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## The Blue-Collar Battle in Pennsylvania

By Jay Newton-Small/Harrisburg

Barack Obama emerged from his hotel in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, in the gray rain early Monday morning and climbed onto his campaign bus for a long day of events. Swinging onto the highway, his motorcade passed a marquee across the street that read "Welcome, Senator Clinton." Six hours later Hillary Clinton would pull off the highway ramp and turn into the Capitol Diner for a roundtable discussion on the economy.

Pennsylvania is a pretty big state, but the two Democratic hopefuls are right on top of each other this week as the fight for the blue-collar vote in areas that are generally considered to be Clinton strongholds. On Tuesday they were both holding events in Wilkes-Barre, and Clinton will address the same AFL-CIO conference in Philadelphia that Obama will attend Wednesday.

On his first bus tour in the Keystone State, Obama's itinerary is like a gauntlet thrown down before Clinton. Everything about his trip is unconventional, from his choice of towns that he is focusing on — Clinton stronghold like Scranton, Altoona, Wilkes-Barre, mostly working-class and white with lots of Catholics — to his quirky event: The Illinois Senator has scarfed down a hot dog and then gone bowling in Altoona, fed a baby cow in State College, sloshed back a beer and watched college basketball in Burnham, sampled the fares at a chocolate factory in Reading and, oh yeah, led some town halls and rallies as well. "I've been having a good time," Obama told an audience of 2,000 in Lancaster Monday morning. "We have stopped by some sports bars and, I admit, on the way had a few beers. I fed a calf a big bottle; that went alright. And then we went bowling — didn't do so good. There was an eight-year-old giving me tips since I hadn't played since I was about eight."

Obama's best shot at winning Pennsylvania, or at least closing the gap, is rallying Democrats in and around Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, the state's two largest cities. [So why is he spending so much time in central Pennsylvania?](#) "This is good old-fashioned retail campaigning, with perhaps a feint to surprise and unbalance the Clinton campaign and force her to contest every delegate," said Donald Kettl, a professor of political science at the University of Pennsylvania. "In some of these communities, he's been playing to his base, such as the rally at Pen State. However, he's also made a few long reaches, such as bowling in Altoona, as much of a white-guy play as on

could make."

Obama may be drawing the crowds — 22,000 in State College alone — and enthusiasm, but Clinton's message is tried and tested in this Rust Belt State, where 47% of Democratic primary voters are over the age of 45. "She's got Bill behind her and I loved Bill," said Daniel Mooney, 72, a security guard from Philadelphia. "She's got the experience we need. She seems to understand people, and unlike Obama she's already been in the White House."

Clinton, with a comfortable double-digit lead in most polls, is running the most conventional of campaigns here — hitting her stronghold areas with a series of discussions on the economy, her strongest issue. Her audiences are filled with her core demographics: women, elderly and blue-collar workers. Her tone is serious as she ticks off depressing economic statistics, brightening only to talk about the boom of the 1990s and how she can return the economy to those good old days. "The typical working family has gotten about \$500 in tax cuts from George Bush," Clinton said at the diner in Harrisburg. "Now \$500 is not nothing, but the typical family has lost about \$1,000 in income. So everybody's behind and that's not the way it used to be; during the '90's everybody was doing better. So what I have been proposing is to get rid of the \$55 billion in tax cuts to the oil companies, the drug companies, the pharmaceutical companies and Wall Street, take that money and give it back to you."

Her message resounds with blue-collar workers, fearful of what a recession could do to their already struggling bottom lines. Obama "is not saying the right things," Robin Fondacaro, 59, an equipment operator from Bristol, said before a Clinton rally in Fairless Hills Sunday. "She's telling us what we want to hear. Now whether it's true or not, time will tell."

Along much of his tour, Obama is being accompanied by Pennsylvania Senator Bob Casey, whose surprise endorsement at the beginning of the bus trip has given Obama a much-needed ally in a state where the establishment long ago endorsed Clinton, including Governor Ed Rendell, Pittsburgh mayor Luke Ravenstahl and Philadelphia mayor Michael Nutter. The pro-life Casey is popular with the white union and Catholic voters that Obama has spent the week courting.

And, though he discusses a range of issues, Obama is sure at every event to mention his plans for middle-class tax breaks, rewriting trade treaties and fixing the subprime crisis. Yet it is another message from the Obama camp that seems to be having a bigger impact these days: that his nomination is inevitable. "Support for Clinton from these Catholics is more pro forma than deep and Senator Obama can make some inroads, especially if these voters begin to suspect that it would be unlikely for Clinton to win the nomination," said Steve Schneck, a political science professor at Catholic University in Washington.

Obama surrogates Senators Chris Dodd and Patrick Leahy last week called on the New York Senator to quit the race, questioning her viability as a candidate. Obama himself, however, welcomed Clinton's continued presence in the race, saying the competition has served to energize and turn out Democrats. But at least one Pennsylvania poll shows the race narrowing as Obama outspends Clinton five to one on television and radio ads. And a steady stream of superdelegates breaking for Obama has become a form of Chinese water torture for the Clinton

campaign. "The news keeps trumpeting the idea that Clinton mathematically can't win the nomination, which means that he has a chance to make [the Pennsylvania race] close," said David Barker, a political science professor at the University of Pittsburgh. "I think if he loses by five or six points that will be perceived as a victory." Mindful that a rush of enthusiasm and a rapid ascent in the polls might raise expectations, as it did in Texas, the Obama campaign has done its best to underline how much of a challenge they face here. Still, their strategy seems to have gotten under Clinton's skin, as they make sure in Pennsylvania that they are never far from her mind.

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