

Clinton campaign in crisis after Obama sweeps five weekend contests

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Illinois Senator Barack Obama won the Louisiana primary, state caucuses in Washington state, Nebraska and Maine and a caucus in the US Virgin Islands last weekend, putting him in a virtual tie with Senator Hillary Clinton in terms of delegate support, with the likelihood that Tuesday's three primaries in Virginia, Maryland and Washington, DC would give him a significant lead for the first time in the contest for the Democratic presidential nomination.

Obama had been favored to win the five contests, but his margin of victory, particularly in the caucus states, was far greater than predicted, buoyed by record high turnouts, especially among young people. Particularly disturbing to the Clinton campaign was the outcome in Maine, which held Democratic caucuses Sunday. Maine was the one state out of the ten holding caucuses and primaries between February 5 and March 4 where Clinton had been considered a likely victor, but Obama won by 59 to 40 percent.

Even before the final totals had been reported in Maine, Clinton campaign manager Patti Solis Doyle announced that she was resigning, to be replaced by Maggie Williams, the former chief of staff for Hillary Clinton as First Lady during her husband's administration. Doyle remains with the campaign as an adviser traveling with the candidate.

The shakeup in the organization was presaged a month ago, after Clinton's upset defeat by Obama in the Iowa caucuses. At that point Williams joined the campaign as an unpaid adviser, and there were rumors she would replace Solis Doyle, but the move was put on hold after Clinton won the New Hampshire primary and seemed to regain her lead in the contest overall.

There are no visible policy issues in the replacement of one longtime Clinton loyalist by another, but some press reports spoke of bitter infighting over weak fundraising results and overspending in some early caucus and primary states, which left the Clinton campaign nearly broke after the February 5 Super Tuesday contests. Doyle had expected the nomination fight to be concluded by that date and budgeted accordingly.

The *Chicago Tribune* cited unnamed Clinton campaign insiders for its report that Solis Doyle had concealed from Mrs. Clinton that there was no money in the treasury, while Clinton kept her campaign manager in the dark about her decision to borrow \$5 million of her own money to keep the campaign afloat. "The cash on hand was nothing," the *Tribune* reported.

As a result of the financial crunch—exacerbated by reports of a flood of new cash for the Obama campaign, much of it from Internet fundraising—the Clinton campaign was heavily outspent in all of the weekend caucus and primary states.

Conceding that Obama will be significantly ahead in the delegate

count when the February primaries conclude in Wisconsin next Tuesday, Clinton spokesman Howard Wolfson told reporters that her campaign expected to retake the lead when primary elections are held March 4 in Ohio, Texas, Rhode Island and Vermont, choosing 370 delegates.

In Louisiana's primary, held Saturday, Obama led Clinton by 58 percent to 36 percent, thanks to a huge margin among black voters, who comprised half of those casting ballots. The Louisiana primary was by far the most racially polarized of any contest in the southern states, with Clinton winning 70 percent of white voters and Obama 90 percent of black voters, according to exit polls.

The wide margin for Obama in Louisiana came despite the fact that hundreds of thousands of New Orleans-area residents are still displaced by Hurricane Katrina and unable to vote. Voter turnout was much higher in the northern half of the state, which suffered far less from the two giant hurricanes that struck in 2005, Katrina and Rita. More voters actually went to the polls in Baton Rouge than in New Orleans, although pre-Katrina New Orleans had twice the population of the state capital.

Obama piled up huge margins in both cities, more than Clinton's edge in the rural "red clay" counties. Overall, he carried 44 of the state's 64 parishes (counties). Clinton had essentially conceded the Louisiana to Obama, pulling her campaign television advertising and not even visiting the state before the primary, focusing on Washington, Maine and the two states with primaries February 12, Maryland and Virginia.

In the two caucus states voting Saturday, Washington and Nebraska, Obama won by even larger margins than in Louisiana, 69 to 31 percent in Washington and 68 to 32 percent in Nebraska. Obama also prevailed, by a margin of better than five to one, in Saturday's caucuses in the Virgin Islands, a US territory in the Caribbean whose residents cannot vote in presidential elections, but can participate in the Democratic nomination contest.

In Nebraska, a Republican state in presidential elections, Obama posted his largest margin, 77 to 23 percent in the 2nd congressional district, which includes Omaha and the state's only significant black population. But he carried the state's two other congressional districts as well, including the heavily rural and nearly all-white 3rd District. In the 1st district, which includes Lincoln, home to the University of Nebraska, Obama won by a margin of 65 to 34 percent. Of the 10,000 who participated in caucuses in Lincoln, 1,500 registered to vote for the first time as they went in to the caucus sites.

Obama's margin in Washington state, which had the largest bloc of delegates at stake, was equally decisive. He won by 72 to 27 percent in King County (Seattle) and carried 37 out of 38 counties overall.

Voter participation in the Democratic contests dwarfed that on the Republican side, a feature of nearly every one of the primaries and caucuses conducted so far this year. Turnout doubled in Washington state, to nearly 200,000, compared to the record turnout in 2004.

