

THE CAMPAIGN WILL GO ON

David Herle

Looking inside the elected delegate numbers of the exciting race for the Democratic presidential nomination in the US, Contributing Writer David Herle concludes it is highly improbable that Hillary Clinton will overcome Barack Obama's 170-vote lead in elected delegates in the remaining primaries and caucuses on the calendar between Pennsylvania in late April and Puerto Rico in early June. However, enough superdelegates could still break her way to deliver the nomination to her at the Democratic convention in August. Far from being obliged to follow the popular will, the ex-officio party officials should follow their sense of which of the two candidates is more electable against John McCain in November. While it's definitely advantage Obama, the campaign goes on.



Compte tenu du nombre de délégués élus à ce jour dans la passionnante course à l'investiture démocrate, notre collaborateur David Herle juge improbable que Hillary Clinton puisse surmonter l'avance de 170 délégués détenue par Barack Obama lors des caucus et primaires de la fin avril en Pennsylvanie et du début juin à Porto Rico. Mais un certain nombre de « super délégués » pourraient encore lui valoir d'être élue au congrès démocrate du mois d'août. Ces délégués d'office ne sont pas tenus de se plier à la volonté populaire et devront voter en leur âme et conscience pour le candidat qui aura les meilleures chances de l'emporter en novembre sur John McCain. Barack Obama s'est acquis un avantage indéniable, mais la campagne est loin d'être terminée.

Some things about the Democratic contest between Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama seem settled. When all primaries and caucuses are concluded, Obama will have elected more delegates than Clinton. However, some other things remain very unclear — most notably the question of who is going to win.

Barring a complete collapse in support for Obama, there is no way that Clinton can catch him in elected delegates with the remaining states. On March 16 the Real Clear Politics delegate count was 1,425 elected delegates for Obama to Clinton's 1,245, leaving Obama with a lead of 170 delegates. In order to tie Obama she would have to win 70 percent of the remaining delegates. That seems highly implausible, given that to this point the highest percentage of the vote she has received was in Rhode Island, where she received 58 percent. In her home state of New York she got 57 percent of the vote.

It is worth taking a moment to consider how the Clinton campaign found itself in this desperate mathematical situation. For much of February her campaign spokespeople talked as though her victory was not only likely but inevitable. Texas and Ohio, they said. February rolled along and Obama racked up win after win, in state after state. Clinton's campaign went to almost comical degrees to diminish the importance of Obama's 11-state winning streak. Each attempt required even greater reliance on the importance of Texas and Ohio. In the process, they accomplished one of the biggest spin victories of the campaign.

Clinton did indeed win the popular vote in both Texas and Ohio — in Ohio convincingly. However, her victories were too narrow to matter to the delegate count. In the immediate aftermath of Super Tuesday Clinton had implied that Texas and Ohio would wipe out any gains Obama made through the month of February. His February victories turned out to be much larger than anticipated, and once-big leads for her in Texas and Ohio disappeared. The spin victory for campaign Clinton was that victories that had essentially no meaning in the delegate count were treated as serious dents in Obama's momentum and seen as an indication that she was still in the race.

Spin is spin but math is math. Obama beat Clinton by 125 delegates in February and she beat him by 5 delegates in Texas and Ohio. That is where the race got away from her (partly due to a deplorable ground organization that has been beaten in organizationally driven caucus meetings with such regularity and severity that Clinton had to fire her campaign manager) and where it became mathematically impossible for her to win the elected delegate count.

Yet I don't think this thing is over yet. Far from it. Despite Obama's success and his dominance in February, he will not have enough elected delegates to have a majority going into the convention in Denver. How is that possible? It's because there are 800 delegates that the Democrats call "superdelegates" (in a country with a Super Bowl, a Super Ball

and a Super Dome, what else could they be called?). These superdelegates were not elected in primaries or caucuses. They are entitled to a vote because of the positions they hold.

