

THE Nation.

Most Valuable Progressives of 2008

By John Nichols

Progressives had more to celebrate in 2008 than in any year since the Supreme Court got into the business of stealing elections. The jubilant mood is dampened, of course, by the fact of a country is stuck in two military quagmires, ravaged by the most fearsome economic downturn in at least a half century and suffering from a serious case of Constitutional degeneration. Perhaps we have not yet reached an ideal champagne moment. But there is still good reason to toast the year's MVPs – Most Valuable Progressives.

MOST VALUABLE POLITICAL GROUP: Progressive Democrats of America

Paul Wellstone's "Democratic Wing of the Democratic Party" finally has a functional voice, in the form of PDA, a national group that has over the past several years struggled mightily — and often effectively — to pull the party to the left on issues of war and peace, health-care reform, economic justice and presidential accountability. While Democratic "leaders" in Washington compromised on matters of principle, PDA pushed for a fixed timeline for the withdrawal of troops from Iraq, questioned Barack Obama's talk of surging more U.S. troops into Afghanistan, worked with Michigan Congressman John Conyers to promote a single-payer response to the health-care crisis and argued that, yes, George Bush and Dick Cheney should be impeached. When Obama secured the Democratic presidential nod, PDA forged an essential bridge to independent lefties, mounting a Progressives for

Obama campaign, successfully pressuring party platform writers to improve language on health care and trade issues and organizing (with support from The Nation) a busy program of policy events on the fringe of the Democratic National Convention in Denver. In a measure of the PDA's expanding role within the party, those convention sessions attracted a dozen key members of Congress including Conyers and House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, D-Maryland, the Rev. Jesse Jackson, actor Sean Penn and dozens of delegates. As 2008 ended, PDA was still taking on the most daunting issues—urging Obama and other Democrats to do more to promote a ceasefire in Gaza—and proving that this group understands the importance of keeping the pressure on party leaders in Washington to serve not just as Democrats but as progressives.