

Obama builds lead over Clinton after North Carolina, Indiana primaries

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Senator Barack Obama increased his delegate lead over Senator Hillary Clinton in the contest for the Democratic Party presidential nomination with a split in the two primaries held Tuesday, winning easily in North Carolina and losing more narrowly in Indiana.

Obama also increased his lead in the total popular votes cast, winning North Carolina by a margin of several hundred thousands votes, while the contest in Indiana was neck-and-neck, with predictions of a Clinton margin of less than 20,000 votes.

North Carolina is the larger of the two states, with 134 delegates compared to 72 for Indiana. While final delegate totals, based on the votes for the candidates in each congressional district, would not be available until Wednesday, it appeared that Obama would add as many as 20 delegates to his current lead of 136.

According to the running tally by the Associated Press, Obama led Clinton in delegates by 1,743 to 1,607 before the May 6 voting. Indiana and North Carolina were the two largest states yet to vote, with only Oregon, Kentucky, West Virginia, South Dakota and Montana remaining, as well as Puerto Rico.

Since these five states and one US territory have a combined total of 217 delegates, and these will be awarded proportionately by congressional district, it is now certain that Obama will finish the primary campaign with more delegates than Clinton, although still short of the 2,025 needed for the Democratic nomination.

The decision remains in the hands of about 250 superdelegates who have not yet publicly pledged their support to either candidate. About 75 of these are members of Congress or former office-holders; the rest are members of the Democratic National Committee or officials of state Democratic parties.

The voting in both Indiana and North Carolina reproduced almost unchanged the demographic splits among Democratic voters already displayed in Ohio and Pennsylvania, indicating that the weeks of media controversy over the comments of Obama's former pastor, Rev. Jeremiah Wright,

shifted relatively few votes.

Obama won more than 90 percent of black voters, a decisive margin in North Carolina, where blacks made up one-third of the Democratic electorate. He also led in college and university towns and in the high-tech region of North Carolina, the Triangle area of Raleigh, Durham and Chapel Hill.

Clinton led among white voters, particularly women, the elderly, and residents of rural areas and small towns and cities, which were the main focus of her campaign in the final days. Clinton's entire margin of victory in Indiana was supplied by voters over 65, who voted for her by 69 percent to 31 percent, while Obama won a majority of those under 65.

The last two weeks of the Democratic contest saw increasingly frantic efforts on the part of both candidates to present themselves as "in touch" with the concerns of working class voters, particularly in relation to the economy and rising gas and food prices.

These appeals are utterly fraudulent. The Democratic Party, like the Republican Party, defends the interests of the giant corporations and banks, and both candidates are drawn from the top one percent of the population that has reaped virtually all of the economic gains under both the Clinton administration in the 1990s and the past seven years of the Bush administration.

Neither Clinton nor Obama advances a program that offers any way forward for the tens of millions of working people facing threats to their jobs and livelihoods, the collapse of their home values and, for millions, the prospect of eviction. These economic pressures are compounded by soaring food and gas prices. Millions of American families walk an economic tightrope, where a medical emergency could drive them into bankruptcy.

The actual policy proposals of both candidates, even if they were implemented, would have only a negligible effect on the deep-seated social problems confronting the working class.

The two candidates have been reduced to symbolic efforts

to demonstrate their sympathy with struggling working class families by visiting diners patronized by shift workers, campaigning at bowling alleys, bars, race tracks and shooting ranges, and holding photo-ops with selected families deemed to be “typical”—i.e., middle-income, white, blue-collar, and living in rural areas or small towns.

Clinton campaign rallies have featured efforts to present the candidate as a modern-day Rosie the Riveter, the hard-working representative of single-mom waitresses, truck drivers and school teachers. The *New York Times*, reporting on a rally in Greenville, North Carolina, quoted Clinton as declaring, “I don’t think folks in Washington listen enough.” The candidate continued: “Because if we listen we will hear this incredible cry: ‘Please just pay attention to what’s going on in our lives.’”

Despite the use of the first-person pronoun, what is going on in the lives of workers in Indiana and North Carolina has little in common with the life of the former first lady and current senator from New York, who, with her husband, raked in \$109 million in income over the past seven years, while working class living standards steadily declined.

There are few working class families in either state who will see their children get a six-figure paycheck from a Wall Street hedge fund before their 30th birthday, as Clinton’s daughter did. It is doubtful that Chelsea Clinton would have found such a position if she were Mary Jones from Muncie.

Clinton denounced insurance firms, Wall Street money managers, student loan companies and China’s export industries. But her harshest rhetoric was directed against the oil companies. Clinton staked her campaign’s survival in Indiana on a pledge to suspend the federal tax on gasoline during the summer months.

This measure was first proposed by Republican candidate John McCain, but it has no chance of being enacted since both the Bush administration and the Democratic leadership in Congress oppose it. Even if put into effect, the result would be a savings of \$28 for the average two-car family, or about 30 cents a day.

The tax cut would subtract \$8 billion from the federal fund used to pay for highway repairs, a shortfall that Clinton—but not McCain—proposes to make up through a windfall profits tax on the oil companies. This is a purely hypothetical levy against the industry, since there is no prospect that such a tax hike would either be adopted by the Democratic Congress or signed into law by the oilman in the White House.

Obama has opposed the temporary gas tax hike, citing the universal opposition among bourgeois economists, and calling Clinton’s support for it “a typical Washington gimmick.”

His own campaign has offered equally fictitious sympathy for the working class, couched in the language, as the *Times*

put it, “of allusions to NASCAR, fatty foods and beer.” The *Los Angeles Times* described a campaign appearance at a Veterans of Foreign Wars hall in a small Indiana town, where Obama rolled up his sleeves and ordered a can of Budweiser: “Drinking deeply from the can, Obama took some questions about high gas prices and cast himself as a champion of the working class.”

The Illinois Democrat at one point voiced his frustration that Clinton, rather than himself, was portrayed as closer to working class voters. Referring to his wife, he said, “The fact is Michelle and I, our lives—if you look back over the last two decades—more closely approximate the lives of the average voter than any other candidate. We struggled with paying student loans, we tried to figure out how to make sure that we got adequate day care, I filled up my own gas tanks.”

The reference to “the last two decades” is significant, since in the past four years, since his rise to national prominence, Obama has become a wealthy man. His wife’s salary as the vice president for community relations at a Chicago hospital suddenly tripled after his election to the Senate, to over \$300,000 a year. Obama himself became a multi-millionaire from the sales of his two books.

Obama voiced similar themes in the victory speech he delivered Tuesday night at an arena in Raleigh, North Carolina. For the first time in such an address, he made a disparaging reference to Wall Street, and declared that he stood for “an America that doesn’t just reward wealth, but the workers who created it...”

At the same time, he repeated his argument, a part of his stump speech, against the “politics of divisiveness,” portraying his campaign as the spearhead of an all-embracing unity that will include not only “black and white, young and old,” but also “rich and poor.”

Both Clinton and Obama employ populist rhetoric in order to prevent working people from developing what they need more than anything else: a clear understanding of the unbridgeable chasm in American society between the working class and the super-rich minority at the top, which controls not only the giant corporations and banks, but also the government and the two major political parties.



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