

When Rupert met Hillary

The media baron Rupert Murdoch is to host a political fund-raiser for America's liberal pin-up, senator Hillary Clinton, the biggest step yet in an unlikely political reconciliation between the former enemies.

Reports suggest that Murdoch, an American citizen for 20 years, will organise the event within the next two months.

The decision marks an abrupt change for Murdoch, whose combative *New York Post* tabloid assailed Clinton during her successful run for the US Senate in 2000. His enormously influential Fox News channel was once described by Clinton as part of a "vast right-wing conspiracy".

But with Clinton moderating many of her positions as she considers a run for the presidency in 2008, and with the Republicans taking a hammering in the polls, the time appears ripe for reconciliation. Funds from the event would go to Clinton's already swollen Senate re-election war-chest, which

Hillary Clinton once described Rupert Murdoch's news network as part of a vast right-wing conspiracy. Now he's hosting a fund-raising event for her. Is he ready to back her for the White House? **Francis Harris** reports.

has now reached \$US20 million (\$26 million). That is far larger than any other re-election campaign fund, stoking the widespread belief that a presidential bid is planned.

A figure involved in the event told the *Financial Times* that Murdoch was backing her for the Senate, not the presidency. "They have a respectful and cordial relationship... I wouldn't say it was illustrative of a close ongoing relationship. It is not like they are dining out together."

Even so, the decision will be seen as a major step towards an endorsement for the presidency. Murdoch's outlets do not have the same clout in America as in Britain, but he is nonetheless a famous and influential figure.

The move will worry Republican strategists,

who paint Clinton as a far-left figure, out of touch with the American heartland.

That will prove a difficult message to project if she has the backing of such a prominent right-winger.

The news will also be received with hostility on the American left, where many believe Clinton's gradual shift to the political centre is a betrayal of her role as an uncompromising liberal.

The New York senator has repositioned herself on a range of critical issues. She voted for the Iraq war and insists troops must remain for now, she has described herself as "a praying person" and has denounced abortion as a "sad, even tragic choice to many, many women". Teenage pregnancy

rates might be cut by young people accepting "religious and moral values", she has suggested.

Such statements led New York's left-wing *Village Voice* to suggest that she was "trying to sound like the second coming of John Wesley".

Clinton aides said that they ran two elections during her run for the Senate in 2000 — one against the Republicans and one against Mr Murdoch's *Post*.

One analysis showed the paper ran 212 hostile opinion pieces about Clinton, 17 neutral and seven positive.

But when Clinton backed a robust military response to the attacks of September 11, the *Post*'s criticism moderated.

In recent years, former US president Bill Clinton has also developed a close relationship with Murdoch. Later this month, he will address Fox News executives at the media magnate's invitation.

The Daily Telegraph, London