group whose logo is a pie chart showing how Pentagon spending dwarfs domestic discretionary spending, is to redirect \$60 billion in federal funds away from the Pentagon and toward education, health care, energy independence, job training and deficit reduction.

Its endorsement was coveted by the Democratic presidential hopefuls, all of who filled out the group's questionnaire, because it has found 10,000 Iowans who have signed a nonbinding pledge to caucus on behalf of the candidate endorsed by the organization.

"We're not going to change people's minds," said Huppert, referring to people who have decided to support someone other than Edwards since filling out a Sensible Priorities pledge card. "But we hope to shore up support for Edwards and to be a tipping point for people who are still undecided."

The names given by 28 percent of the 10,000 "pledgers" are exact matches with Iowans who have participated in previous Democratic caucuses.

Due to the organization's legal status, Sensible Priorities is not permitted to provide its list of pledgers to the Edwards campaign. But the group plans to communicate with its pledgers by phone and possibly by mail about the decision to endorse Edwards.

The way Huppert sees it, both Edwards and Obama want to be "the un-Hillary," but they are approaching that task with radically different approaches: While Obama is promoting consensus and reconciliation, Edwards is selling confrontation and a day of reckoning.

Asked if she is looking for a fight, Huppert shot back, "I think it's going to take a fight."

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