



Democrats' delegate dilemma

With the race so close, "superdelegates" may choose the nominee. Clinton and Obama have contrasting views.

By Larry Eichel

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Neither Hillary Rodham Clinton nor Barack Obama is going to win the Democratic presidential nomination based on the primaries alone.

- > At this point, it's just about mathematically impossible. That's the central reality of the race now that Super Tuesday has come and gone.
- > The contests yet to come - including Maryland, Virginia and the District of Columbia on Tuesday; Texas and Ohio on March 4; and Pennsylvania on April 22 - remain tremendously important.
- > But the object of the game has changed: Now the idea behind winning primaries is to gain momentum and thereby impress the 796 superdelegates, most of them party and elected officials.
- > Those are the individuals whose votes at the convention will carry one candidate to the magic number and the nomination.
- > But their influence, depending on how it's exerted, could leave millions of Democratic voters feeling cheated - and less enthusiastic about their party heading into November.
- > Clinton aides say they'll play by the rules they've been handed. But Obama has been sounding the alarm, saying that he should be the nominee if he wins more pledged delegates.
- > "It would be problematic," Obama said Friday, "for the political insiders to overturn the judgment of the voters."
- > Those insiders, the superdelegates, aren't bound by the results in their states, and many of them have been choosing sides already. But they're also free to change their minds later on.
- > What confronts the Democrats now is a classic case of the law of unintended consequences.
- > "They're being bitten by a process they created to solve a problem they don't have," said Donald F. Kettl, director of the Fels Institute of Government at the University of Pennsylvania.

- > The superdelegates, who make up 20 percent of the 4,049 delegates, exist to prevent the party from nominating an unelectable outsider - not to stop it from choosing between two strong, mainstream candidates.
- > Which is what they're doing. If the superdelegates didn't exist, and only Clinton and Obama were in the race, one candidate would have to win the nomination based on the primaries. The arithmetic would make it so.
- > There would be no room for any backroom deals, no likelihood that anyone would feel that the prize had been stolen, no chance for a train wreck.
- > To be sure, there are enough pledged delegates left in the coming primaries and caucuses to get either Clinton or Obama over the top without the superdelegates. But for that to happen, given the Democrats' proportional system, one candidate would have to start winning everywhere by huge margins.
- > According to the Associated Press count, which is unofficial, Clinton has the lead in total delegates, 1,064 to 1,029, with 2,025 needed for victory.
- > Obama is ahead by 47 or so in pledged delegates, those chosen by the voters. But Clinton has a lead of slightly more than 100 in superdelegates, giving her the overall advantage.
- > About 40 percent of all the superdelegates nationwide have endorsed a candidate thus far. Superdelegates represent the party establishment, and Clinton has more establishment support.
- > All 398 members of the Democratic National Committee are superdelegates. So, too, is every Democrat in the House and Senate, as well as every Democratic governor.
- > There's also a category of distinguished party leaders, including former presidents and vice presidents, and 76 add-on delegates (three in Pennsylvania, two in New Jersey, one in Delaware) whom the state parties haven't named yet.
- > Considering the situation, the best path to a happy ending for the Democrats - a universally accepted consensus - would be for either Clinton or Obama to sweep Texas, Ohio and Pennsylvania and build up a clear lead.
- > Under that scenario, after Pennsylvania in late April, there would be pressure on the superdelegates, regardless of whom they had previously backed, to rally around the leader and make him or her the presumptive nominee.
- > Should that not happen, the potential for division and disgruntlement would be high - because the insiders, not the voters, would be seen as the ones in control.
- > "I don't think 50 people representing all the others get in a room and decide to be kingmakers," said Neil Oxman, a Democratic strategist not allied with either campaign. "It would be just tough, hard inside baseball, one superdelegate at a time. If it were dead even at that point, I assume Clinton wins."
- > In any event, there will be a push to resolve the contest before the convention, which is scheduled for the last week in August in Denver.
- > Howard Dean, the Democratic national chairman, said in a New York television interview last week:

"The idea that we can afford to have a big fight at the convention and then win the race in the next eight weeks, I think, is not a good scenario."

> In addition, going all the way to the convention creates the likelihood of a divisive credentials battle over Florida and Michigan, which were stripped of all their delegates for scheduling their primaries too early.

> Said Costas Panagopoulos, a political scientist at Fordham University: "The Republicans have nine months to coalesce around John McCain, and the Democrats will be divided for some time. That could have serious implications in November."

> One solution could be a Clinton-Obama ticket, assuming the candidates don't work each other over too much in the coming weeks. But that's not in sight at the moment.

> "If it stays this close, it could end with the calling of the roll in Denver," Oxman said. "It might not be over until the clerk calls the state of Wyoming."

> The superdelegates, as an institution, were created in 1981 by a special commission.

> After the Democrats' disastrous 1968 convention in Chicago, party rules had been democratized, producing what party insiders considered unacceptable outcomes.

> In 1972, the nominee was George McGovern, who lost in a landslide to Richard Nixon. In 1976, it was Jimmy Carter. He won. But his problems as president led to another Republican landslide in 1980, this one for Ronald Reagan.

> The commission decided that the solution was less democracy; it guaranteed a bloc of seats at the convention for party insiders.

> Since then, the number of superdelegates has grown. Not that anyone noticed. Until now.

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Democratic Superdelegates From the Region

> PENNSYLVANIA

> **Democratic National Committee members:** Rena Baumgartner, Anna Burger, Carol Ann Campbell, Ronald Donatucci, William M. George, Marcel Groen, Leon Lynch, Sophie Masloff, Gerald McEntee, Jean Milko, Ian Murray, Evelyn Richardson, T.J. Rooney, Ruth Rudy.

> **Governor:** Edward G. Rendell. **U.S. Senate:** Robert P. Casey Jr.

> **U.S. House members:** Jason Altmire, Robert Brady, Chris Carney, Michael Doyle, Chaka Fattah, Tim Holden, Paul Kanjorski, Patrick Murphy, John Murtha, Allyson Schwartz, Joe Sestak.

> **Others:** Three more to be named later.

> NEW JERSEY

> **Democratic National Committee members:** Tonio Burgos, Joseph Cryan, Joseph DeCotiis, June Fischer, Phil Murphy, Donald Norcross, Dana Redd, Christine Samuels.

> **Governor:** Jon. S. Corzine. **U.S. Senate:** Frank Lautenberg, Robert Menendez.

> **U.S. House members:** Robert Andrews, Rush Holt, Frank Pallone, Bill Pascrell, Donald Payne, Steven Rothman, Albio Sires.

> **Others:** Two more to be named later.

> DELAWARE

> **Democratic National Committee members:** John Daniello, Harriet Smith-Windsor, Rhett Ruggiero, Karen Valentine.

> **Governor:** Ruth Ann Minner. **U.S. Senate:** Joseph Biden, Thomas Carper.

> **Others:** One more to be named later.

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