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Speaking of contenders for vice president ...

Governor Chides McCain on Russia

Says U.S. should not isolate country

By Michael Coleman Journal Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — Gov. Bill Richardson criticized Sen. John McCain's position on U.S.-Russian relations Sunday and told a national television audience that he was happy to help Sen. Hillary Clinton erase her multi-million-dollar presidential campaign debt in New Mexico.

Richardson, appearing from Santa Fe on CNN's Late Edition with Wolf Blitzer, spoke about the Russian-Georgian conflict before explaining his decision to headline fundraisers for Clinton in Albuquerque and Santa Fe on Sunday.

Richardson told Blitzer he agreed with McCain, the presumptive Republican presidential candidate, that "there should be consequences for what Russia has done" militarily in Georgia, but that he doesn't advocate isolating the former superpower.

"Senator McCain wants to isolate Russia," said Richardson, who has frequently been mentioned as a potential vice president or secretary of state in a Barack Obama White House. "That's the last thing we need to do. We need to engage them."

Richardson, a former United Nations ambassador and U.S. energy secretary, said the United States' "intensive preoccupation" with Iraq has led it to neglect Russia, despite needing the country's help on some thorny international issues. He said the U.S. should stand firm in its support for Georgia, but without shutting off diplomacy with Russia.

"What we need is an aggressive engagement relationship with Russia with a lot of skepticism," Richardson said. "Russia is important if we're going to deter Iran from building nuclear weapons. We need Russia in the fight against global terrorism ... and we want Russia to do something about loose nuclear weapons, nuclear proliferation.

"Senator McCain — you know he's making a lot of rhetorical, bellicose statements, but without any specific policy," Richardson added. "If you isolate Russia, there's going to be more moves there towards radicalism, towards resentment."

Turning toward the fundraisers for Clinton in New Mexico on Sunday, Richardson barely acknowledged the high-profile falling-out he had with Clinton when he decided to endorse Obama's presidential bid earlier this year.

"It's not a question of making up," with Clinton, Richardson said, referring to his decision to host the fundraisers. "Sen. Obama wants the party united. I want the party united. The Clintons have been longtime allies of mine. I know what it is to have a presidential debt. I have one myself."

Richardson made special note of a rally for Obama in "Hispanic northern New Mexico, where (Clinton)

was very strong.”

Richardson also said after some initial reservations, he is now “comfortable” that Clinton’s name will be put in nomination at the national convention in Denver later this month.

“It’s going to be placed in nomination in recognition of the 18 million votes that she got — her historic candidacy,” Richardson said. “But then she is going to pledge her delegates to Senator Obama so that it’s a unanimous — a unanimous election. That — that gives me comfort.

“Until that had been worked out, I was a little uneasy about there being just a roll call without any transference of that support to Senator Obama,” Richardson added.



RICHARDSON: Will help raise funds for Hillary Clinton