

Obama, Clinton admit primaries may not settle nomination fight

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18 February 2008

Spokesmen for Democratic presidential candidates Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton have conceded that the 17 remaining state primaries and caucuses, being held from February 19 through June 7, may not give either candidate a majority in the contest for the Democratic presidential nomination.

Obama leads Clinton narrowly, by 1,280 delegates to 1,212, according to a tally conducted by the Associated Press. The tallies by the rival campaigns give similar figures. With a little over 1,000 more delegates remaining to be selected in the primaries and caucuses, either Clinton or Obama would have to win 75-80 percent to achieve the 2,025 required to secure the nomination.

Obama is favored to win the Wisconsin primary and the Hawaii caucuses on February 19, after which there is a two-week interval before potentially decisive primaries in Ohio, Texas, Rhode Island and Vermont on March 4. Clinton leads in the polls in several of those states, but by a margin that seems to be eroding rapidly.

Obama was endorsed Friday by two of the largest newspapers in those states, the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, in Wisconsin, and the *Houston Chronicle*, in Texas. He also received endorsements from two large unions with tens of thousands of members in Ohio and Texas, the Service Employees International Union and the United Food and Commercial Workers.

The Clinton campaign, meanwhile, was visibly struggling in Wisconsin, canceling all but one candidate appearance on Monday. As she did in many of her previous primary defeats, Clinton will leave the state before voting actually begins and will not rally with campaign supporters as the returns come in.

Even if Clinton succeeds in winning the three large-state primaries that remain—Ohio and Texas on March

4, and Pennsylvania on April 22—Obama is considered likely to emerge with a lead of perhaps 100 delegates.

This would leave the final decision in the hands of so-called superdelegates, the 795 people who are automatic delegates thanks to their holding current or past elective office, or membership in the Democratic National Committee. About 400 of these delegates have publicly committed themselves to Obama or Clinton, a majority of them for Clinton.

The remaining delegates—as well as any of those committed who decide to change their minds—could have decisive weight in the contest. Most of them are members of the DNC or the chairmen of state Democratic parties, part of the Democratic Party apparatus concerned primarily about the assistance that the presidential candidate could provide in winning local, state and congressional offices.

The Clinton campaign rejected suggestions by Obama that superdelegates should vote according to the popular vote either in their states or nationwide, arguing that they were free to vote as they please. Clinton spokesman Howard Wolfson said that both campaigns would have to rely on superdelegates to win the nomination, and that Clinton would seek the support of superdelegates aggressively regardless of the outcome of the remaining primaries.

The most likely scenario for a Clinton victory depends on achieving a sufficiently large majority among the superdelegates to overturn Obama's margin among the pledged delegates. This edge would then allow Clinton's forces to control the credentials committee at the Democratic National Convention in August and approve the seating of delegates from two states, Michigan and Florida, which were stripped of their votes for violating national Democratic Party rules by moving their primaries up to January.

While the Obama campaign has sought, in effect, to change the rules on superdelegates, making their votes depend on the outcome in their states or congressional districts, the Clinton campaign is seeking to change the rules on Michigan and Florida, because Mrs. Clinton needs the delegates.

Clinton won both primaries, defeating an uncommitted slate in Michigan, where Obama was not even on the ballot, and defeating Obama and Edwards in Florida, where none of the candidates campaigned. If delegations are seated according to the primary results, Clinton would stand to get a sizeable majority of the 366 delegates the two states were entitled to.

Much of the Democratic Party establishment fears that a Clinton victory through maneuvers with superdelegates and rules changes on Michigan and Florida would create explosive conditions on the floor of the national convention and discredit the entire process. There has been open discussion of the precedent of the 1968 Democratic convention in Chicago, where police violence against antiwar demonstrators outside the convention and crass antidemocratic maneuvers inside produced a political debacle and contributed to the defeat of the eventual nominee, Hubert Humphrey.

A key group of superdelegates is being organized to try to forestall such an eventuality. According to press reports over the weekend, former vice president Al Gore, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and three former candidates in the current contest, Senator Joseph Biden, Governor Bill Richardson of New Mexico and former senator John Edwards, have held talks on the danger of allowing the nomination fight to continue into August.

None of the five has yet sided with either campaign, although Pelosi's closest supporters in the House have largely backed Obama. Pelosi intervened in the nomination contest for the first time Thursday, with a statement backing the position adopted by the Obama campaign on the two contentious procedural issues: the role of the superdelegates, and the seating of delegations from Michigan and Florida.

Arguing that the superdelegates should go with the candidate winning the most delegates in the primaries and caucuses, Pelosi said, "I don't think it was ever intended that the superdelegates would overturn the verdict, the decision of the American people. It would be a problem for the party if the verdict would be

something different than the public has decided."

Pelosi added that there should be no allocation of Michigan and Florida delegates based on the primary results, since that would unfairly penalize Obama for complying with the rules established by the DNC. "We can't ignore the rules which everyone else played by," she said. Some Florida and Michigan party officials have suggested seating delegations split 50-50 between the two candidates, a measure adamantly opposed, for obvious reason, by the Clinton campaign.

Pelosi will serve as the permanent chair of the national convention, giving her a potentially decisive role in the event that these procedural questions become critical.

Both campaigns are now engaged in a ferocious struggle for support among the uncommitted superdelegates, as well as attempting to poach those who have already committed themselves to the rival campaign. A particular media focus is on members of the Congressional Black Caucus, half of whom enlisted in the Clinton campaign last year, when she was the clear frontrunner. A prominent leader of the CBC, Representative John Lewis of Georgia, told the *New York Times* Thursday he was rethinking his position in the wake of Obama's 3-1 victory among voters in his congressional district.



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