

**THE BLOG**

How To Make Love To A Superdelegate

By Marty Kaplan

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Both the Clinton and Obama campaigns have boiler rooms working 24/7 to squeeze public endorsements from as many of the 796 superdelegates as they can before the Party's convention in August. Both campaigns are deploying every gun they have, and they're whispering every blandishment they can muster. But the right question isn't which side this insider's contest will lock up the nomination for; the challenge is whether the recipients of all these love-bombs can turn the individual attention they're getting into something good and important for the country as a whole.

The superdelegates are being barraged by calls from the likes of Tom Daschle, Janet Napolitano, John Kerry, Madeleine Albright, Chelsea Clinton, Bill Clinton, right up to the candidates themselves. The boiler rooms have files that the FBI would envy, dossiers telling them that, say, DNC member Rachel Binah of Mendocino County, CA cares "most about the environment and about funding research for Alzheimers, the disease that took her father." As Harold Ickes, the seasoned hunter-and-trapper running Hillary's operation, explains the strategy, "You try to figure out, what factors influence them? Who do they talk to about presidential politics?... Sometimes, it's two or three close confidants, sometimes it's a chief of staff, or someone who raises money for them. Maybe there's an issue that's important to them."

How many superdelegates are so far supporting whom? Estimates and claims differ; Clinton seems to have between 213 and 270, and Obama between 139 and 170. But the truth is that all 796 are still in play, because the rules permit them to change their minds right until they vote at the convention. My friend Tad Devine, the original superdelegate arm-twister with whom I worked in the 1984 Mondale campaign, had a piece in Sunday's [New York Times](#) called "Superdelegates, Back Off." He says that they

"should resist the impulse and pressure to decide the nomination before the voters have had their say. The party's leaders and elected officials need to stop pledging themselves... before Democratic voters in the remaining primaries and caucuses have made their decisions.... After listening to the voters, the superdelegates... can ratify the results of the primaries and caucuses in all 50 states by moving as a bloc toward the candidate who has proved to be the strongest...."

I think Tad is half-right. Superdelegates ought to hold out. But these nearly 800 party activists shouldn't just wait around decoratively, like potted plants, until the voters of Montana and South Dakota speak on June 3 (let alone

whenever and however the voters of Florida and Michigan speak for a second time). Not only might the delegate and popular vote totals still fail to produce a clear-cut winner by then; the superdelegates will also have surrendered a tremendous opportunity.

Instead of superdelegates responding individually to calls that push their hot buttons, why don't they organize themselves, right now, and act collectively? Instead of selling their votes separately in exchange for personal pet projects, why not coalesce around a great national issue, and attempt — while it's still going on — to affect the course of the campaigns currently being conducted by both candidates?

Imagine what might happen if the usual political G-spot touching that transpires during these calls to superdelegates didn't work. Imagine instead if the campaigns got an earful like this:

“You know what might win my support? You're a Senator. Why are you waiting around until you're inaugurated? This is the most brazenly lawless administration in history. Every other day the president spits on the Congress with signing statements. Every week George Bush and Dick Cheney and their minions figure out a new way to piss on the checks and balances system. They torture, and then they lie about torture, and then they get away with it. They've got the pardon power in their hip pocket. They destroy evidence, they refuse to testify, they forbid their Justice Department to enforce contempt citations, and there's zero accountability for it. The only contempt is the contempt they have for Democrats every time you cave and compromise with them on core principles. These war criminals have you so freaked out by the possibility that they'd call you bad names — terrorist-appeasers, Osama-enablers, jihad-symp — that you're scared to stop them from raiding our treasury, ruining our armed forces, and condemning our kids to tragedy. You do a lovely job of talking about the future. But there's nearly nine more months for this Republican junta to do damage to our country. What are you going to do to stop it? If you're not as mad as I am about the past seven years, and if you're not as scared as I am about this eighth year, then it may not matter who on our side tops the ticket, because some of this trashing may be undoable. You want to know what my political erogenous zone is? It's called the Constitution, and it's on fire, and I want to know what you're going to do about it — not next January, but now.”

I know, I know. How romantic. But a guy can dream, can't he? After all, Valentine's Day is coming.

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