

Pennsylvania: Breaking the Checkmate?

March 6, 2008

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Against all odds, contrary to most plans, and confounding to many politicians, it has happened. Pennsylvania is about to play a role in determining the presidential nominees.

It's been a while. For the Democrats, the last time the state even remotely mattered was in 1984 when the reform candidate Gary Hart battled Walter Mondale for Pennsylvania support. But for the first time in at least 25 years, the Keystone State again matters. Between now and April 22nd, the state will be ground zero in the historic struggle now going on between Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama.

It is a struggle that will mix complex geography with critical demography. Pennsylvania is a state of enormous size and scope. Spatially immense, demographically diverse, and politically temperamental, the state is a hodgepodge of small towns, sprawling suburbs, and big cities. Home to urban behemoths like Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, it also has the third largest rural population in the country and the third highest population of elderly citizens.

By major media market, we can make some forecasts for how well the opposing candidates might do.

- **PHILADELPHIA:** Obama easily should win Philadelphia where more than half the voters are black. But African American voters statewide, who are only 12 to 15 percent of the Democratic vote, will not carry Obama home as they did in some earlier states. Philadelphia is also the home of Governor Ed Rendell and new Mayor Michael Nutter, both Clinton supporters. Rendell is a fundraiser extraordinaire and can help Clinton raise money, but he has no real campaign organization. And Nutter, though very popular, won't be able to halt the Obama tidal wave.
- **PHILADELPHIA SUBURBS:** This is a battleground region. Obama will contest Clinton here for the votes of the educated, more affluent, suburban Philadelphia voters, but Clinton will make it tight by scoring well with women in the region. Potentially a tossup.
- **PITTSBURGH and the SOUTHWEST:** Clinton should carry the blue collar, Catholic, union voters in the southwestern part of the state, just as she did in Ohio. Many old Reagan Democrats still reside in the aging mining and mill towns in western Pennsylvania. Generally these areas have been good for centrist Democrats.
- **SCRANTON and the NORTHEAST:** Clinton will do well here also. Many Democratic voters in counties like Lackawanna and Luzerne are conservative in the tradition of former Governor Robert Casey. Scranton in Lackawanna is the birthplace of Clinton's father, and the Clintons vacationed there in the past. The current Senator Robert Casey, son of the late governor, is neutral in the race.
- **LEHIGH VALLEY and SOUTH CENTRAL PA:** These are the swing regions of the state--areas that are likely to be hard fought. Both are growing areas with diverse populations and economies, and some tendency to vote against the grain.

Electoral forecasts may point to voting outcomes, but larger questions remain. What will those votes mean? Just what exactly is at stake in Pennsylvania on April 22nd: bragging rights to a big diverse state, momentum

going forward, or the nomination itself? The question is a vital one given the unusual circumstances now befuddling the Democratic nomination fight.

This much seems clear. Neither Obama nor Clinton can now clinch the nomination before the convention. The party's proportionality rules for delegate selection preclude either candidate from amassing a majority of pledged delegates before voting ends in June. So neither Pennsylvania nor any later state can change the delegate outcome very much.

In fact the Democrats confront the ultimate electoral catch 22--Obama can't reach a mathematical majority of pledged delegates to secure the nomination, and Clinton can't overtake him in delegates. They are checkmated.

Consequently the remaining contests will be anti-climatic. The nomination battle in Pennsylvania--and for that matter all the remaining caucuses and primaries--are bridges to nowhere for Democrats seeking a candidate to run against John McCain.

So Pennsylvania is unlikely to change the delegate ratio between Clinton and Obama or otherwise bring the race to a decisive end. Instead Pennsylvania is important for two other reasons, both critical components of the race at this moment, momentum and expectations. The first favors Clinton and the latter Obama.

Momentum is Clinton's now, and she might win the nomination if she sustains it. She has now stopped the apparently unstoppable Obama coming out of two electorally large states (Texas and Ohio). If she can now win Pennsylvania, Clinton will be able to make the compelling argument that she has won the big three swing states--Ohio, Florida, and Pennsylvania--conventionally believed to be needed for Electoral College victory in the fall. Meanwhile Obama has not scored impressively in the key large states needed to stitch together an Electoral College victory in the fall.

But if momentum favors the Clinton candidacy, expectations do not. The Pennsylvania contest will be fought on Clinton's turf, overseen by Clinton supporter Ed Rendell. And the state's Democratic demographics match up much better with Ohio and New Jersey, states she won, than with Wisconsin and South Carolina, states Obama won. So the expectations now shift decisively to her. Pennsylvania should be a Clinton state. And if she loses or only wins narrowly, her candidacy will be weakened, perhaps fatally.

And so the stage is now set for the Pennsylvania winner to write the final act in this long running Democrat melodrama. And the competing scripts are numerous: should the nomination go the candidate with the most delegates, or to the candidate who wins the most popular votes, or to the candidate who wins the most states, or to the candidate who wins the battleground states?

If Obama pulls out a victory in Pennsylvania, he will use it to demolish Clinton's argument that she can win in the critical big battleground states and so doing halt her momentum coming out of her victories on March 4th. Obama will be able to argue convincingly that his opponent can not win where she must and should not be the nominee. If Obama wins Pennsylvania, he probably cannot be stopped.

But if Clinton prevails in Pennsylvania, so likely will her arguments that only she can win the big, diverse battleground states that Democrats need to win in November. The super delegates who must now decide this thing will not be able to ignore what she has done, nor the messy problems left over from the aborted Michigan

and Florida primaries. Nor will they find it easy to deny her the nomination. If Clinton wins Pennsylvania, she will likely be the nominee.

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