

Hillary grasps for nomination

By DAVID PAUL KUHN | 12/29/07 11:30 PM EST



Once well ahead in Iowa and New Hampshire polls, HRC finds herself in exhaustive battle early in nominating circuit.

Photo: AP

DUBUQUE, Iowa — In the last weekend before the Iowa caucuses, after nearly a year of running as the Democratic front-runner, **Hillary Rodham Clinton**

(http://www.politico.com/candidates2008/demcandidates/hillary_clinton_candidate.html) is campaigning as the culmination of the best qualities of her chief rivals.

The veiled criticisms of her primary opponents reflect the climax of hundreds of campaign speeches, now summing to 18-hour days for Clinton. She is grasping at the Democratic presidential nomination that not long ago seemed all but inevitable.

The New York senator is now traversing Iowa as the economic populist seen in **John Edwards**

(http://www.politico.com/candidates2008/demcandidates/john_edwards_candidate.html) . She touts herself as a capable, practical candidate ready to “rebuild the middle class.” At the same time, Clinton campaigns as the change agent portrayed by **Barack Obama**

(http://www.politico.com/candidates2008/demcandidates/barack_obama_candidate.html)

but says she's not merely "hoping for it."

"Maybe you don't have health insurance," or "maybe you" have coverage but "the insurance company won't pay," she said at an early weekend stop. Or, "maybe you are looking at the cost of college and shaking your head," or "have just been told you are not going to have a job next year," or are suffering from stagnant wages.

Only two days after the assassination of Pakistani opposition leader Benazir Bhutto, Clinton is refocusing her campaign on domestic issues.

The accent on economic woes is coupled with her continued refrain: She is a hard worker, a "problem solver," a woman who will "roll up her sleeves" and who pledges to "get up every day" to "achieve" what Edwards and Obama talk about.

Once well ahead in the polls in Iowa and New Hampshire, Clinton now finds herself in a tight, exhaustive battle in the first two states in the nominating circuit.

"She did more on health care, education and the economy, more than ever" said real estate appraiser Sherry Madison, a Clinton volunteer who has heard her speak seven times this year.

"The mood of the country has changed in the last 30 to 50 days, and has become more concerned about the economy," she added, referencing a barrage of foreclosures and credit problems she has seen in many small Iowa towns.

Not far down the Mississippi River on Saturday, one of Clinton's chief rivals, Obama, was critiquing her capacity to be exactly that. He said she was less capable of winning in the general election because she's too unpopular nationally to appeal across party lines.

Clinton, meanwhile, was speaking of working with a Republican senator on veterans' affairs issues.

As Clinton's caravan drove the snowy byways of eastern Iowa, her campaign heard of Obama's critiques and pivoted in later stump speeches. She amplified her own electability, arguing that voters should support a candidate "who will be the best president from Day One," who is "tested and proven to be able to win against whatever the Republicans decide to do."

Clinton's internal polling has tracked an uptick in support for Edwards, likely explaining her slight but notable increase in populist rhetoric.

At her fifth speech of the night, as the hour passed 10 p.m., she asked voters who do not have health insurance to raise their hands. In an earlier speech, she repeated an oft-used line that contrary to "the two oil men in the White House," she believes that "it is not rich people that made America great."

Her soft populism is tied to her effort to undercut Obama as a "leap of faith," while arguing that voters can see what she will "get done" by looking at what she "has done."

She is counting on Iowa Democrats' tradition of flirting with challengers but by the caucuses offering the plurality of their support to party favorites, as they have from Walter Mondale in 1984 to John F. Kerry in 2004.

After a Clinton speech in Maquoketa, Iowa, Brenda Carlson, who once favored Edwards, stood cradling the former first lady's autobiography.

A medical technologist, Carlson had heard Obama campaigning and thought he "just seems so dynamic." But, she added, "it seemed like [Clinton] was really talking to us."

“It’s been really difficult,” she said, scratching her head. “I hope to get a feeling that night, to decide then.”
