

[WARNING: If you haven't noticed, I have become an unabashed Obama partisan. Everything that follows should be viewed in that context.]

I'm ordinarily not impressed with the writing of the New York Times' Adam Nagourney (he is easily led by the nose by the shallowest "conventional wisdom" including, at times, transparent administration propaganda). But [this piece](#) (below) summarizes a number of points I was inclined to make. (Of course, it is possible that it isn't Nargourney's synthesis that has improved but rather mine that has declined.)

This sentence expresses a particular concern of mine:

With every delegate precious, Mrs. Clinton's advisers also made it clear that they were prepared to take a number of potentially incendiary steps to build up Mrs. Clinton's count.

This goes to the heart of my concern with the Clintons and their narcissism – it's all about THEM. Already they are going increasingly negative and I'm concerned that as they go down (and at this point, clearly, they are) they could go scorched-Earth on the party: "If we can't have the prize, NO ONE can." Trying to subvert the will of the voters through backroom deals with "superdelegates" would tear the party apart.

Note this argument from the Clinton camp:

Mrs. Clinton's aides said they would also argue to superdelegates that they should give less deference to a lead from Mr. Obama because much of that had been built up in states where there were caucuses, which tend to attract far fewer voters than primaries, where Mrs. Clinton has tended to do better than she has done in caucuses.

"I think for superdelegates, the quality of where the win comes from should matter in terms of making a judgment about who might be the best general election candidate," said Mark Penn, Mrs. Clinton's senior campaign adviser.

Obama has been winning by HUGE margins – 15 states with a winning margin of 20% or more vs. for 2 for Clinton:

Obama (22)

Idaho +62
DC +51
Alaska +50
Kansas +48
Washington +37
Georgia +36
Nebraska +36
Colorado +35
Minnesota +35
Illinois+32
South Carolina +32
Virginia +29
North Dakota +24
Maryland +23
Louisiana +21
Maine +19
Utah +18
Alabama +14
Delaware +10
Iowa +9
Connecticut +4
Missouri +1

Clinton (10)

Arkansas +43
Oklahoma +24
New York +17
Massachusetts +15
Tennessee +13
California +10
New Jersey +10
Arizona +9
Nevada +6
New Hampshire +3

But he has also won more total votes among all the states: Obama 8,977,712 vs. Clinton 8,424,971.

So if the caucuses are supposedly diminished in relevance because they involve fewer participants than the primaries, where supposedly Clinton excels, then it makes Obama's lead in total votes all that much more impressive – he has had to pick up his large numbers in smaller, more diverse increments.

And note Obama's current delegate lead:

Mr. Obama's campaign said that he had a lead of 1,139 to 1,003; by the count of the Clinton campaign organization, Mr. Obama was doing even better: 1,141 to 1,004 for Mrs. Clinton.

Clinton is now relying entirely on the "Giuliani strategy" of pinning all the hopes of her campaign on two distant state primaries, Ohio and Texas.

That didn't work out too well for Giuliani:

A half-dozen senior officials of the Rudy Giuliani Presidential Committee conferred this week on how to wind down their affairs, and at least one piece of their correspondence painted what appeared to be a bleak picture of the dormant campaign's financial situation.

"We are deeper in the hole than I thought we would be," John Gross, the campaign's treasurer, wrote in an e-mail message to several senior campaign aides that was obtained by The New York Times.

"Windown is likely to be less than projected, but travel expenses are higher," Mr. Gross continued. "We cannot prefer any one creditor. **We probably could make a 10% payment to all qualified creditors at this point, but probably not much more.**" ...

(Republican economic mismanagement and deficit-spending extends to the campaigns.)

Anyhow, here is the Nagourney piece:

February 14, 2008

Obama's Lead in Delegates Shifts Focus of Campaign

By ADAM NAGOURNEY

WASHINGTON — Senator Barack Obama emerged from Tuesday's primaries leading Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton by more than 100 delegates, a small but significant advantage that Democrats said would be difficult for Mrs. Clinton to make up in the remaining contests in the presidential nomination battle. Neither candidate is expected to win the 2,025 pledged delegates needed to claim the nomination by the time the voting ends in June. But Mr. Obama's campaign began making a case in earnest on Wednesday that if he maintained his edge in delegates won in primaries and caucuses, he would have the strongest claim to the backing of the 796 elected Democrats and party leaders known as superdelegates who are free to vote as they choose and who now stand to determine the outcome.

Mrs. Clinton's aides said she could still pull out a victory with victories in the biggest primaries still to come, including Ohio and Texas next month. But Mr. Obama's clear lead in delegates allocated by the votes in nominating contests is one of a number of challenges facing her after a string of defeats in which Mr. Obama not only ran up big popular vote margins but also made

inroads among the types of voters she had most been counting on, including women and lower-income people.

