



Perspectives

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on Women & Politics

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SUNSHINE SUPERWOMAN & SUPERDELEGATES

We may have the opportunity to call Hillary Commander-in-Chief after all. On Sunday last, as I left D.C., I felt the momentum moving back toward Hillary. I know you are saying “that’s just because – after the fact – she won Texas and Ohio” – but truly – I felt the momentum moving back. I spent most of Sunday — from about 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. — browsing around Union Station, shopping, eating, shopping some more, eating some more, and I asked questions of all the service folks who were there to assist me: “What do you think about the Democratic candidates?” And to a man and woman, they told me they were voting for Hillary. We’re talking about two dozen folks, a fair mixture of men and women, a fair mixture of black and white, plus a couple of Asians and Hispanics. Admittedly a very un-scientific poll, but they were all voting for Hillary on Sunday morning.

I know the “your children are safe/red phone in the White House” ad started late last week. Was that the catalyst for the momentum shift? I don’t think so. Are you of the age to remember Donovan’s Sunshine Superman? A portion of the lyrics go something like this: “Cause I made my mind up you’re going to be mine, I’ll tell you right now, any trick in the book now, baby, all that I can find....”

Pundits are calling it “the kitchen sink” strategy, but the fact is that the Clinton campaign is using any trick in the book – and that’s the American way. And I believe that Democrats are making their minds up. While the Democratic race remains tight, Hillary is reemerging as the superwoman she appeared to be at the beginning of this long campaign. Of course, to leap the tall obstacles left on this campaign trail in a single bound, this superwoman is going to need every trick in the book, and one of those tricks is to land substantial superdelegate support. Can she do it?

What are superdelegates anyway? If you are like me, you may not have been aware of *super*-delegates prior to this election. The superdelegate concept was introduced after the 1980 election, so it’s not like we’ve been asleep all our lives – just the last 25 years. The superdelegate, the noun nouveau of the Democratic party, is actually the same as the unpledged delegate of the GOP. These individuals are delegates who are not selected by the voters; they are often the unchallenged party leaders — the party “establishment” — and their job is to maintain party control over the nomination process, just in case an “adjustment” must be made. Maybe the parties have been quiet about superdelegates. It’s difficult for us regular folks to fathom that the winner of the popular vote can lose the election, much less that there are delegates who select the party nominees who aren’t even elected in the delegate election process.

Superdelegates and unpledged delegates are not only *not* selected by a vote of party members, *they are not bound by the decisions of the voters of their state*. The superdelegate or unpledged delegate can cast his/her vote for whichever candidate he/she prefers. In the Democratic Party, 796 of the total number of delegates (4,090) are superdelegates. In the Republican Party, 463 delegates out of 2,380 are unpledged, including 123 members of the Republican National Committee.

As of March 5, 2008, the website “2008 Democratic Convention Watch” reported: without Michigan and Florida, of the 2,024 delegates needed to gain the nomination, Obama had 1,228 regular delegates and 197 committed superdelegates for a total of 1,535, while Clinton had 1,206 regular delegates and 240 committed superdelegates, for a total of 1,446. Two hundred eighty-four superdelegates remain undeclared and about 25 delegates were otherwise committed (principally to John Edwards).

Mississippi has six superdelegates. As recently as February 15, 2008, Media General’s News Service, Washington D.C. Bureau, was touting that “Mississippi’s superdelegates may hold the key to the Democratic nomination”. Of the six, only two, Representative Bennie Thompson of Bolton and Ms. Johnnie Patton of Jackson, a DNC member, have articulated their choice, both having committed to Obama. Mississippi’s remaining four superdelegates: Wayne Dowdy of McComb, Chair of the Mississippi Democratic Party; Carnelia Pettis Fondren of Oxford, Vice Chair of the Mississippi Democratic Party; Everett Sanders of Natchez, DNC member; and Representative Gene Taylor of Bay St. Louis remain uncommitted. Ms. Patton has indicated that while she has committed to Obama, but has been quoted as saying that she will consider the Mississippi primary vote prior to casting her superdelegate vote.

Our primary is March 11. The next big vote comes in Pennsylvania on April 22. An established pollster, Rasmussen Reports, indicates that Hillary has a narrow lead in Pennsylvania (46% to 42%); earlier in the primary season, her lead was more substantial. Rasmussen indicates that, at least in Pennsylvania, the gender gap favors Clinton. She leads by 15 points among women voters, but trails by 14 points among men. Pennsylvania, like other states, has more registered women voters than registered men. Rasmussen’s polling has indicated that 47% of the state’s likely primary voters believe the economy is the most important issue; 20% say it’s the war in Iraq; and 15% say it’s health care. The voters who stress concerns for the economy will vote 47% Clinton to 42% Obama. Clinton should also garner more of the votes cast by the 15% of Pennsylvania Democrats who believe that health care is the most important issue. Obama leads Clinton by 20 points with the group of potential voters who believe that the war in Iraq is the most important issue. I wonder if the “your children are safe/red phone in the White House” ad will make a difference with these voters?

Hillary has demonstrated by the victories in Ohio and Texas that she has staying power, perhaps even super power. Joseph Campbell says that the “last trick you have to do yourself”. Retaining her remaining superdelegates and obtaining a substantial amount of the uncommitted superdelegates might be that last trick – regardless of the outcome of the Michigan-Florida debacle. To paraphrase Donovan: ‘cause she’s made her mind up...to claim that velvet throne....’

**If you would be interested in attending a seminar on “Applied Politics for Women”,
please contact me at lydia@sig.msstate.edu.**

