

## Why Philly Matters, 7:00 a.m. E.T.

Buoyed by a handful of polls that show Obama's lead down to 4-6 percentage points (though others still show Obama up by double digits), McCain and his surrogates have stumped furiously in Pennsylvania. The main energy has been in Philadelphia and the close-in suburbs, which are almost certain to swing for Obama, but are important mathematically. If Obama wins here by a blowout, it will cancel out any gains by McCain in the west and central area. If McCain can hold Obama's margins here down, however, he has a slight chance of picking up enough votes elsewhere to carry the state.

Obama's campaign made its final push in the city Monday night, with an appearance by running mate Joe Biden and several members of the World Champion Philadelphia Phillies baseball team. Significantly, the appearance was in a heavily white, blue collar district in South Philadelphia, where Hillary Clinton won in the primary by a large margin and the McCain campaign hopes to pick up enough conservative, Catholic Democratic voters to help depress Obama's margin of victory in the city.

Although there does seem to have been closure in the polls, McCain's main hope in Pennsylvania appears to be "divine intervention," according to G. Terry Madonna, director of the well-regarded and non-partisan Franklin & Marshall Poll, the latest of which shows Obama up by 12 points among likely voters. John Kerry won the state by 144,000 votes in 2004. Polls show Obama strong in all of the same places Kerry was strong — and he has something like 500,000 newly registered Democrats behind him. Even if only a fraction of those new Democrats turn out on Tuesday, it's hard to see how McCain can pick up enough votes to offset all those extra votes. A McCain victory at this point, Madonna said, "would go against everything we know about the state." — *By Sean Scully / Philadelphia*

## **In Philadelphia, Paper Ballot Worries and a Still-Undecided Voter, 1:50 p.m. E.T.**

At a hurried late-morning conference held by speakerphone in an office high over Center City Philadelphia, members of the election watchdog group The Committee of 70 discussed their main worry this busy Election Day: running out of paper ballots. Word was coming in from all over the area that poll workers were not familiar with a federal court decision last week requiring precincts to make paper ballots available in the case of a machine breakdown. Worse, there were only about 100 paper ballots pre-set at each precinct, so places with serious machine problems in the morning faced running out.

"If they run out of paper ballots at the end of the day, that would be a real problem," said committee president Zach Stalberg.

Overall, however, things had been going reasonably smoothly in the Philadelphia area, despite what is invariably being described as a record turnout in most places. There were a few spots where machines were broken or wouldn't turn on early in the day. But with a lunchtime rush approaching, he said, most of those issues had been worked out.

The committee has more than 1,000 volunteers around the area observing the election process, helping confused voters, and fielding phone calls reporting problems and abuses. In the committee's offices, more than a dozen volunteers with phone headsets and laptops were recording problems and suggesting solutions for voters.

"His voter ID card has the right polling place," another asks. "Then you can fill it out and get it back," said another into the phone. "I know it's a lot of work, but it will work. Goodbye — and good luck."

At the city's most overcrowded precinct — in the heart of the bustling Chinatown — the lunchtime line snaked far around the corner of the block at the Chinese Christian Church at 10th and Spring streets. Easily a hundred people waited in line as a cold, and previously unpredicted, rain began to fall. The precinct was supposed to have only around 1,200 voters on the rolls but wound up this year with more than 4,000. Christy Kam, 26, a dance instructor, waited in line for more than an hour to cast her first-ever vote, only to discover that she was in the wrong place.

"Yeah, I'm still going to vote," she said with a sigh as she asked Obama volunteer Kim Irwin to confirm her real polling place. "But it's a big pain." Kam said in 2004 she didn't bother to vote because she knew John Kerry would win Pennsylvania. But this year, she feels quite strongly and wants to make sure Obama wins.

"I figure they have it covered," she said, eyeing the line stretching down the block. "But I just wanted to make sure."