As we approach the end of the primary/caucus process, scrutiny is moving to these superdelegates. The scrutiny is not limited to how they *will*

The superdelegates exist because they represent the institution of the Democratic Party. Those who have delegate status because they are members of the Senate or the House of Representatives are the public face and representation of the Democratic Party. They have an awful lot at stake in the nominee being successful as they will be on the ballot beside his or her name.

vote. Increasingly, there is a debate about how they *should* vote. There has been an aggressive campaign by the Obama campaign to delegitimize these delegates. They weren't elected, they say — how dare these elites overturn the will of the elected delegates, or the will of those who voted in primaries or caucuses? In the words of Obama. "If this contest comes down to superdelegates, we are going to be able to say we have more pledged delegates, which means the Democratic voters have spoken...The argument we would be making to superdelegates is, if we come into the convention with more pledged delegates then I think we can make a very strong argument that our constituencies have spoken." The suggestion is that it would be inappropriate for these superdelegates to do anything other than mirror the elected results. Apocalyptic visions of the fractures in the Democratic Party should Obama be "denied" the nomination by superdelegates are the stuff of fevered speculation on political Web sites and cable news channels.

There are several assumptions baked into that thinking, but the most important is the notion that these superdelegates, because they were not elected through the primaries or caucuses, do not have the legitimacy to vote their own conscience. Let's examine that assumption.

Superdelegates are made up broadly of two categories — public office holders like members of Congress, and Democratic Party officials. Most political parties make the same provisions for the same kinds of people. The Liberal Party of Canada calls them ex-officio delegates, and they make up just shy of 20 percent of a convention

delegation — similar in proportion to the Democratic superdelegates.

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Those who are delegates by virtue of the positions they hold in the party are there because those people who make political parties work, who form the organizational backbone of the parties, should have a direct say in the selection of the nominee. These are the people who year in and year out, when politics is not glamorous or exciting, give up their time to help the party develop policy, recruit new members, develop a volunteer base and raise money. They, too, have been elected to their posts by their peers in the activist wing of the party. Long after the election is over, and the millions who voted excitedly for one candidate or another

(many of whom do not even claim to be Democrats) have gone back to their lives, these core party activists will be the ones who are left picking up the pieces of whatever has transpired.

This is not a process where the public selects two finalists for president. This is a process where the two political parties select their nominees for president. They could do it any way they like. They could choose a system where 10 men in a smoke-filled room select the nominee. They could choose a system, as does the Liberal Party of Canada, where only party members have a vote. The Democratic Party

has an interest in the nominee — to ensure electability, to ensure that they he or she represents the values of the party, to ensure that he or she cares about the party.

Much has been written in this magazine and other places about the decline of the party system. Selecting the nominee is one of the most important tasks political parties fulfill. Political parties are not empty shells to be used as vehicles for presidential ambitions. Political parties are ongoing institutions vital to the democratic choices offered to voters, and the party, as well as its voter base, needs to be comfortable with its presidential nominee.

In essence, the Democratic Party has delegated most of its presidential nominee process to the American public. But it has not delegated all of it. It has retained this 20 percent slice of the delegation to represent the institution of the Democratic Party. Superdelegates are clearly intended to use their own judgment. They are explicitly not bound to any candidate and are not required to declare at any point prior to voting. They are expected to use their judgment to the end. As it turns out, they will be pivotal.

What could cause these superdelegates to overturn the popular will, as expressed through the elected, or pledged, delegates? The question itself is an example of the fabulous job the

Obama campaign has done in framing this issue. Just asking it delegitimizes the superdelegates. It is also true that the popular will is not so clear-cut as the question would presuppose. At this point, Obama has about 53 percent of the elected delegates to Clinton's 46 percent. Given the possibility of seating delegations from Florida and Michigan, along with some good prospects upcoming for Clinton, it is conceivable that the elected delegate count will be closer than that by the convention.

