

Don't expect Gore on campaign trail

By: [David Paul Kuhn](#)

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Despite Al Gore's choreographed endorsement of Barack Obama on Monday, top Democratic strategists don't expect the 2000 Democratic nominee will risk his environmental agenda by campaigning vigorously in this year's presidential race.

They note that the new Gore — Nobel laureate, documentarian, globe-trotting advocate for environmental issues — has in recent years shied away from more partisan domestic debates.

"[Gore] is not wholly going to abandon his profile as a Democrat, but he also has his advocacy and citizen-of-the-world stature to take into account," said a Gore confidant, who spoke on the condition of anonymity. "He's trying to weigh all of these things because he understands the importance of the White House in solving some of these climate crisis issues, and there is a difference between the candidates on that issue."

Those closest to the former vice president also suggest that he may have exhausted his interest in campaign politics, which would explain his change in direction from the 2004 general election, when he made several fiery speeches lambasting the Bush administration.

Gore regularly turns down requests to raise money for the national Democratic Party as well as for gubernatorial and congressional candidates — more indicators that he may be reluctant to return to the partisan rough-and-tumble.

"If Gore had wanted influence with Obama, he would have endorsed him during the primary," said a former adviser to Bill Clinton. "I don't think there are also any hard feelings between Obama and Gore. But I don't think Obama is thinking that 'Al Gore was there for me when I needed him in the way that Bill Richardson was.'"

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The former Clinton adviser speculated that Gore's decision not to endorse Obama during the primary may have been an indication Gore did not wish to further aggravate a cool relationship with the Clintons.

"Gore has effectively become an environmentalist who used to be in politics," said Doug Schoen, who served as Bill Clinton's pollster and adviser. "My sense is that Gore sees himself now as almost above politics, and I don't believe Gore, for his own reasons, wants to be seen as a harshly partisan figure."

Though Gore delivered a hearty endorsement of Obama before some 20,000 roaring supporters, he also attempted to calm the partisan crowd as many booed mention of presumptive Republican nominee John McCain.

"There were a couple of times in the night when everything was choreographed, tape all

around, walking through smelly kitchens — I didn't get the sense he missed it," said Carter Eskew, speaking from Gore's Nashville, Tenn., home less than a day after Gore announced his support for Obama. Eskew was Gore's chief strategist in 2000 and traveled with him to Michigan for the endorsement.

"He's in a different place now, having won the Nobel Peace Prize, than after having served as vice president," Eskew continued. "I don't think that he is at the same sort of partisan level."

It's not entirely clear whether Gore would be a tremendous asset for Obama, anyway. The Democratic strategists interviewed for this story didn't believe Gore could do much to affect the outcome.

"The voters that Gore is more likely to appeal to are the ones that are with Barack Obama already," said Schoen. "If you look at border states, Al Gore didn't win them, and his constituencies are not the working-class whites that Obama needs."

But Gore's 2000 campaign manager Donna Brazile believes that he would be helpful in "consolidating the party's base." She added that Gore would be a top party surrogate, particularly as Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.) recovers from surgery to remove part of a cancerous brain tumor.

"He's going to do enormous good with the base. And to the extent people are worried about Obama's inexperience, having Gore may help," said Elaine Kamarck, a Harvard professor of government who served as a senior policy adviser to Gore. "Gore, unlike [Bill] Clinton, has certainly enhanced his post-administration reputation."

A Democrat close to Gore said the Obama campaign has not asked Gore to take an active role in fundraising or on television or even in conference calls with reporters, as 2004 Democratic nominee John F. Kerry has.

Obama spokesman Bill Burton said simply, "As a candidate, Obama appreciates any help that Gore is willing to provide."

"As president, Barack Obama will be counting on Al Gore to help him lead the fight for a clean energy future here in America and around the globe," he said.