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**UNITED STATES****The Democratic race****Welcome to the Super Bowl**Apr 10th 2008 | PHILADELPHIA  
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AP

**Post-industrial Pennsylvania will decide whether Hillary Clinton can continue with her presidential bid**

IN 1754 George Washington, then a young lieutenant-colonel fighting for the British, reputedly fired the first shots of the French and Indian war in Pennsylvania. The question now hanging over American politics is whether Hillary Clinton will fire the last shots of her presidential bid in the Pennsylvania primary on April 22nd. The state's Democratic primary has not mattered since 1976, when Jimmy Carter clinched the party's nomination by beating Henry "Scoop" Jackson and Morris Udall there. But it most assuredly matters this year.

Pennsylvania is a big state—the sixth-biggest in the country, in terms of population—and a varied one. James Carville famously described the state as "Pittsburgh and Philadelphia with Alabama stuffed between them", but in fact "Alabama" is divided between rolling countryside dotted with Dutch-style barns in some parts of the state and forbidding Appalachian hills in others. Pennsylvania contains beaten-up rustbelt towns but also spanking corridors of high-tech start-ups and big-box stores. Pittsburgh feels decayed, like Cleveland, Ohio. Philadelphia has plugged itself into the booming Boston-Washington corridor, so much so that some New Yorkers condescendingly refer to the city as their sixth borough.

Electorally, Pennsylvania is a stronghold of Reagan Democrats—the white blue-collar workers who side with the Democrats on the economy but with the Republicans on security and moral issues. About 30% of its households contain union members, while 46% of its voters own a gun. "The Deer Hunter" was set in Clairton, near Pittsburgh. Dover, on the other side of the state, became famous in 2004 when the local school board required teachers to put forward "intelligent design" as a rival theory to evolution. But Pennsylvania also has its fair share of liberal professors—it has some of the best universities in the country—and middle-class professionals who are disillusioned with George Bush's Republican Party.

All this makes the state a perfect laboratory for America-watchers: and indeed John Updike set his great four-novel study of his American Everyman, "Rabbit" Angstrom, in the state. But it is also a nightmare for political strategists, awkwardly mixing elements of both the Southern-fried politics of the sunbelt and the culturally

liberal politics of the north-east.

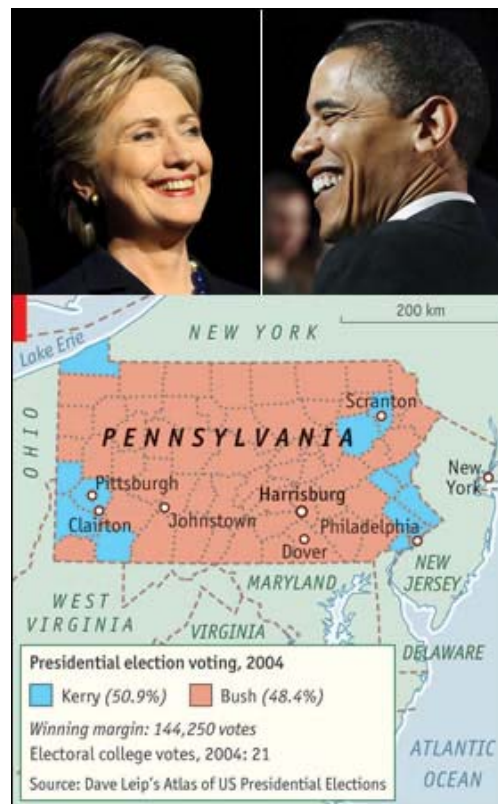
As a result, Pennsylvania has been a swing state in every close election for the past 70 years, and the two parties have regularly swapped control of the governor's mansion in Harrisburg. Mr Bush visited the state more than 30 times in his first term, more than any state apart from Texas. The Democrats have won the state in the past four presidential cycles. But John McCain currently leads Barack Obama in head-to-head polls there.

