“Super Tuesday” primaries leave Democratic presidential contest unresolved

Patrick Martin
6 February 2008

Primary elections and party caucuses in 22 states Tuesday left the Democratic presidential nomination contest unresolved. Senator Hillary Clinton barely retained a narrow lead over Senator Barack Obama, winning the primary vote in California, the largest state.

In the Republican contests in 21 states, Senator John McCain opened up a significant lead over his two rivals, former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney and former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee, with California giving him a potentially decisive victory.

As of this posting, no estimate was possible of the total number of convention delegates won by each of the five major candidates, because many of them are apportioned on the basis of the vote in congressional districts, not statewide. Half of all the convention delegates were at issue in the voting.

Clinton won eight of the 22 Democratic contests, including the two largest, New York and California, while Obama won 13. Results in New Mexico have not yet been reported.

Besides California and New York, Clinton’s most significant victory came in Massachusetts, where Obama had been endorsed by senators Edward Kennedy and John Kerry and Governor Deval Patrick.

Obama won his home state of Illinois, as well as Connecticut, Missouri, the southern states of Georgia and Alabama, and all the states holding caucuses rather then primaries, where he was able to mobilize more support among the smaller numbers of people able to devote several hours of their day to the nominating process.

California sends 440 delegates to the Democratic National Convention, more than 10 percent of the total, and Clinton and Obama are likely to split them nearly evenly because of proportional representation. The other seven states won by Clinton account for 774 delegates, while the 13 states where Obama won account for 838 delegates.

The outlook in the Democratic contest is for a campaign that extends for at least another month. The next major primary day is February 12, in Virginia, Maryland and the District of Columbia, with Obama heavily favored in all three contests.

Clinton campaign officials indicated Tuesday that they expected Obama to close the gap in delegates during the remaining February contests, which also include Louisiana, Wisconsin and Washington state. They said they hoped to regain the lead when two of the three remaining large states, Ohio and Texas, hold primary votes on March 4.

Obama has pulled ahead of Clinton in both campaign fundraising and media and political endorsements. In January, his campaign collected $32 million in contributions, compared to only $13 million for Clinton, a clear sign that corporate America regards him as a reliable guarantor of their interests.

The final decision on the Democratic nomination may well be made by the 800 unelected “super delegates”—congressmen, governors, mayors and members of the Democratic National Committee—who will cast 20 percent of the votes at the convention.

The run-up to the Tuesday primaries and caucuses saw a series of large rallies for Obama, with a heavy turnout particularly among young people. Obama won five of the six states where these rallies took place.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* has explained (see: “US political establishment lines up behind Barack Obama”), the Obama phenomenon is the product of the alignment of two quite distinct processes.

A section of the political establishment is attempting to alter the world image of the United States, after eight

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disastrous years of the Bush administration, and make certain limited shifts in policy. Obama is seen as a useful tool in altering the image of the United States around the world. Hence the clear media bias in his favor in recent weeks.

This has intersected with the genuine desire among large sections of the population for a significant change in domestic and foreign policy. At present, this sentiment finds expression in an undefined and vague call for “change,” focused on the personage of Obama, a political unknown only four years ago who would be the first African-American president.

If Obama should win the nomination and the presidency, it would not be long before he betrayed these politically naïve expectations and hopes. Indeed, if he emerges over the next month as the presumptive nominee, he will likely be called on by the ruling elite to pick a right-wing running mate with close ties to the military-intelligence apparatus.

The huge increase in turnout in the Democratic primaries and caucuses is another indicator of the popular desire for change. Far more voters participated in the Democratic contests than on the Republican side, and in some of the largest states, including New York, Illinois and California, the combined vote of the two Democratic candidates was double that of the three Republicans.

The Republican contest, while evidently closer to resolution, could well plunge the party into deep political crisis. McCain owed his substantial victory to states like New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Illinois and California, which the Republican Party has lost in the last four presidential elections.

Among the 13 states won by Bush in 2004 that held Super Tuesday contests, McCain won only three, one of them his home state of Arizona. Huckabee and Romney won five apiece. In many of these states, the winner received less than 40 percent of the vote, as the Republican electorate fractured into three roughly equal parts.

The Christian fundamentalist and extreme-right elements that largely comprise the activist base of the Republican Party are deeply hostile to McCain, but split their votes between Huckabee, a Baptist minister before he became governor of Arkansas, and Romney, a multi-millionaire venture capitalist whose Mormon religion is anathema to many evangelical Christians.

The tensions within the Republican Party have been voiced most openly by radio talk show hosts like Rush Limbaugh, who have fulminated against McCain and denounced his prospective nomination as the destruction of the party.

As of this posting, Romney aides were telling the press that on Wednesday his campaign would be discussing “hard decisions,” leading to widespread speculation that the former Massachusetts governor would suspend his campaign or pull out of the race altogether, an action that would effectively concede the nomination to McCain.

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