It has to be closer for there to be any realistic chance that Clinton will receive the support of superdelegates in numbers sufficient to put her over the top. Of the criteria superdelegates will be applying, by far the most important will be whom they perceive to be the strongest candidate against John McCain. Obama has won more delegates, states and votes than Clinton has. He has spent most of this campaign gaining support while she has spent most of it losing support. He has been primarily responsible for a surge of new voters in the primary process. Alternatively, the race is very close, and if you remove the caucus state tallies (caucuses measure organization as much as they measure public support), they are effectively tied in states that held primaries. Support for her candidacy has proven resilient — New Hampshire, Super Tuesday and Texas/Ohio all represented clear opportunities for Obama to deliver a decisive blow and put this away. He was unable to do so. And polls show both of them running very similarly — and dangerously closely — to John McCain. At this point, the evidence on electability is inconclusive, but the advantage is to Obama.

For months now all the momentum has been with Obama. Unless that changes, he will almost certainly win. The importance to Clinton of states like Pennsylvania is not only in the delegates she might gain, but in the enhancement of her moral claim on the nomination. But it will take more

than a win in Pennsylvania. She needs to do very well — and clearly better than Obama — in the remaining states. She needs to surprise people with the extent of her support in order to change existing impressions about which of them is the better candidate.

Even that is likely to be insufficient to make a persuasive case that she is a better general election candidate than he is. As a result, the contest is likely to get more negative. It will be difficult for her campaign to make *her* seem like a much *better* choice than she has seemed to this point. It will be easier for her campaign to make *him* seem like a *worse* choice than he has

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appeared to date. Her campaign will be aided by the media scrutiny that inevitably applies to the likely winner.

The recent revelations about the incendiary sermons of Obama's long-time pastor may be the most significant test he will face. It goes to his character and judgment. It goes to the heart of the narrative of his candidacy: that he is not a racial candidate; that he is, in fact, the candidate to transcend racial divisions. And it will test his remarkable powers of persuasion. He has made an impressive start. Like Paul Martin facing the sponsorship scandal, Obama adopted the approach modern politics demands and traditional politics abhors — he chose to address the issue rather than try to pretend it didn't exist; and he chose to trust in

information rather than obfuscation. His speech was widely praised as a serious and honest effort to address the racial divide in America. He appears to have staunched the initial bleed of public support. However, there is a great deal of campaigning yet to do before the general election next November. One speech, no matter how impressive, is unlikely to be sufficient to convince Americans why the sentiments expressed by his minister are not seen as extreme in that culture, and why his roots in that culture are a qualification rather than a disqualification for the presidency. It may be that the issue will not fatally damage his candidacy in the Democratic nomination campaign, but will re-emerge in the general election. The Republicans are likely to be much less shy than Hillary Clinton in the way that they use the issue. One thing is certain — with the forthright and open approach Obama has taken to this issue he has strengthened his credentials to be the leader of the United States.

Out-of-the-blue developments like the Reverend Wright controversy are the reason this race is very much a work in progress. Political campaigns are dynamic. They are full of unforeseen changes in support. Talk of backroom arrangements between the candidates to cut a deal is not founded in reality. The Clinton campaign will not agree to freeze the campaign at this point as if, now that Obama has reached a point where she cannot catch him in elected delegates, it is over. It is not over. It is going to the convention in Denver, and the campaign will be fought hard all that time. The superdelegates will decide it one way or another based on their judgment at that time. And there is nothing wrong with that. The campaign for the ages goes on.

Contributing Writer David Herle, former pollster and national campaign co-chair for the Liberal Party of Canada, is a principal of the Gandalf Group in Toronto. herle@gandalfgroup.ca

JUST THE FACTS

Fact: Canada's forest products industry is committed to a goal of being carbon-neutral by 2015 (oh, and that's without the purchase of carbon offset credits).

For an industry that has already made significant progress in reducing its impact on the climate—a 45% cut in the use of fossil fuels, a 54% improvement in greenhouse gas emissions intensity, a 40% reduction in landfill waste since 1990, and a 44% reduction in emissions from our pulp and paper mills—the next logical step is complete carbon neutrality throughout our value chain.

Ambitious, yes, but part of the industry's ongoing commitment to environmental leadership and performance.

Discover more facts
about the forest products
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