CHAPTER 12

PENNSYLVANIA

Following Hillary Clinton's big victories in the Texas and Ohio Democratic primaries, the 2008 campaign for the Democratic nomination for president became two campaigns. The first campaign was to see who would win most of the ten remaining presidential primaries. The second campaign was over who could gain the most support from the superdelegates, a special set of delegates to the Democratic National Convention who were appointed rather than being selected in the caucuses and primaries.

SUPERDELEGATES

When the Democratic Party changed its rules in the early 1970s, it endeavored to make the Democratic National Convention a more inclusive event. States were required to select more women, young people, and minorities as delegates to the convention. The new rules worked quite well, and the group image of the delegates that went out to the nation on television became noticeably more diverse.

By the early 1980s, however, one group was conspicuously missing at the national convention. That was party elected officials, such as state governors, members of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives, etc. Although a number of women and minorities held major elected offices throughout the nation, it was still true that most elected officials were middle-aged white males. The party rules requiring more women, young people, and minorities at the national convention were, in effect, excluding significant numbers of the party's major holders of elected office. That was mainly because so many of these elected officials were men, were well-along in their careers, and were not members of a minority group.

The Democrats decided to correct this situation by creating "superdelegates." All of the major elected government officials in the party, the members of the Democratic National Committee, and other party dignitaries were automatically appointed delegates to the national convention. The gender, age, and minority requirements that applied to the pledged delegates selected in presidential caucuses and primaries did not apply to the superdelegates. The major purpose was to make certain that prominent elected Democrats, such as leading U.S. senators, prominent state

governors, and well-known members of the House of Representatives, were present and visible at the convention.

There are many Democratic politicians sitting in important elected government offices across the United States, so the number of superdelegates is sizeable, approximately 800 or so. Superdelegates are each given one vote, similar to pledged delegates elected in caucuses and primaries. Prior to 2008, however, those superdelegate votes had no real impact on the nominating process. The party nominee always was determined in the first 10 or so presidential caucuses and primaries, and never later than Super Tuesday. All the superdelegates had to do was be in attendance at the convention and cast their votes for the winning candidate selected by party voters in the early caucuses and primaries.

In 2008, however, the role and importance of the superdelegates changed radically. Following Hillary Clinton's big twin win in the Texas and Ohio primaries, it was clear that the Democratic Party was splitting down the middle over Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton. If the race remained even through the final ten primaries, which appeared likely, neither candidate would have won enough delegates to have a majority and win the nomination. The final choice between Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton then would have to be made by the superdelegates at the national convention in Denver, Colorado, in August of 2008.

Many of the superdelegates had already made and announced their decision to vote for either Barack Obama or Hillary Clinton, but 40 percent, around 320, had not. The major news media began canvassing the superdelegates and keeping a running count of which superdelegates were supporting Barack Obama and which were going for Hillary Clinton.

Initially, Hillary Clinton had a strong lead among the superdelegates who had revealed their intentions, but Barack Obama steadily reduced that lead. In fact, it appeared to be a strategy of the Obama campaign to periodically announce the name of a superdelegate who was a former Clinton supporter but was then solidly behind Obama.

A classic example was Joe Andrew, a former chairperson of the Democratic National Committee and thus a key Democratic Party personage. Andrew jolted the Clinton campaign by switching his support from her to Obama and calling on Democrats to "reject the old negative poli-

tics" and come together behind Barack Obama.

Particularly damaging to Hillary Clinton were superdelegate switches to Obama by former members of Bill Clinton's presidential cabinet, such as former-Secretary of Labor Robert Reich and former-Secretary of Energy Bill Richardson, who at the time of the 2008 presidential election was governor of New Mexico. These were people who got their opportunity to serve in the national government from Bill and Hillary Clinton, but that debt did not seem to stop many of them from shifting their support to Barack Obama.

THE FINAL TEN CAUCUSES AND PRIMARIES

It was clear that one of the major influences on how the undecided superdelegates eventually were going to vote was the ten presidential caucuses and primaries remaining after Texas and Ohio. By this stage of the process, however, most astute observers could look at the list of the final ten and make a well-educated guess as to which candidate would win which caucuses or primary. The tentative list of states and probably winners looked like this.

First up would be the southern state of Mississippi, where more than a majority of the Democratic voters are African-American. It should be a certain big victory for Barack Obama.

Second would come Pennsylvania, a populous state that is very similar to Ohio, with large numbers of white working-class voters. That slated it as a probable win for Hillary Clinton.

Then would come North Carolina and Indiana. An even split of the two states was predicted. North Carolina would go for Barack Obama because it was a southern state with a substantial black population. Hillary Clinton would win Indiana, with its Ohio-type white working-class Democrats.

