

Obama gains majority of elected Democratic Party delegates

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22 May 2008

Senator Barack Obama split two statewide primaries Tuesday with Senator Hillary Clinton, winning Oregon and losing Kentucky, in the process collecting enough delegates to give him a majority of the delegates elected in primaries and caucuses.

Among the superdelegates—elected officials and members of the Democratic National Committee who are automatically seated at their party’s convention—Obama has overtaken Clinton’s early lead and now has a slight edge.

Media tallies showed Obama with 1964 delegates to Clinton’s 1779, a lead of 185, with only another 86 to be elected in the last three primaries, in Puerto Rico June 1 and Montana and South Dakota on June 3. Obama is only 62 short of the total of 2,026 required for nomination.

According to an analysis by NBC News, the delegate race has been essentially unchanged since Obama’s victories in 11 consecutive caucuses and primaries between February 5 and March 4, which provided him a net gain of 118 delegates, and an overall lead of about 150. After subsequent contests in Ohio, Texas, Pennsylvania, Indiana, North Carolina, West Virginia, Kentucky and Oregon—and intensive media coverage of such issues as the views of Rev. Jeremiah Wright, Obama’s former pastor—the Illinois senator’s lead is now just slightly larger.

Clinton is continuing her campaign, at least through the final primaries, but cannot win the nomination unless the remaining uncommitted superdelegates intervene to overturn the outcome of primaries and caucuses. Most of these are not actually undecided, but either barred by party rules from committing publicly until after the end of the primaries, or not yet selected by state party organizations.

Clinton flew to Florida the day after her Kentucky victory, to press her demand that the Democratic convention seat the delegates from Florida and Michigan, the two states that were stripped of representation because state party officials defied national party rules and scheduled their primaries too early.

All of the Democratic candidates backed the sanctions against Michigan and Florida and did not campaign in either

state, while Obama and several other Democrats, but not Clinton, removed their names from the Michigan ballot altogether. Clinton won both states, taking 51 percent of the vote in Florida against Obama and John Edwards, and 55 percent of the vote in Michigan against a slate labeled “uncommitted.”

A Democratic Party rules committee is to meet May 31 to decide on whether to seat all or part of the Florida and Michigan delegates, but even in the unlikely event that both delegations are seated without any penalty, the result would not enable Clinton to overcome Obama’s delegate lead.

Instead, the Clinton campaign has been proclaiming its “victory” in the popular vote, based on a tendentious accounting that includes Clinton’s vote in Michigan but not the disguised Obama (uncommitted) vote, and excludes several caucus states won by Obama that did not release official vote totals, only the number of delegates (Iowa, for example).

The voting May 20 maintained the demographic pattern that has emerged over the past two months, with Clinton winning among the elderly and among lower-income white voters, particularly in the Appalachian region, while Obama won by equally decisive margins among young people, blacks and middle- and upper-income whites.

In Kentucky, where Clinton won by a margin of 66 percent to 31 percent, Obama carried only the state’s two largest counties: Jefferson, which includes the city of Louisville, the only large concentration of black voters; and Fayette, which includes the state’s second-largest city, Lexington, home of the University of Kentucky. Clinton carried every other county, rolling up as much as 90 percent of the vote in the eastern counties, where the coal mining industry has collapsed and much of the population lives in deep poverty.

In Oregon, the Obama campaign staged the largest event of the five-month primary campaign, a rally in Portland Sunday that drew 75,000 people. Obama won the state by a 60-40 margin, carrying Portland as well as Eugene, the state’s second-largest city. Clinton won only a handful of rural counties, and by much narrower margins than in

similar districts of Kentucky. Clinton won narrowly among voters over 65, while Obama won among voters under 30 by a margin of 40 points.

The Clinton campaign faced a deepening crisis as superdelegates continued to shift to Obama and the Democratic Party's biggest financial backers begin to coalesce behind the frontrunner. Senator Robert Byrd of West Virginia, the senior Democrat in the Senate, announced his endorsement of Obama despite Clinton's 41-point margin of victory in his state, one of at least eight new superdelegate endorsements since Sunday. The United Mine Workers of America, which had previously backed Senator John Edwards, also endorsed Obama.

The *Washington Post* reported Sunday on a meeting in the capital, co-hosted by a prominent Obama backer, former senator Thomas A. Daschle of South Dakota, to honor former Treasury secretary Robert Rubin, a Clinton backer, and raise money for the Democratic National Committee. The event was one of a series of such gatherings of "fundraisers and surrogates from both camps" to merge operations for the fall campaign, the newspaper reported.

Other press reports indicated that a prominent Clinton fundraiser, investment banker and former Treasury official Roger Altman, was urging the New York senator to end her campaign, while her former campaign manager, Patty Solis Doyle, had contacted Obama aides to offer her support for the fall campaign.

One sign of the crisis in the Clinton campaign was the increasingly hysterical tone of the comments by the candidate's husband, former president Bill Clinton, who told a crowd in Lexington, Kentucky Monday night that the media was to blame for his wife's current standing in the polls.

"By their own admission it's been the most slanted press coverage in American history," Clinton said. "Every time you turn on the television and listen to one of the people dissing her, they all have a college degree, they've all got a good job, they've all got health care and they're having no trouble filling up their gas tank."

Clinton's discovery that the media pundits are part of a privileged elite is not exactly a revelation—and he never complained of it during 2007, when the same media proclaimed Hillary Clinton the frontrunner and presumptive nominee.

Such populist demagoguery notwithstanding, neither Mrs. Clinton nor Obama represent the interests of working people. The Democratic Party, like the Republican, is a party that defends the profit system and the financial aristocracy at the top that controls the vast bulk of the wealth produced by workers.

The Clinton campaign has gone beyond such populist

staples, however, in an increasingly ugly appeal to white racism, voiced openly in Hillary Clinton's declaration earlier this month—in West Virginia—that she had the backing of "hard-working Americans, white Americans," whose support Obama was unable to win.

Exit polls in Kentucky showed Clinton winning white voters by a margin of 49 percentage points, while Obama won the much smaller black electorate by 9 to 1. One in five white voters said that race played a role in their vote, and nearly 90 percent of those voted for Clinton. Only 29 percent of those Democratic primary voters said they would support Obama in November if he were the party's nominee. By contrast, only one in ten white voters in Oregon said race was important, and they split their votes evenly between Obama and Clinton.

This aspect of the Clinton campaign foreshadows the far more open appeal to racist sentiment that will be a key element of the Republican campaign in the general election. This connection was spelled out most cynically by Dick Morris, the former Clinton political adviser who is now a supporter of Republican John McCain.

In a newspaper column Sunday, Morris wrote, "The growing fear of Obama, who remains something of an unknown, will drag every last white Republican male off the golf course to vote for McCain, and he will need no further laying-on of hands from either evangelical Christians or fiscal conservatives."

While the prospect of the election of the first African-American president will provoke a racist backlash in some quarters, it is also one of the sources of widespread illusions in Obama in the black community and among millions of young people.

In this context, it must be emphasized that Obama does not represent an insurgent campaign, even within the context of the Democratic Party. He has become the favored candidate of the Democratic Party establishment and of much of the financial aristocracy.

Obama is a conventional big business politician whose program, if anything, is more conservative than that espoused by Bill Clinton in 1992. Indeed, last week Obama proclaimed himself an admirer of the foreign policy of President George H. W. Bush, whom Clinton defeated in that year's election.



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