Should the cracks in her support among those groups show up in Ohio and Texas as well, it could undermine her hopes that those states will halt Mr. Obama's momentum and allow her to claim dominance in many of the biggest primary battlegrounds.

With every delegate precious, Mrs. Clinton's advisers also made it clear that they were prepared to take a number of potentially incendiary steps to build up Mrs. Clinton's count. Top among these, her aides said, is pressing for Democrats to seat the disputed delegations from Florida and Michigan, who held their primaries in January in defiance of a Democratic Party rules.

Mrs. Clinton won more votes than Mr. Obama in both states, though both candidates technically abided by pledges not to campaign actively there.

Mr. Obama's aides reiterated their opposition to allowing Mrs. Clinton to claim a proportional share of the delegates from the voting in those states. The prospect of a fight over seating the Florida and Michigan delegations has already exposed deep divisions within the party.

Julian Bond, the head of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, called for the delegates to be seated, saying failure to do so would amount to disenfranchising minority voters in those states. But on Wednesday, such a move was denounced by the Rev. Al Sharpton of New York, who said

many people in those states did not go the polls because they assumed their votes would not count.

Mrs. Clinton's advisers acknowledged that it would be difficult for her to catch up in the race for pledged delegates even if she succeeded in winning Ohio and Texas in three weeks and Pennsylvania in April. They said the Democratic Party's rules, which award delegates relatively evenly among the candidates based on the proportion of the vote they receive, would require her to win by huge margins in those states to match Mr. Obama in delegates won through voting.

The delegate math set up a new front in the battle for the party's presidential nomination, one based on competing views of how the party leaders and elected officials whose vote will determine the outcome should make their decisions.

Mrs. Clinton's aides said the delegates should make their decision based on who they thought would be the stronger candidate and president. Mr. Obama argues that they should follow the will of the Democratic Party as expressed in the primary and caucuses — meaning the candidate with the most delegates from the voting.

Mr. Obama's aides said they hoped to end the voting season with a delegate lead of more than 100, which they would seek to portray as a decisive affirmation by Democratic primary voters of Mr. Obama's candidacy. Mrs. Clinton's advisers said they were looking to bring the margin down significantly below 100

in hope of arguing that the result was too close for delegates to consider in deciding how to vote.

Much for Mrs. Clinton depends on shoring up her support in the portions of the electorate — including women, low- and middle-income voters and Hispanics — that have provided her with victories in key states.

“Hillary does better with blue-collar voters, working-class voters, union members,” said Senator Sherrod Brown, the Ohio Democrat who has not endorsed anyone in the race. “Barack does better among African-Americans and younger voters and upper-income voters. If that holds, Ohio tilts toward Hillary.”

Mrs. Clinton’s campaign showed signs of being buffeted by conflicting forces as it sought to grapple with a dwindling number of options. Mrs. Clinton’s advisers, after some discussion about whether to focus exclusively on Ohio and Texas for the next three weeks, finally decided to send her for three days this week to Wisconsin, which votes next Tuesday.

Mrs. Clinton’s advisers said that they did not think she could win there but that they had concluded at this point they could not afford to leave any delegates on the table or allow Mr. Obama to run up another big margin of victory in the popular vote.

Mrs. Clinton’s aides said they would also argue to superdelegates that they should give less deference to a lead from Mr. Obama because much of that had been built up in states where there were caucuses, which tend to attract far fewer voters than

primaries, where Mrs. Clinton has tended to do better than she has done in caucuses.

“I think for superdelegates, the quality of where the win comes from should matter in terms of making a judgment about who might be the best general election candidate,” said Mark Penn, Mrs. Clinton’s senior campaign adviser.

The final Democratic primary contests are in early June; Montana and South Dakota vote June 3, and Puerto Rico four days later. It would then be almost three months until the Democratic convention, a period in which, if enough superdelegates have not expressed a firm preference to decide the outcome, the party could face a period of intense horse trading or worse.

Meanwhile, the likely Republican nominee, Senator John McCain of Arizona, would have a long period to rally his fractious party to his side and hone his attacks on the Democrats. A delegate count by The New York Times, including projections from caucuses where delegates have not yet been chosen, showed Mr. Obama with a 113-delegate lead over Mrs. Clinton: 1,095 to 982.

Delegate counts by other news organizations and by the campaigns showed somewhat different results, reflecting the difficulty of trying to make exact delegate counts at this point in the process. The figures do not include superdelegates.

Mr. Obama's campaign said that he had a lead of 1,139 to 1,003; by the count of the Clinton campaign organization, Mr. Obama was doing even better: 1,141 to 1,004 for Mrs. Clinton.

