

VP pick may chafe Hillary supporters

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Many of the foremost activists in the women's movement ardently believe that Hillary Rodham Clinton should be Barack Obama's running mate — and primary wounds that are just beginning to heal may be torn back open should the Democratic nominee select someone else, as it seems very likely he will.

Geraldine Ferraro, a Clinton supporter who in 1984 became the first woman on a major party presidential ticket, said Obama should be "gracious" enough to offer Clinton the vice presidency, considering how narrow the race was.

Marcia Pappas, who heads the New York state chapter of the National Organization for Women, believes that Clinton supporters "would be outraged to know she was not given that right of first refusal."

"She is the only woman in history who has ever garnered this much support," Pappas continued. "She is the only woman in history who was able to raise the kind of money one would need to run a presidential campaign."

Pamela Sumners, who directs the Missouri chapter of the abortion-rights group NARAL, added that Clinton "is now seen as the reigning dean of the women's movement. It's sort of Moses gets all the way to the mountain and doesn't get to the promised land — and I think there would be people really angry about that."

About one in five voters who supported Clinton in the Democratic primaries tell pollsters that they are not voting for Obama, according to a mid-July Quinnipiac University national poll of likely voters — a number that's only slightly lower than when Clinton dropped out and the conventional wisdom had it that support would coalesce around the presumptive nominee after a brief cooling-off period.

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The split isn't limited to women. "No matter who he picks," said former New York Gov. Mario Cuomo, "the question is going to be raised: Are you telling me that this person would be a better qualified vice president than Hillary Clinton?"

While there had been speculation that Obama might seek to mend fences by tapping another woman for the role, this seems increasingly unlikely — and it's not clear that even if it did happen that it would help with Clinton loyalists, especially since the most-often named women all endorsed Obama in

the primaries, earning the resentment of many leaders of women's organizations.

"If he picked Claire McCaskill or [Janet] Napolitano [or Kathleen] Sebelius, I think it would annoy women," Ferraro said.

Ferraro added that “those are women who we spent our lifetime helping run for office” and that “a lot of us are not happy with these women for not supporting Hillary because they came to us for help based in large part on their gender.”

“I would be very concerned about his judgment if he offered the position to another woman before offering it to Hillary Clinton,” Pappas said, “or any person.”

“The women who have been elected to office in this time in history are the beneficiaries of the women’s movement,” Pappas continued. “And it’s disheartening to see those same women turn their backs on another woman who is better qualified, and one can only wonder what they are getting out of their decision to turn their back.”

Any selection other than Clinton will reinforce some women’s sense that the most qualified candidate, a woman, has been passed over for the position.

Clinton has in this sense become a metaphor for the women’s movement itself.

“There are a lot of women apoplectic at the discussion of Bob Barr and Chuck Hagel,” said Kim Gandy, president of the National Organization for Women.

“It seems like the smart choice will be to pick Hillary Clinton because she adds so much to the ticket but the second choice should be a nominee who supported Hillary Clinton, to try and bring the sides together.”

Clinton’s most vocal sympathizers, like Sumners, warned that Obama cannot presume that Clinton’s supporters will return to the Democratic fold no matter who he selects.

Obama’s assertion at a closed-door meeting with members of the Congressional Black Caucus that Clinton’s supporters will “get over it,” once they consider the choice between him and presumptive Republican candidate John McCain, further frustrated many women.

“Those adamant Clinton supporters, the older, and I would say wealthier women, and some of the better known feminists from the dark ages, I think they will use his vice presidential choice, whether a woman or a man, as an excuse not to support him,” said Joan Hoff, an historian at Montana State University and a former president of the Center for the Study of the Presidency.

“There is disappointment out there,” noted Ellen Moran, executive director of women’s political group EMILY’s List. But she added that the “Obama campaign is taking important steps to reach out to and welcome and incorporate Hillary Clinton supporters.”

Part of that outreach took place when Moran and EMILY’s List president Ellen Malcolm flew to Chicago after the Democratic primary to meet with Obama’s senior advisers.

That outreach will culminate at the Democratic National Convention, where Clinton is scheduled to speak on Aug. 26 — which is also the 88th anniversary of the ratification of the 19th Amendment, which gave women the right to vote, a bit of symbolism that may chafe some of her supporters.

“I’m sorry to say this but I do think [the Democratic divide] is sort of significant,” Hoff said.

“It could have an impact. It’s not that you need a lot of them,” meaning Clinton supporters who will sit out the general or vote for McCain. “You just need enough of them in key places.”

Hoff compared the current dynamic to the Republicans in 1976, when Ronald Reagan’s supporters never fully rallied to Gerald Ford, and the Democrats in 1980, when Edward M. Kennedy’s supporters never fully warmed to Jimmy Carter.

“Ford lost because the neoconservatives sat on their hands and didn’t turn out to vote. The real worry is that [Clinton’s supporters] are going to sit on their hands, the older feminists,” Hoff said. “I’m telling you they’re mad.”

“It’s not that they are going to vote for McCain,” Hoff added. “It’s just that they are not going to get out there on the hustings” for Obama.