In Louisiana, the total Democratic vote was 381,888 compared to 158,784 in the Republican primary, won narrowly by former Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee over the presumptive Republican nominee, Senator John McCain of Arizona. Obama alone received more votes than all the Republican candidates combined, although Republican presidential candidates have carried Louisiana in six of the last seven elections.

Of the 185 delegates at stake in the five weekend votes, Obama's campaign claimed to have secured 118, compared to 67 for Clinton. Since proportional representation applies in all Democratic primaries and caucuses, the defeated candidate still receives a significant number of delegates.

The weekend's results put Obama's total of pledged delegates at 970 compared to Clinton's 894, according to a tally by the Associated Press. Clinton still has narrow overall lead counting so-called super-delegates, who have a vote at the convention due to their holding elective or party office and are not bound by primary or caucus results. About half of the 796 super-delegates have publicly declared their support for Clinton or Obama. Including those, Clinton's total is 1,135 to 1,106 for Obama, according to the AP.

Both campaigns are wooing the erstwhile third-place finisher in the Democratic contest, former North Carolina senator John Edwards, who dropped out of the race in late January and has made no endorsement. Edwards controls 40 delegates pledged to vote for him, based on his showing in Iowa, New Hampshire and South Carolina. Clinton held an unannounced meeting with Edwards last Thursday, while Obama was to meet with him Monday night to seek his support.

Obama is heavily favored in the February 12 primaries in Maryland, Virginia and Washington DC, where another 175 delegates will be chosen. He was conceded the nation's capital, which is majority black, and had 20-percentage-point leads in opinion polls in the two neighboring states. While there are conflicting estimates of current delegate totals, there is general agreement among media and Democratic Party analysts that Obama will have the lead after February 12.

Obama continues to lead Clinton in fundraising and the ability to draw large crowds. Some 10,000 people jammed a civic center in Bangor, Maine Saturday, more than the hall's capacity. Clinton spoke to a smaller and older audience in Orono the same day. On Sunday Obama addressed a campaign rally in Virginia Beach, Virginia, attended by an estimated 18,000 people.

Both candidates addressed the Virginia Democratic Party's Jefferson-Jackson Day dinner in Richmond Saturday night, attended by a record 6,000 people. Obama celebrated his three victories in that day's balloting, and had a clear majority of supporters in the audience.

Both candidates struck a relatively "left" pose in their addresses to the Richmond dinner, focusing their attacks on President Bush and likely Republican candidate McCain and saying little about each other.

Obama said of McCain, "He speaks of a hundred-year war in Iraq and sees another on the horizon with Iran. He once opposed George Bush's tax cuts for the wealthiest few who don't need them and didn't ask for them. He said they were too expensive and unwise. And he was absolutely right. But somewhere along the line, the wheels

came off the Straight Talk Express, because he now supports the very same tax cuts he voted against."

Clinton said that McCain represented "more of the same," essentially a third term for the Bush administration. "We have tried it President Bush's way: concentrate wealth, hoard power, disregard science, shred the Constitution, smear dissenters, impugn patriots."

While both candidates claimed to represent consistent opposition to the Bush administration, they spoke only one day after the Democratic-controlled Congress voted overwhelmingly—including by 81-16 in the Senate—in favor of the economic stimulus plan introduced by the Bush administration, which provides no assistance to the unemployed or those hit by huge heating bills.

As he has collected more endorsements from top Democratic office-holders, Obama has begun to voice more directly the longstanding grievances of sections of the Democratic Party establishment against Bill Clinton's performance in the White House, particularly his failure to assist Democratic congressional candidates after the Republicans won control of Congress in 1994.

In response to a question at a campaign rally in the Virginia suburbs of Washington DC, Obama praised Clinton as "a vast improvement over the incumbent," but added, "Senator Clinton starts off with 47 percent of the country against her. That's a hard place to start." He continued, "Keep in mind, we had Bill Clinton as president when, in '94, we lost the House, we lost the Senate, we lost governorships, we lost state houses. And so, regardless of what policies they wanted to promote, they didn't have a working majority to bring change about."

Sunday also saw the first public comments on the Democratic nomination contest from President Bush and his former secretary of state, Colin Powell, who came down on opposite sides. Bush, in an interview on Fox, praised Bill and Hillary Clinton and went out of his way to criticize Obama for his suggestion that he would rely more on diplomacy in foreign policy.

"I certainly don't know what he believes in," Bush said. "The only foreign policy thing I remember he said was he's going to attack Pakistan and embrace Ahmadinejad." This was a garbled reference to Obama's statement that he would meet with the Iranian president (and to his support for military strikes against Taliban or Al Qaeda sites inside Pakistan).

Bush seemed to be debating with Powell, who gave an interview to CNN Friday night that was reported at the time and then broadcast Sunday night. Powell praised Clinton, Obama and John McCain, but refused to commit himself to vote for the Republican candidate. He described Obama as "an exciting person on the political stage," adding that "he has energized a lot of people around the world."

Powell specifically endorsed Obama's call for opening direct US talks with Iran, for which Clinton as well as Bush have criticized him. "You have to talk to folks that you may not necessarily like, and you can't put down impossible preconditions for conversations," Powell said. "You can't say, 'Give me what I want before I will talk to you.' That doesn't work. It won't work with Syria; it won't work with Iran."



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