There are 1,082 delegates left to be selected.

By any measure, Mr. Obama is in a much stronger position on Wednesday than he was just a few days ago and in a significantly stronger position than Mrs. Clinton thought he would be at this point. That is because Mr. Obama not only won a series of states, but also won them by large margins — over 20 percentage points — so that he began picking up extra delegates and opening a lead on Mrs. Clinton.

And that is the problem for Mrs. Clinton going forward. If these were winner-take-all states, Mrs. Clinton could pick up 389 delegates in Texas and Ohio on March 4. Now she would have to beat Mr. Obama by more than 20 percentage points in order to pick up a majority of delegates in both states.

"We don't think our lead will drop below 100 delegates," David Plouffe, Mr. Obama's campaign manager, said in an interview.

"The math is the math."

Mr. Plouffe said by his count, Mr. Obama had won 14 states by a margin of over 20 percentage points or more; Mrs. Clinton has won two states by that margin.

Mr. Penn said the Clinton campaign believed that it could mitigate the losses she suffered by winning in Ohio, Texas and Pennsylvania. In addition to whatever demographic advantage

she might have in Ohio, Mrs. Clinton enjoys the support of the governor, Ted Strickland.

“They are working very hard on her behalf,” said Chris Redfern, the party chairman, who is neutral in the race. “It’s not one of those ‘we show up the last week and do a press conference’ things.”

In Texas, Mr. Penn said Mrs. Clinton would be helped by the Latino vote — which he said could ultimately be as much as 40 percent of the electorate.

But Mrs. Clinton faces another problem there in the form of that state’s unusual delegation allocation rules. Delegates are allocated to state senatorial districts based on Democratic voter turn-out in the last election. Bruce Buchanan, a professor of political science at the University of Texas at Austin, noted that in the last election, turnout was low in predominantly Hispanic districts and unusually high in urban African-American districts. That means more delegates will be available in districts that, based on the results so far, could be expected to go heavily for Mr. Obama. Mrs. Clinton, Dr. Buchanan said, “has got her work cut out for her.”

My favorite political essayist, Hendrik Hertzberg of the New Yorker, had [this piece](#) written before Super Tuesday, but it is still relevant:

Comment

THE SPAT

by Hendrik Hertzberg



During the four or five weeks leading up to February 5th—“Tsunami Tuesday,” when voters in states with half the nation’s population participate in a not quite national primary—the emotional texture of the Democratic side of the Presidential campaign changed profoundly. For most of Year One of this insanely elongated process, the Democratic Party had been a peaceable kingdom. Its voters were proud of and pleased with the array of choices before them: proud of its diversity, pleased with its unity. A confident woman in middle age; a graceful young African-American of mixed parentage; a handsome Southerner from a white working-class family; and a Mexico City-raised, three-quarters Hispanic governor-diplomat with (for a touch of mayonnaise) a blandly “American” name—these were the Democrats’ leading contenders, supplemented by a more conventional pair of distinguished senators from the East Coast. After years of talk about “looking like America,” here was the real thing. On questions of policy, the views of the candidates were as reassuringly similar as their backgrounds were exhilaratingly different. Such disagreements as they had, none of them fundamental or bitter,

were subsumed in their revulsion at the moral and strategic failures of the Bush Administration. As for Democratic voters, it was hard to find one who wouldn't tell you something like this: "I'm supporting so-and-so in the primary, but I'll be fine with any of them—just so we get a Democrat in the White House."

But as Iowa gave way to New Hampshire and then South Carolina, and the contest careered toward its ultimate form of a zero-sum game between Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, the mood darkened. Anger and depression, the pop-psych books tell us, are two sides of the same coin: depression is anger suppressed, anger is depression liberated. Is it possible to strobe between the two? It must be, because, as the Clinton-Obama race turned nasty, a rapid alternation was noticeable among the sort of obsessive Democrats who follow every twist and turn. This was true of people all across the deep-blue universe: passionate Obama supporters; tentative Obama supporters; Obama-Clinton fence-sitters (including the fans of John Edwards, now bereft); and tentative Clinton supporters. (Passionate Clinton supporters, notwithstanding their candidate's shrinking but still sizable lead in national polls, seem to be a little rarer.)

The anger was mostly directed at Senator Clinton, her husband, and her campaign, for a series of what have come to be known, redundantly, as "negative attacks." The most egregious, because so coldly premeditated, was a radio spot that took as its hook a snippet of audio from an Obama interview in which he said, "The Republicans were the party of ideas for a pretty long chunk of time there over the last ten, fifteen years." A smooth-voiced announcer then adds:

Really? Aren't those the ideas that got us into the economic mess we're in today? Ideas like special tax breaks for Wall Street? Running up a nine-trillion-dollar debt? Refusing to raise the minimum wage or deal with the housing crisis? Are those the ideas Barack Obama's talking about?

