

Clinton wins West Virginia primary but Obama nears nomination

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Senator Hillary Clinton won the West Virginia Democratic primary Tuesday by a huge margin over the front-running Democratic presidential candidate, Senator Barack Obama. Nevertheless, Democratic Party leaders and superdelegates continued to shift to Obama, including, most notably, former senator John Edwards, who dropped out of the Democratic presidential contest in late January.

Clinton won 20 delegates in West Virginia compared to eight for Obama, for a net gain of 12. Obama's gain of 24 superdelegates over the past week more than offset West Virginia, and Edwards's endorsement, delivered at a campaign rally Wednesday in Grand Rapids, Michigan, likely means that another 19 delegates won by Edwards in Iowa, New Hampshire and South Carolina will now switch to Obama.

With four states and Puerto Rico still to vote, Obama has won 30 states to Clinton's 14, and leads her by a margin of about 170 delegates. (This does not count Michigan and Florida, whose primaries were declared invalid by the Democratic National Committee because their dates were moved up in violation of party rules). One published delegate count put the totals at Obama with 1,882 and Clinton with 1,714. With additional superdelegates and the 19 delegates pledged to Edwards, Obama was estimated to be within 100 of the 2,025 delegates required for the nomination.

On Monday and Tuesday alone, Obama collected an additional eight superdelegates to Clinton's one, as the steady drift of support in his direction from the party establishment continued. Among those endorsing Obama were Roy Romer, the former governor of Colorado, who was at one time named general chairman of the Democratic Party by Bill Clinton, as well as one senator, one congressman and the president and vice president of College Democrats of America.

NARAL Pro-Choice America, an abortion rights advocacy group with longstanding ties to Clinton, announced Wednesday that its political action committee was endorsing Obama on the grounds that that it believed he would be the Democratic nominee.

Even the longtime Clinton political aide James Carville conceded that Obama was the likely nominee, telling the *New York Times*, "I would have preferred another result, but I'm going to be for him."

In her West Virginia victory, Clinton swept every county in the state and rolled up a margin of 65 percent to 27 percent over Obama, who made only one four-hour appearance in the state, essentially conceding the primary. The vast majority of voters were from the demographic that has favored Clinton in previous eastern and Midwest industrial states: older white voters, particularly women, and the non-college-educated.

Because of the long-term collapse of state's principal industry, coal mining, two generations of young people have left the state to find work elsewhere, and West Virginia's population has shrunk to the point where it has only three congressional districts, compared to six when John F. Kennedy won the primary victory over Hubert Humphrey in 1960 that propelled him to the Democratic presidential nomination.

In her victory speech in Charleston, Clinton labored to extract a winning message out of the unforgiving electoral arithmetic. She cited victories in such "swing" states as Ohio, Pennsylvania, Arkansas, New Hampshire and West Virginia. "The White House is won in the swing states, and I am winning the swing states," she said.

At the same time, unlike previous victory or concession speeches, she made no criticism whatsoever of her primary opponent and even declared, "I deeply

admire Senator Obama... And I will work my heart out for the nominee of the Democratic Party to make sure we have a Democratic president.”

In an interview with CNN Wednesday, Clinton responded directly to the suggestion that many, or even a majority, of her supporters might vote for Republican John McCain if Obama becomes the Democratic nominee. “I’m going to do everything I can to make sure that anyone who supported me... understands what a grave error it would be not to vote for Sen. Obama,” she said.

Clinton also expressed regret for saying during an interview last week with *USA Today* that “Senator Obama’s support among working, hard-working Americans, white Americans, is weakening.” The remark was widely denounced in Democratic Party circles for its racial overtones.

New York Congressman Charles Rangel, a longtime Clinton supporter, said the comment “was the dumbest thing she could have said.” Asked to respond Wednesday, Clinton said, “He’s probably right.”

Clinton sidestepped a question about taking the second spot as Obama’s vice-presidential running mate, but clearly left the door open. One of her strongest backers, Pennsylvania Governor Edward Rendell, told the press that to make peace with the pro-Clinton wing of the party, Obama should take Clinton as the vice-presidential candidate, rather than offer the position to a Clinton supporter like himself.

The Clinton-Obama contest has opened up significant fault lines of race, gender and generation within the Democratic Party, but the ultimate source of the divisions is the conflict over foreign and domestic policy within the US ruling elite, particularly over how to deal with the consequences of the Bush administration’s debacle in Iraq—for which Clinton, as an early supporter of the war, is deemed by her critics in the Democratic Party leadership to share responsibility.

This does not preclude an Obama-Clinton rapprochement in the event Obama clinches the nomination next week, or a joint Obama-Clinton ticket in the general election.

What is most significant about the current stage of the nomination contest is the rallying of major sections of the business and financial elite behind Obama, and more generally, behind the Democratic Party. With the

eruption of a major financial crisis in the United States, there is considerable concern in these circles over the potential for mass social struggles emerging in the United States—and hence the need for the populist demagoguery that the Democratic Party specializes in, to divert such struggles away from any challenge to the profit system.

As the West Virginia voting was being conducted, the Obama campaign released a statement by three former chairmen of the Securities and Exchange Commission—William Donaldson, appointed by George W. Bush; Arthur Levitt, who served under Bill Clinton; and David Ruder, appointed by Ronald Reagan. The three joined with former Federal Reserve Chairman Paul Volcker to praise Obama’s “positive leadership and judgment” on economic issues.

“We are aware of the reasoned approach Mr. Obama has taken in analyzing the current financial crisis and the need for balanced regulatory reform,” the four said. “We believe that such a constructive approach can be extended broadly in the economic area as well as elsewhere.”

This follows a report by Bloomberg News analyzing the shift in campaign contributions by executives in four key industries—transportation, securities, pharmaceuticals and energy—from the Republican Party to the Democrats.

While all four industries favored George W. Bush over Democrat John Kerry in 2004, by margins of better than 2 to 1, all four now are giving far more to the Democrats than to McCain. In some cases the margins are lopsided: The securities industry has given Obama and Clinton each twice as much money as McCain.



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