Irwin, a library employee from Brooklyn, N.Y., who came to Pennsylvania to work for Obama, said the high turnout was giving her great hope. She had worked all over the city in recent weeks and found tremendous and increasing enthusiasm for Obama, even in the more McCain-friendly precincts in northeast and south Philadelphia. Turnout will help Obama, she said, gesturing to the line. "You want the people to vote."

[See pictures of Barack Obama's campaign behind the scenes.](#)

About halfway down that long line stood one of those people much sought after by reporters and campaign activists — a last-minute undecided voter. Even though she was probably only 20 minutes or so from standing in the voting booth, Amy Ho said she was still wavering about her choice for President.

"Obama would probably make more of a positive impact in terms of health care" and other domestic issues, she said. "But McCain might make more of a difference in the war."

The 25-year-old lab researcher said she would probably vote for Obama in the end, if only because Sarah Palin was such a poor choice for a running mate for McCain. And the economic meltdown had inclined her even more toward Obama.

And yet, even as she stood in line, nibbling from a cup of fragrant noodles, she was "playing the pieces in my mind" about who to vote for. She did consider not voting at all when she first saw the endless line, she said, but she realized "this is going to be a historic election — I'm just happy to be a part of it."

## **A Black Panther Creates Controversy in Philadelphia, 4:15 p.m. E.T.**

Poll watchers reported only a scattering of problems with voting machines, mostly in the morning. Otherwise, the election appeared to go smoothly throughout the Philadelphia area. As a result, what problems did develop generated considerable media attention, but they ranged between minor and farcical.

Earlier in the day, for example, several Republican poll workers were asked to leave their polling places. Reports varied as to why — either they lacked proper credentials or the polling place was too crowded to accommodate them. In either case, a city judge promptly ordered them returned to the polling places, according to state party officials.

More colorfully, a pair of men dressed in the militant uniform of the Black Panthers — berets, dark shades, military-style jackets, pants and boots — appeared in front of a polling place in a predominantly black area of north Philadelphia around midday. One man was reportedly armed with a nightstick, but he was asked to leave by police, who had been summoned by a Republican poll watcher. By mid-afternoon, as media began to gather, one uniformed but unarmed man remained, handing out literature to voters, but he angrily refused to answer any questions. A credentialed Obama poll worker, who identified himself as James Orman, said the uniformed man was a representative of the Obama campaign, though he curtly refused to answer any additional questions or identify the uniformed man by name. He advised the uniformed man not to say anything further to the press.

[See the Top 10 ballot measures.](#)

An Obama volunteer from the precinct told political blog *Talking Points Memo* that there had been no voter intimidation by the men, and indeed, McCain workers seemed to be baiting the Panthers by taking their photos before police arrived. The volunteer also said the man was a fully credentialed poll watcher. And by mid-afternoon, when TIME arrived, the remaining Panther did not seem to be making any effort to stop people from approaching the building, although he maintained a stiff and formal expression on his face and stood with a military bearing when not handing out literature.

The situation drew the attention of conservative media like Fox News, as well as Republican attorney Loida H. Coleman Jr., a member of Lawyers for McCain, who showed up on the scene to observe. The mens' dress — particularly the nightstick — "was very militaristic and could have been very intimidating," she said. "I don't think someone would be wearing that garb in front of a voting machine without the intent to send a message."

She admitted, however, that "after talking to people, I haven't found evidence of specific harm to individuals."

While she was talking with the press in front of the polling place, in the cafeteria of an apartment building, a man who identified himself as a representative of the city's District Attorney showed up, spoke briefly with the Democratic poll workers and left, saying there was "no situation here" and advising reporters to stay away from the uniformed man. Election watchdog group The Committee of 70 reported at mid-afternoon that they were seeing only a handful of problems in the area, including poll workers who were improperly demanding driver's licenses from all voters at a crowded precinct in Chinatown, and a precinct in Northeast Philadelphia where the voter logs inexplicably excluded all names starting with letters Aa through Aj.

Perhaps the most amusing report came from the suburban town of Brookhaven, in Delaware County, where committee representatives heard complaints about snakes in the building, and structural problems including a collapsed ceiling and broken lights. — *By Sean Scully / Philadelphia*