Uh, no. Those are *not* the ideas Barack Obama's talking about. But the spot's disingenuous questions were plainly intended to deceive the unwary into assuming

that Wall Street tax breaks and the like are the very ideas Obama has been advocating. With equal honesty, the spot could have said, “Denying global warming? Torturing prisoners? Appointing right-wing ideologues to the federal courts? Are those the ideas Barack Obama’s talking about?” But that might have taxed the credulity of even the unwary.

Actually, Obama was not talking about any particular ideas. He was talking about the conservative movement’s success in *marketing* its policy ideas and presenting itself as an intellectual powerhouse. He can be faulted for getting the timeline wrong in a way that dismissed the Clinton years—the Republicans’ “party of ideas” claim is at least thirty years old—but his basic point has long been a commonplace among Democrats. It is why liberals have spent the past decade and more trying to build a counterweight to the conservative infrastructure of think tanks and policy journals.

Obama has turned out to have a kind of political magic unseen since the Kennedy brothers of the nineteen-sixties. He has something of Jack’s futuristic, ironic cool, something of Bobby’s earnest, inspiring heat. His endorsement, last week, by President Kennedy’s surviving brother and surviving child closed the circuit. Senator Clinton’s answer to this is “I have more experience.” And it’s true. Her mastery of policy is deep and subtle; her sense of how the White House wields power is probably unequalled. But experience is a problematic argument, especially when voters are hungry for a new beginning.

Anyway, an argument is no match for an aura. So the Clinton campaign evidently concluded that it had no choice but to “go negative,” and Bill Clinton was assigned, or assigned himself, the task. Some of his attempts to sully his wife’s opponent—calling Obama’s consistent opposition to the Iraq war “the biggest fairy tale I’ve ever seen” and dismissing his South Carolina victory as a racial one, like Jesse Jackson’s twenty years ago—have been untruthful or unworthy or both. Whether or not these and similar attacks “worked” (the evidence is mixed), they

certainly succeeded in diminishing both the former President and his wife. “The Clintons” used to be a Republican trope, calculated to make one or the other half of the couple look like a puppet or a victim or a co-conspirator; now it is simply descriptive. Bill Clinton’s talents are immense, and so are those of Hillary Clinton. But the events of the past few weeks have suggested that the peculiar dynamics of the Clinton marriage, which distorted the workings of the first Clinton White House in areas ranging from its failed health-care initiative to its inability to quash the Whitewater hoax, would be carried over into a second.

For some Democrats, a final straw has been the Clinton campaign’s sudden interest in changing the rules. In Nevada, where the state’s Democratic Party had provided special caucus sites for casino workers, Clinton allies tried to get them shut down after a union representing many of those workers endorsed Obama. The Democratic National Committee warned the Party’s affiliates in Michigan and Florida that if they moved their primaries ahead of Tsunami Tuesday they would lose their Convention delegates. They did so anyway, and now Clinton—whose name was the only one on the Michigan ballot and who carried Florida, where no one campaigned—is demanding that the two states’ delegates be accredited. Those delegates, added to the bulk of the unelected “superdelegates,” could conceivably put Clinton over the top if Obama arrives at the Convention with a slight edge in delegates chosen by voters—a scenario that would bear an ugly resemblance to Florida, the popular vote, and the Supreme Court, circa 2000.

Last Thursday night’s televised debate between the two remaining Democrats—a civilized and substantive conversation—has eased the tension. But politics ain’t beanbag. One of the arguments made on behalf of the Clintons is that they know how to win. They do what is necessary. They fight hard. They’ve shown they can survive the worst the Republican attack machine can throw at them, next to which the relatively mild roughing-up they’re giving Obama is downright Gandhian. But there are hard-nosed arguments for Obama, too. Nothing would energize the dispirited, disoriented Republicans like running against Hillary

Clinton. And a late-entry challenge from Mayor Michael Bloomberg and his billions would be far less likely if Obama became the Democratic nominee.

Obama's Democratic critics worry that his soaring rhetoric of reconciliation is naïve. But, as Mark Schmitt has argued in *The American Prospect*, Obama's national-unity pitch should be viewed as a tactic as well as an ideal. It might lengthen his coattails, helping Democratic candidates for the House and the Senate in marginally red districts and states. It would not protect him from attack, of course, but it would enable him to fire back from the high ground. And, as a new President elected with a not quite filibuster-proof Senate, he would be in a better position to peel off the handful of Republican senators he would need to make meaningful legislative progress than someone who started from a defensive crouch. Hillary Clinton would make a competent, knowledgeable, and responsible President. Barack Obama just might make a transformative one. ♦