

Solving the Hillary Problem

By Richard N. Bond

Democrat Harry Reid, the Senate majority leader, is in a unique position to settle his party's presidential nomination battle between Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama.

And the solution he could offer his party would not involve winning another primary or caucus, negotiating redo votes in Florida and Michigan, convincing superdelegates to make or break commitments, or masterminding convention floor fights.

The solution that is within his power is simpler, yet more profound than any of the extraordinary political events America has witnessed this election year. It requires only the rarest of things: an individual willing to set aside his own power and ambition for the good of his party and his country. It is this: Mr. Reid could step aside as leader of the Senate and hand the post to Mrs. Clinton. Only the proffer of this consolation prize would likely persuade Mrs. Clinton to drop her divisive, and now futile, quest for her party's nomination.

Make no mistake—because of the increasingly bitter Clinton-Obama fight, the Democrats are poised to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory. Every political indicator points to a smashing Democratic win this November. Their presidential candidates have outraised the Republican field by a huge margin; 2008 turnout in Democrat primaries has almost doubled over the turnout in 2004; the Democrats' congressional campaign committees are swamping their GOP counterparts in fundraising; a record number of Republican incumbents are retiring from Congress, opening numerous opportunities for Democratic gains; President Bush's unpopularity continues at record highs; the war in Iraq remains unpopular; and the economy is in, or near, recession.

Yet, because Mrs. Clinton continues to try to win what has become unwinnable, John McCain now holds comfortable leads over both Democrats for the first time in this race. In her selfishness and grandiose sense of entitlement for the presidency, Mrs. Clinton's continued pursuit of the nomination threatens to tear asunder what could otherwise be a dream Democratic year.

Two recent developments highlight the danger the Democrats are in as they teeter on the brink of a civil war. First, a group of prominent contributors to the Clinton campaign sent a sharply worded letter to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, chiding her for publicly stating that the leader in delegates and the popular vote should be the party's nominee. Such public criticism portends a coming conflict between the two most powerful women in the Democratic Party—a conflict that will likely be harmful to the party's self-interest.

Second, a series of recent national polls found that nearly one in three Clinton supporters say they will vote for Mr. McCain if Mrs. Clinton is not the nominee. One in five Obama supporters say they will not support Mrs. Clinton if

he is not the party's standard-bearer. Democratic Party spinmeisters will attempt to brush off these results as simply passing squalls that will blow over as the general election campaign gets underway. The fact remains that the Obama-Clinton battle is taking the party into new and dangerous waters, and no one can control the situation.

Democrats should let Mrs. Clinton be Senate majority leader.

Enter Harry Reid. He well knows that Mrs. Clinton would never accept the vice presidency under Mr. Obama. Mr. Reid also understands Mrs. Clinton's naked ambition and drive to win.

He knows her calculating nature, and senses her need for an out. His years of experience tell him that if Mr. Obama loses to Mr. McCain, Mr. Obama will be finished, much in the same way that Al Gore and John Kerry have been swept into history's remainder bin of failed Democrat presidential hopefuls.

But has Mr. Reid thought out the power equation? If Mrs. Clinton were Senate majority leader during a McCain presidency, then she and she alone would be the leader of the party and first in line for the nomination in 2012.

It is very likely that this is what Mr. Reid, and perhaps a number of other party elders, is thinking. After all, the simplest way to prevent a train wreck is to switch the runaway train onto another track.

So will Mr. Reid, like Henry Fonda in the 1964 film "The Best Man," nobly put aside his own ambition for a greater good? If he considers all the facts, he might. Mr. Reid has to know that, in this most peculiar of election years, only one individual has the power to end the Clinton-Obama war, and that is he. If he voluntarily passes his position to Mrs. Clinton in exchange for her withdrawal, history will likely remember him as his party's best man.

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