One key state still to vote was West Virginia, which is rich in those white working-class Democrats who had become the most loyal part of Hillary Clinton's support. Also important in the final days ahead, however, would be Kentucky, another white working-class state, and Oregon, a famously liberal state that should prove strong territory for Barack Obama.

Near the end of the line would be Puerto Rico, a United States territory that could not vote in the November general election but which would be sending a substantial number of delegates to the Democratic National Convention. With its heavy Hispanic population, Puerto Rico was potentially a big win for Hillary Clinton.

The last two states to vote would be Montana and South Dakota. Both states are located west of the Mississippi River in a part of the United States that had proven strong for Barack Obama.

So, as the curtain rang down on Hillary Clinton's two big triumphs in Texas and Ohio, the future voting looked as evenly-balanced as the previous voting had been. Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama probably were going to more or less equally divide the final ten caucuses and primaries between them. The superdelegates, almost as evenly divided as the caucuses and primary voters, would be making the final decision, but no one could tell exactly when or how that final decision by the superdelegates would be made.

MISSISSIPPI

Mississippi voted one week after Texas and Ohio. Mississippi is one of the most Republican states in the nation, but in the Democratic primary over 60 percent of the voters are African-American. The expectations game came into full play in Mississippi in 2008. Barack Obama won handily, but he was expected to win, so his big triumph had minimal effect on his race against Hillary Clinton.

PENNSYLVANIA

An unusual situation came into play where the Pennsylvania primary was concerned. There was a six week dead spot, planned by no one but nonetheless real, in the Democratic presidential primary calendar. From March 11, 2008, when Mississippi voted, until April 22, 2008, when Pennsylvania was scheduled to go to the polls, there were no caucuses or primaries. It was the biggest gap in the presidential primary calendar since the runup to the "First-In-The-Nation" Iowa caucuses on January 3, 2008. That big block of empty time prior to Pennsylvania meant that Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton could concentrate their campaigns almost exclusively on Pennsylvania for an extended period of time.

Pennsylvania, nicknamed the Keystone State, appeared to be worth the time, the money, and the effort for both of the candidates. In Hillary Clinton's case, Pennsylvania was a populous state with large numbers of white working-class voters, the very ones who had propelled her to that impressive victory in Ohio. Pennsylvania represented Hillary Clinton's best chance in the remaining primaries to show that she could win, and win big, in a heavily populated state with a large number of electoral votes and legions of those blue-collar voters who had long been the traditional base of the Democratic Party.

For Barack Obama, on the other hand, Pennsylvania offered the opportunity to campaign hard and demonstrate that he could win the votes of the white working class. A Pennsylvania win would show that Barack Obama could expand his support beyond African-Americans and upscale whites and bring blue-collar Democrats into his coalition of electoral supporters. A victory for Barack Obama in the Keystone State would be a major upset. It would take from Hillary Clinton her big argument that only she could attract the white working-class voters needed for a Democratic presidential victory against the Republicans in November.

Thus it was that Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton both pitched themselves into a high-stakes battle for Pennsylvania. The two candidates campaigned against each other throughout the state, hitting the big cities of Philadelphia to the east and Pittsburgh to the west and many of the small towns in between. A six week deluge of television commercials hit Pennsylvania Democrats right along with all the candidate visits.

For six weeks in the spring of 2008, the state of Pennsylvania came to resemble the states of Iowa and New Hampshire in late December and early January. The last two surviving candidates for the Democratic Party nomination for president, Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton, were virtually inhabiting the state and spending small fortunes on campaign television ads. Their campaign buses continually crossed paths as they searched for votes in every nook and cranny of the Keystone State.

The people of Pennsylvania definitely did not deserve all this sudden attention. If ever a major state had been lackadaisical about whether it

had a relevant presidential primary or not, it was Pennsylvania. The state had made no effort whatsoever over the years to move the date of its primary forward on the calendar into a more meaningful position. In presidential years, Pennsylvanians dutifully went to the polls and routinely cast their votes for the candidate who had locked up the party presidential nomination in early caucuses and primaries. In 2008, however, because of the even race between Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton, Pennsylvania had the first significant and meaningful presidential primary contest in state history.

Pennsylvania is the sixth most-populous state in the United States. It has one of the most elderly populations in the nation (15 percent are over 65-years-old compared to 12 percent nationally) and one of the lowest college-graduation rates (22 percent have college degrees compared to 24 percent nationally). It is a classic "rust-belt" state with many abandoned factories, significant numbers of lost manufacturing jobs, and lots of unemployed factory workers. A big asset for Hillary Clinton in Pennsylvania was that she had the endorsement and the active campaigning support of the state's popular Democratic governor, Edward Rendell.

The six weeks between the Mississippi primary and the Pennsylvania primary left plenty of time for things to go wrong, and sure enough both candidates ran into difficult political obstacles. Trouble developed for Barack Obama when digital images of inflammatory statements by his African-American church pastor back in Chicago began playing on the internet. The Rev. Jeremiah Wright was the religious leader whom Barack Obama credited with bringing Obama to Christianity.

