

Clinton's big West Virginia win too little, too late

Hillary Clinton scored a landslide victory in the West Virginia primary, but it may be too little and too late to stop frontrunner Barack Obama from winning the Democratic presidential nomination.

Running in a state tailored to her strengths - 95 percent white, less educated and less well-off than most other states and a little more than half the voters coming from rural areas - she posted a 41 point lead, one of her biggest winning margins of the primary season.

With most results in, she was leading Obama 67 percent to 26. Under the Democratic party's proportional allocation system, the two candidates will share the 28 delegates at stake in West Virginia in the ratio of their votes.

Thus with the numbers heavily stacked against her, it would be virtually impossible for the former first lady to overtake Obama who now has 1,875.5 delegates to 1,712 for Clinton. It takes 2,025 delegates to clinch the nomination. At best the victory would help her reduce the lead marginally.

Clinton trails Obama in delegates won, states won and the popular vote. Her campaign is \$20 million in the red and she has also lost her last edge in super delegates, key party leaders who hold the balance of power in the nomination process if no candidate gets the required majority.

Clinton used her big win in West Virginia Tuesday to make her case that she has a better chance of beating the Republicans in the general election. Calling West Virginia a 'tremendous victory', she told supporters in Charleston, West Virginia: 'I am more determined than ever to carry on this campaign'.

'I'm winning Catholic voters and Hispanic voters and blue-collar workers and seniors, the kind of people that (presumptive Republican nominee John) McCain will be fighting for in the general election,' Clinton said.

'I am in this race because I believe I am the strongest candidate. I can lead this party to victory in the general election if you lead me to victory now,' she said showing no signs of heeding growing calls to drop out of the race.

Clinton still hopes to persuade party leaders that she would be the more electable candidate against McCain, based on her victories in Ohio, Pennsylvania and now West Virginia. All three states are important on the presidential electoral college map.

'She is in until the very end,' insisted Clinton's communication director, Howard Wolfson. 'We think we're going to be the nominee. We're going to make our case to the super delegates.'

Reiterating a point she has made frequently while campaigning in West Virginia, Clinton pointed out Tuesday that no Democrat has won the White House since 1916 without winning West Virginia. Bill Clinton won there in 1992 and 1996. George W. Bush took the state in 2000 and 2004.

In addition to West Virginia, Clinton's campaign points to other swing states she has won - like Ohio and Pennsylvania - as they try to woo super delegates to their side.

She also likened herself to John F. Kennedy, who laid to rest doubts about his candidacy - and the electability of a Catholic - by winning the state in 1960.

But observers point out Kennedy was short of delegates and needed a win to avoid throwing the nomination into the hands of party leaders, while Clinton is attempting the opposite, hoping to extend the race so super delegates can decide the nomination.

In West Virginia Obama conceded even before the polls closed leaving a congratulatory phone message for Clinton. He then went off to campaign in Michigan and Missouri, considered major battle grounds for the November presidential election, focusing on McCain instead.

He called McCain a 'genuine American hero', then added: 'But for two decades, he has supported policies that have shifted the burden away from special interests and on to working families. And his only answer to the problems created by George Bush's policies is give them another four years to fail.'

The Illinois senator continued to gain super delegate support, adding another four Monday. Since winning North Carolina last week and barely losing Indiana, Obama has picked up more than two dozen super delegates. Clinton has gained only two.

The next battle comes May 20 with Clinton favoured in Kentucky and Obama expected to win Oregon. The results could give Obama a majority of pledged delegates - those awarded through primaries and caucuses - at which point he may declare victory.

Arun Kumar (© IANS / India eNews)