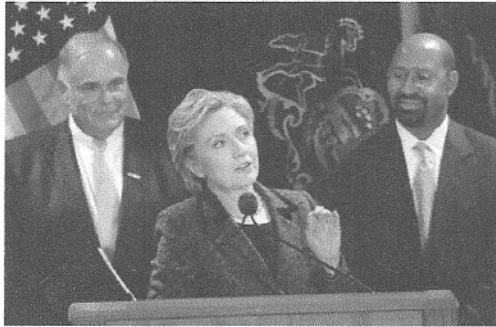


The Primary to End All Primaries?

By SEAN SCULLY/PHILADELPHIA

Wednesday, Mar. 05, 2008



Hillary Clinton is endorsed by Pennsylvania Governor Edward G. Rendell and Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter at Philadelphia City Hall on January 23, 2008 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

WILLIAM THOMAS CAIN / GETTY

In a stark, unfinished office space in a gritty corner of Philadelphia along the Delaware River, Hillary Clinton supporters gathered last Sunday to plan a campaign that wasn't supposed to happen. "We cannot take anything, any area, any voter for granted," the city's newly elected mayor, Michael Nutter, told the crowd of perhaps 150. The race, he said, will be like this year's Super Bowl, in which the previously undefeated New England Patriots unexpectedly fell to the underdog New York Giants. And he means for the Pennsylvania's Clinton campaign to be the Giants. "We have our work cut out for us," he said. "But we have a real candidate who is a real person, and she really does care."

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Campaign organizer Abe Dyk assured the crowd that the six-week run-up to the primary will be a full-bore, no-excuses campaign. "We will be Iowa on steroids ... everything we do in a traditional campaign after Labor Day we're going to start doing after March 4," the date of primaries in Ohio and Texas, he told the cheering crowd of activists.

In fact, the state's April 22 primary is shaping up to be another so-called decisive battle in the Democratic campaign. It is the single biggest prize in the next six weeks, with 103 delegates up for a vote. With her comeback victories in Texas and Ohio, Clinton needs a solid victory here to justify a potential triumph at the convention with [a superdelegate strategy](#). Obama needs to [counter that strategy by piling up the pledged delegates](#), to blunt any Clinton hold on the superdelegates that is based on momentum and growing popular support. "Neither Clinton nor Obama can afford to bypass [Pennsylvania]," said pollster and political analyst G. Terry Madonna of Franklin & Marshall College. "They can't

afford to let it alone even though it won't give anyone enough pledged delegates for a victory at the convention." Madonna's latest poll, taken in mid-February, shows Clinton holding a good lead in Pennsylvania, 44 to 32 percent, but Obama has closed the gap since January, when he was 20 points down. Democratic consultant Larry Ceisler believes that by winning Texas and Ohio, Clinton proves she can win Pennsylvania.

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on economics and some sparring over national security. Clinton organizers in Pennsylvania were instructing volunteers early in the week to call Ohio and tell undecided voters that she will "deliver real solutions to the lagging economy and soaring home foreclosures," both issues that have affected Pennsylvania, particularly in the formerly industrial sections in the West and Northeast. Obama's statewide chairman, Congressman Patrick Murphy, predicted that the candidates will also continue the Ohio debate over the legacy of NAFTA, which blue collar workers in Pennsylvania blame for the loss of textile jobs.

Money has been a problem for Clinton, with Obama far outraising her, but the results on Tuesday may change her fortunes as donors become more certain she can win. And Pennsylvania is generally thought to be a rich state for Democratic candidates looking for funds. Obama is "a money-making machine," Madonna said. "She would probably have a more significant problem, but she does have [Governor] Ed Rendell and his money-making boys" to help fund the fight.

Madonna said Obama is likely to do very well in Philadelphia, with a large African-American electorate, and may win in the city's suburbs, which have the same kinds of upscale, well-educated professionals that have gone for Obama in recent contests. Western and Central Pennsylvania are much more conservative, blue collar and Catholic, and the voters tend to be a bit older, all of which seem to favor Clinton. The key battleground is likely to be in the Lehigh Valley and the Northeast, toward Scranton and Wilkes-Barre, where traditional blue collar industry is giving way to high tech.

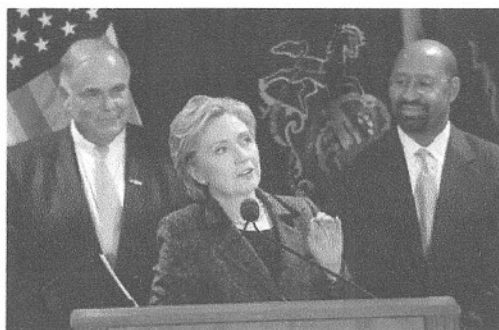
Despite Clinton's continued lead in the state polls, Obama is riding on a wave of grassroots enthusiasm, the likes of which political veterans say they have never seen before. Until late February, neither candidate had much of an organization in the state — a handful of junior staffers but no more. But without prompting from the national campaign, dozens of self-generated Obama organizations sprang up around the state in recent months, drawing in thousands of supporters. "The brilliance of the Obama campaign is that it is very organic," said Dan Wofford, an Obama supporter and son of former Sen. Harris Wofford. "It's not without structure, but it is bottom up." As campaign staff begins to arrive in the state, he said, "they are very mindful; they don't want to snuff out the grassroots with a layer of hierarchy on top of it, but they do bring in structure that helps nourish the grassroots movement."