Pennsylvania is a "no excuses" state for the Democratic candidates. The two rivals have had six weeks to prepare for the primary, so they cannot blame "momentum" or accidents for any misfortunes. Pennsylvania's Democrats also operate a doubly closed primary: you not only need to be a registered Democrat to vote, but you also need to have registered at least a month before the contest. Mrs Clinton will not be able to attribute a good performance on Mr Obama's part to gate-crashing by independents or even Republicans.

Pennsylvania has long been presumed an easy state for Mrs Clinton to win. More recently, the polls have suggested a tightening race. If Mr Obama can hold Mrs Clinton's margin of victory to five points or so, then he will be unstoppable, secure in his lead in the popular vote and the delegate count (and if he wins the state, then Mrs Clinton will be finished). But if Mrs Clinton can repeat her ten-point victory in Ohio, she will be able to argue, with even more conviction than in the past, that Mr Obama cannot win the white working-class voters or the big swing states he needs if he is to take the White House

What are the chances that Mrs Clinton can pull it off? At first sight, they don't look bad. Pennsylvania is full of just the sort of Democrats who have flocked to her banner in Ohio and elsewhere: blue-collar workers, white ethnics, oldsters, conservative Democrats, party loyalists and Catholics. The state has a high proportion of people over 65 (15.1% compared with a national average of 12.4%, higher than any state except Florida and West Virginia). And it has a low proportion of people with college degrees, 25.4% versus a national average of 27%.

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Parts of Pennsylvania offer classic rustbelt fare—battered by downsizing and fearful of change. The state was a cradle of America's industrial revolution, the home of robber barons such as Andrew Carnegie and Henry Clay Frick. But today it is littered with shuttered factories and shrinking towns. It has seen the slowest population

growth of any big state in the country. In 1960 it had as many congressmen as California; now it has 19 to California's 53. Pittsburgh shrank from the country's tenth-largest city in 1940 to its 52nd in 2000. The battered manufacturing sector has lost a fifth of its jobs since 2000.

The local political establishment is mostly pulling for Mrs Clinton. Ed Rendell, the state's governor and a former two-term mayor of Philadelphia, is one of her most prominent national supporters. The mayors of the state's two biggest cities, Philadelphia's Michael Nutter and Pittsburgh's Luke Ravenstahl, have both endorsed her. Mr Nutter's endorsement is particularly significant, since he is a reform-minded black. Congressman Jack Murtha, who has showered his district, including Johnstown, with federal money—72 projects worth \$149m in the last fiscal year alone—and slapped his name on the local airport among other monuments, is a staunch supporter.

The Clinton name also has a magic ring for many Pennsylvanians. Both the Clintons visited the state frequently when they were in the White House, and Mr Clinton took the state by nine points in both 1992 and 1996. Mrs Clinton's father was born in Scranton and is buried there. Donald Kettl of the University of Pennsylvania points out that when Mr Clinton appeared in Philadelphia after his heart surgery, a crowd of 100,000 people turned up to wish him well.

## Not so fast, Mrs Clinton

But look a little harder at the state, and the picture becomes rather murkier. Job growth since 2003 has been 3.2% compared with Ohio's 0.5%. Greater Philadelphia has large concentrations of high-tech companies and business service operations. Even some of the state's grittier areas have been reinventing themselves. Ten times as many Pittsburghers work in the city's hospitals and universities as in the steel industry. Taken as a whole, the state has seen 16.9% growth in employment in education and health services since 2000, and 15% growth in jobs in professional and business services.

Nor is the state's political machine as solidly pro-Clinton as it was. Bob Casey, the junior senator, has endorsed Mr Obama and joined him on a recent bus trip across the state. Mr Casey's father was a popular governor. Mr Casey himself is a darling of the Reagan Democrats—a Catholic who is left-wing on economics but conservative on abortion and gun rights, a combination which helped him to beat Rick Santorum, his Republican predecessor, by 18 points in 2006. Nobody could be better positioned to help Mr Obama with Catholics (whom he has lost to Mrs Clinton in 18 of the 24 primaries surveyed so far) and downscale voters. John Kerry's support for Mr Obama may also prove significant. His wife, Teresa Heinz Kerry, is one of the most powerful women in the state, the widow of a popular (Republican) senator and an influential philanthropist.

