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Obama supporters hope to heal party

Gay delegates seek to unite Democrats against McCain

By JOSHUA LYNSEN, Washington Blade | Jun 4, 1:40 PM

Gay delegates for Sen. Barack Obama are hoping to unite Democrats after he overtook Sen. Hillary Clinton to clinch the party's presidential nomination this week, becoming the nation's first black nominee of a major party.

Kesh Ladduwahetty, an Obama delegate and lesbian political activist who lives in Washington, said Obama's supporters must invite those who once stumped for Clinton to now campaign for Obama, the presumptive nominee.

"I think they're looking to be welcomed," she said. "I think they want to know that Obama supporters are not looking at them as the enemy. And I certainly know I do not."

Obama this week crossed the Democratic Party's revised, 2,118-delegate threshold to secure the nomination. Clinton, meanwhile, reportedly was jockeying to join the ticket as the party's vice presidential nominee.

Ladduwahetty said in the aftermath of the party's protracted primary process, it was time to unify Democrats against Sen. John McCain, the Republican Party's presumed presidential nominee.

"I have nothing but admiration for people, like my friend, who worked on the Clinton campaign," she said. "And now I think it just requires individual outreach efforts."

Kierra Johnson, an Obama delegate who runs a pro-choice organization and lives in Washington, said she hoped Obama and Clinton supporters could quickly unite.

"If the two candidates can have conversations once the dust clears and meet up and be on the same page about Election Day," she said, "I don't see why supporters of both candidates can't do the same thing."

Johnson identifies as "queer."

But Peter Rosenstein, a gay Clinton delegate who was part of her campaign and lives in Washington, said some Clinton supporters might need some time before they start wearing Obama shirts.

"I think that what Obama supporters need to recognize is that when people passionately support someone for over a year, those passions don't go away overnight," he said. "And I think that Obama and Clinton supporters need to stop attacking each other's candidates and focus all attacks now on John McCain, and let Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton work out the details of what their relationship will be."

Rosenstein said Wednesday that Clinton's supporters would take their lead from the former first lady, who congratulated Obama after he clinched the nomination Tuesday, but did not immediately concede the race.

"I think both of them spoke very generously about each other last night, and I think that what has to happen is electing a Democrat in November," he said. "That must be the goal."

Jerry Clark, a gay Obama delegate and National Gay & Lesbian Task Force board member who lives in Washington, agreed the new focus on November would help unify the party.

"I think the most important thing that Obama people can do to help unite the party is to just continue to focus on the themes of unity and the importance of winning in November," he said. "I think that these things come together after a period of time and everybody's going to recognize that winning in November — taking back the White House — is just of super importance to all of us."

Johnson said Obama supporters could help the process, though, by welcoming Clinton supporters to the fold.

"We should definitely not enter into the kind of with-us-or-against-us rhetoric," she said, "and just go into conversations with a real understanding that we're all on the same page and we're all out to win on Election Day."

Because with unity, Rosenstein said, could come the Democratic "dream ticket" that exemplifies Obama's message of change.

"There is nothing that could represent more change in this country," he said, "than an African-American president and a female vice president."

HRC blasts McCain

As attention shifted this week from the primaries to the general election, the Human Rights Campaign blasted the presumed Republican nominee.

HRC on Tuesday released a compilation of Sen. John McCain's statements and stances on gay issues. The five-page report called McCain an "opponent of equality" and "out of touch with the GLBT community."

Lisa Schwartz, HRC's legal director, said McCain as president would "act against the civil rights" that gay Americans seek, including "basic fairness" guarantees in the workplace.

"John McCain opposed the Employment Non-Discrimination Act," she said. "He opposes protections for GLBT people so that they can go to work and lead the productive lives that they can and deserve to."

"John McCain has had three opportunities to vote for hate crimes legislation that would protect people on the basis of race, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, gender identity and disability," she said. "And all three times, he's voted against this legislation."

Schwartz said McCain exhibits a "backward looking way of thinking that doesn't reflect what most Americans believe about" these issues.

The report does not assign McCain a score. He received 33 of 100 on HRC's most recent congressional scorecard. Obama scored 89 of 100.

Brian Rogers, a McCain campaign spokesperson, said in a statement to the Blade that McCain would continue to seek support from all Americans.

"Sen. McCain is seeking support from all Americans this November, based on his vision for

moving America forward and his long record of treating people with respect and dignity,” Rogers said. “He was proud to receive an endorsement from the Log Cabin Republicans in his 2004 re-election campaign, and we’re confident he’ll win strong support this fall.”

Log Cabin has not yet announced whether it will endorse McCain.