Kathleen Hood of Highland Township, for example, began holding house parties for Obama last year and took it upon herself to set up "United for Obama in Chester County" in early February this year. Since her first meeting, the group has grown from seven to 50, all without any contact from the official campaign until the final few days of the month, when some staff began coming into the state. She was able to do it largely by using the campaign website, which has a calendar for local activists to post events and reams of material for organizers to use without having to have any direct support from the central campaign. "They've provided tools that can be used to begin to generate that enthusiasm ... there are very specific tools you can use, very specific things you can do," said Hood, a teacher and school administrator. "It helps you act on your strong beliefs. That's what so exciting about it."

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Sue Gregson, a freelance writer from nearby Downingtown, started holding events for Obama in March of last year. She even tried calling the national campaign for help, but couldn't get much out of them. "They could hardly staff the phones at that point; everyone was calling in. I didn't even get material from the campaign," she said. "They had little packets eventually that they sent to people who were having house parties, but mine was too early." So she bought an "Obama for President" sweatshirt and went to work on her own. "We would basically just meet in peoples' houses and talk about what we can do on a shoestring budget, because people were talking money out of their own pockets," she said. "That hoodie was probably the best \$35 I ever spent. It's my trademark."

So great was the grassroots enthusiasm that some of Obama's more experienced Pennsylvania supporters had to step in to bring order to the campaign, holding organizational meetings in January in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh to begin the process of naming delegates to an Obama slate in advance of the primary. "You could either allow that [enthusiasm] to dissipate, or allow it to go off in all these different directions where it would create counter purposes," said Pittsburgh attorney Cliff Levine, who chaired the western organizational meeting. But "by marshalling everybody together and trying to map out the wildfire of enthusiasm, that little bit of structure allowed this to grow very quickly and in an organized way."

The Clinton campaign, meanwhile, has taken a different approach, focusing on securing high-level support from most of the state's Democratic establishment, including Nutter, Rendell and state party chairman T.J. Rooney. "While the Obama campaign has a lot of enthusiastic people on their list of delegates, our delegates are mostly county commissioners, party chairmen and others," said Lazar Palnick, an organizer for Clinton in Western Pennsylvania and a longtime friend of the Clintons dating from his youth in his native Arkansas. "Each of those have extensive networks that we intend to take full advantage of and

Nutter, meanwhile, admits that Obama's base seems more strongly enthusiastic than Clinton's, but he said the experience and political muscle of the New York Senator's base may prove stronger. Obama's organization "certainly has to be respected," he told TIME, but the key is "how you translate that into on-the-ground troops that know how to run elections and get people to come out to the polls. It's one thing to have events and rallies and be moved by stirring oratory; it's another that people know you and are motivated to come out to the polls and actually push your button."

Obama supporters and some media commentators, however, have suggested that Clinton's campaign in Pennsylvania is top-heavy and poorly organized, pointing to the fact that she failed to fill all 103 slots on her delegate slate — a routine and basic exercise in political organizing — despite a two-day deadline extension from the governor. "It indicates to me they weren't sufficiently prepared for this and they fell asleep at the switch," Madonna said. The campaign, however, dismisses this as "a story about nothing," saying a few would-be delegates failed to file their paperwork for personal reasons, such as illness. Even so, they say, the delegate slate is a minor technical matter and Clinton will get credit for every delegate she wins, whether or not she actually named a full slate of delegates. "It's just a matter of waiting for the media to get bored with the subject," spokesman Mark Nevins said. "Nobody else is talking about it."

And even if the Clinton campaign did get off to a later start in Pennsylvania than Obama's, it was clear in the days leading up to the Ohio and Texas primaries that the organization was getting geared up. It opened offices in both Pittsburgh and Philadelphia and began holding meetings across the state to fire up volunteers. "We are not going to concede any votes to Barack Obama," Dyk told the Philadelphia meeting.

The Clinton volunteers themselves seem aware that the weight of emotion, and perhaps grassroots momentum, seems to lie with Obama, but they say they can deliver Pennsylvania for her. "I feel like this is when she really needs our support the most," said Elsa Louis-Charles, 34, a legal assistant from suburban Glenside. "I try not to watch the numbers so much." Hannah Miller, 31, of Philadelphia, signed up to volunteer hoping that Clinton would be the one to stand up against the war in Iraq and the increasingly militarized nature of American society. She said Pennsylvania will be the key to Clinton's comeback victory. "I think the whole race is going to change," she said. "I think it's going to change in Pennsylvania ... I think something magical is going to happen in her campaign here."