Mr Obama's strategy in Pennsylvania is to eat into Mrs Clinton's base (as he did in Wisconsin) while also supercharging his own supporters (upscale liberals, blacks and younger voters). Here Mr Casey's endorsement should help. Mr Obama has also been engaged in a blue-collar charm offensive, swapping his grand speeches for cosy town-hall meetings and even engaging in the quintessential white-guy sport of bowling. But he may have as little luck with his charm offensive as he did with hitting the pins.

His office in Johnstown displays the usual posters about "hope" and "change". But they strike a discordant note. A nearby factory, a behemoth in its time, is boarded up and decaying. The local estate-agent advertises a three-bedroom house for \$8,000. Most of those in the local restaurants are elderly whites on Social Security.

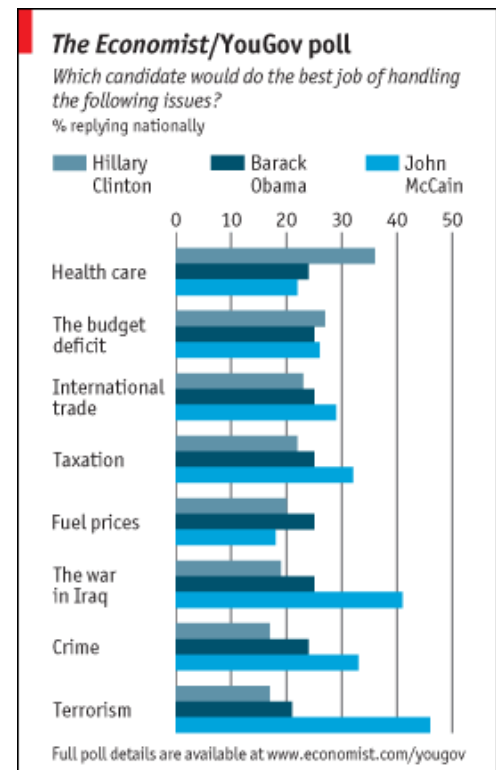
But the second half of Mr Obama's strategy is more hopeful. Mr Obama won Missouri despite losing the vast majority of the state's 115 counties. He could do the same here. Ironically, the best model for Mr Obama to follow is Mr Rendell's own victory over his friend Mr Casey in the race for the Democratic nomination for governor in 2002: Mr Rendell won by 57-43%, despite taking only ten counties to his opponent's 57, because he triumphed in the Philadelphia region.

Some 60% of the state's Democratic voters live in the greater Philadelphia area. The city contains large numbers of blacks (about 40% of the electorate), upscale professionals and students. Its suburbs have also been trending Democratic.

The *Politico's* Ben Adler warns that Pennsylvania might not prove to

be as much of a treasure trove of student votes as Iowa and New Hampshire, thanks to the strict rules governing voting and the fact that the state is a net importer of students. But Mr Obama is looking strong with the professional crowd. More than 100,000 new Democrats signed up before the March 24th deadline, and more than 86,000 voters switched their party registration. An unscientific drive-by survey of lawn signs in the suburbs also showed Obama signs outnumbering Clinton ones by four to one.

The available evidence from the pollsters is more mixed. Several polls have shown Mrs Clinton's lead diminishing (and an American Research Group poll taken between April 5th and 6th shows the two in a dead heat). But a poll by SurveyUSA shows Mrs Clinton with a striking 18-point lead. If the first poll is right, then Mrs Clinton is doomed; but if the second poll is on the money, then the Democratic Convention may yet see a fight worthy of that local Philadelphia hero, Rocky Balboa.



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