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Independence a good value to have in our politicians

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It's been a good year for candidates running as "independent" voices for their state or district. The trend started with Scott Brown in January, as he campaigned for the United States Senate promising to make his decisions based on what is best for Massachusetts rather than be beholden to one party or point of view.

Nearly six months into his Senate tenure, few can argue that he has been beholden to the Republican leadership in Washington, D.C. In fact, he has drawn fire from conservatives for his willingness to work with President Obama and the Democratic leadership on certain issues. Regardless of what you think of senator Brown, he appears to be blazing his own path.

In Arkansas, there is another example of a politician who has bucked party leadership. On June 8th, incumbent Democratic senator Blanche Lincoln nearly lost her primary to lieutenant governor Bill Halter. Lincoln had come under fire from the Democratic Party and organized labor for opposing to the so-called "Employee Free Choice Act" (EFCA) and President Obama's health care plan. She so inflamed the Arkansas labor unions that several news outlets estimated they spent as much as \$10 million in a failed effort to defeat her.

In April 2009, before the death of senator Kennedy and Scott Brown's election, Democrats had a filibuster-proof 60 members in the Senate. When Lincoln announced her opposition to EFCA, she all but ended any chance the bill had of passing, leaving Democrats one vote short of being able to break a Republican filibuster. Combined with several other positions she took that were not in lock step with the Democratic Party, Lincoln soon found herself fighting for her political life. In the end, she won 52% - 48%, but still faces Republican opposition in November.

Being a leader is not always about seeking compromise or avoiding conflict. The 4th of July is a reminder that were it not for the political and moral courage of America's founding fathers, we would not have won our independence from England. As another Independence Day passes us by, I am heartened by the independence shown by senators Brown and Lincoln. America would be well served to have more politicians willing to stand up for what they believe in, regardless of party affiliation.

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