Wright had said the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., were "chickens coming home to roost" as a result of United States terrorism against minorities in the U.S. and overseas. In past church sermons, Wright had charged that the U.S. Government had created AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) to kill "people of color." Wright also defended Louis Farrakhan, an African-American leader well-known for his anti-white point of view.

The Rev. Wright's statements were played over and over again on

cable news and the internet. His comments were particularly damaging to Barack Obama, who had build his political career on being non-racist and non-threatening to white voters. Wright also was dramatically raising the issue of racial conflict in the United States, a conflict that Barack Obama argued was in the past and should not be allowed to keep white and black Americans from making progress together.

The Obama campaign decided to counteract the effects of Rev. Wright's past statements by having Barack Obama give a major speech on race relations in Philadelphia. The speech was well-received by the news media and served to separate Barack Obama from the views of his inflammatory church pastor. The speech reassured Obama supporters that Obama was a moderate on the subject of race relations and believed that the United States was taking significant steps toward ending all forms of racial discrimination.

A second problem that developed for Barack Obama in the campaign to win the Pennsylvania primary was of Obama's own making. On April 6, 2008, speaking at a fund raiser in San Francisco, Obama commented dejectedly on the problem he was having winning over white working-class voters in Pennsylvania. "It's not surprising then that they get bitter," Obama lamented. "They cling to guns or religion or antipathy to people who aren't like them or anti-immigrant sentiment or anti-trade sentiment as a way to explain their frustrations."

Obama thought he was speaking off the record with no reporters present, but one person in the audience was a political writer on the internet who, although an Obama supporter, sent his remarks out into the cyberworld. The conventional news media picked up Obama's comments off the internet and circulated them widely. Obama's apparent deprecating attitude toward working-class people and his description of them as "bitter" set off a storm of protest. Obama's critics charged he had an elitist attitude toward people who like guns and believe in their religion and are concerned about illegal immigration and foreign trade stealing jobs.

Obama had lamented that he could not reach blue-collar workers. Once that lament became public, it kicked up a fuss and further separated

him from white working-class voters in Pennsylvania.

Obama's comments in San Francisco and the sharp reaction in the news media to his choice of words became known as Bitter*gate*, a play on the name of the Water*gate* scandal which had ended Richard Nixon's presidency in the early 1970s. Even worse for Obama, voting behavior analysts pointed out that the "bitter" voters in the United States were the upscale college graduates who were supporting Obama, not the white working-class voters who tended to like Hillary Clinton. Far from being "bitter," polls showed the white working class was one of the most optimistic and patriotic groups in the nation.

Hillary Clinton was not spared from making a major gaffe as primary day in Pennsylvania drew closer. In several speeches, she recounted how, as first lady in the Clinton administration, she had heard sniper fire when she arrived at the airport in Bosnia during a state visit. Members of the press quickly checked the historical record and discovered that the most lethal thing Hillary Clinton had encountered at the airport was a bouquet of flowers. Hillary Clinton was forced to retract her remarks and admit she made a major factual error, one that inflated her resume but was patently untrue.

At long last, the six weeks of constant campaigning were over and Pennsylvania voters went to the polls. In a major surprise, Hillary Clinton won the Pennsylvania primary big time. The polls predicted she would win the Keystone State by 5 or 6 points, but she defeated Barack Obama by a double-digit margin. Above all, white working-class voters rallied to her cause, strongly bolstering her argument that only she could win this essential component of a Democratic victory coalition in the November general election.

The news media exit polls showed that the demographic divide in the Democratic Party was continuing to widen. One of Hillary Clinton's strongest support groups, as usual, was white women, who gave her 68 percent of their votes. Close behind were white men, who went for her with 57 percent support. Hillary Clinton's best performance was among Catholics, who voted 70 percent for her. In households with a gun owner, Clinton polled 63 percent. In households with a member of a labor union,

she garnered 59 percent.

Barack Obama also increased his numbers with the groups that had been supporting him all along. He received 90 percent of the African-American vote in Pennsylvania and 55 percent support from voters younger than age 45. He was particularly strong in big cities, where African-American voters and upscale whites combined to give him large majorities.

Hillary Clinton's noticeably big victory in Pennsylvania accentuated and continued the lift she received from her twin victories in Texas and Ohio. Although Barack Obama campaigned hard in the Keystone State and outspent Hillary Clinton by almost 3-to-1, he failed to dent her once-again proven strength in populous swing states with large numbers of white working-class voters. It seemed that campaigning and monetary expenditures were no longer affecting the race. Who won particular primaries was being determined by the characteristics of the voters in the particular state and by little else. For the Democratic Party in the 2008 presidential caucuses and primary season, demography had evolved into electoral determinism.