

Clinton convention strategy in doubt

By DAVID PAUL KUHN | 3/31/08 8:31 PM EDT



Clinton has already won enough pledged members to meet the 20 percent threshold required to vote out a minority report.
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If the fight over whether to count the results in Florida and Michigan makes it to the Democratic National Convention, Hillary Clinton will not have enough pledged votes on the 169-member Credentials Committee to deliver a majority decision in her favor, according to an analysis conducted for Politico.

Her only hope of getting the key committee to vote out a “majority report” supporting her position rests on her

ability to persuade an as-yet-undetermined number of the 25 members appointed to the committee by party Chairman Howard Dean to cast votes for her position.

The DNC’s Credentials Committee consists of 144 pledged members (Florida and Michigan are not included) plus the 25 party leaders and elected officials appointed by Dean. The 25 Dean appointees include a mix of Dean loyalists, Obama supporters and at least several individuals who have endorsed Clinton.

"If the formal process of seating a delegation cannot be resolved," a Clinton senior adviser said, "those 25 will be important."

The analysis was conducted by Matt Seyfang, an attorney and a former delegate counter for past Democratic presidential candidates including Bill Clinton in 1992 to Bill Bradley in 2000. According to his projections and a calculation of the number of committee seats that each candidate is entitled to based on their proportion to the statewide vote or the relevant caucus rules, Obama holds roughly 65 seats and Clinton 56. There are slightly more than 23 seats still to be decided in the remaining contests.

Seyfang's findings reveal that Clinton faces an uphill battle if, as she signaled on Saturday, her campaign decides to take her fight to seat the Florida and Michigan delegations to the Credentials Committee.

"I have no intention of stopping until we finish what we started and until we see what happens in the next 10 contests and until we resolve Florida and Michigan," she told the Washington Post. "And if we don't resolve it, we'll resolve it at the convention — that's what credentials committees are for."

While it is mathematically impossible for Clinton to win a majority without winning over a number of Dean's appointees, it is also highly unlikely that Barack Obama will have enough votes to capture a majority without doing the same. He would need to sweep the remaining contests by runaway margins to win the roughly 20 seats necessary to gain a majority.

Clinton has, however, already won enough pledged members to meet the 20 percent threshold required to vote out a minority report, meaning that both Democratic candidates could have their positions voted on by all seated convention delegates.

The prospect of a convention that begins with a contentious vote on a "minority" or "majority" report is "the nightmare scenario," according to one Democratic party insider.

Neither campaign tracks projections on Credentials Committee seats,

according to aides charged with the arcane process of counting delegates. The DNC also does not track these totals but relies on state parties to report their totals as they are determined.

Adding to the confusion surrounding the Credentials Committee, a subject that has perplexed many party veterans, is the fact that Democrats have not found themselves studying the minutiae of convention rules since 1980. Since then, convention votes, including those in the Credentials Committee, have been pro forma.

Clarification: The Democratic National Committee's Credentials Committee consists of 186 members who cast 183 votes when Florida and Michigan members are included in the count.

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