

Obama rushes to ailing grandmother at height of election

Democratic candidate Barack Obama was rushing to the bedside of his ailing grandmother in Hawaii Thursday, taking a break from intense campaigning to make sure he saw her before she died.

Madelyn Dunham, 85, was a formative figure in the life of the White House frontrunner, helping Obama's single mother raise him during his teenage years when his own mother was working abroad.

Obama said Thursday he decided to take a break from the campaign to avoid repeating the tragic error when he failed to make it back to his mother, Dunham's daughter, Stanley Ann Dunham Soetoro, before she died of cancer at the young age of 52.

'(We) got there too late,' he said in an interview with CBS. 'We knew she wasn't doing well. But, you know, the diagnosis was such where we thought we had a little more time and we didn't. And so I want to make sure that I don't - I don't make the same mistake twice.'

Obama has often paid tribute to Dunham, and mentioned her decisive influence on him when he accepted the Democratic nomination in September.

On Thursday he again explained their special connection.

'My mother was a single mom, so she raised me with the help of my grandparents. And so my grandmother, my grandfather, my mom, they're really the people who took care of me all throughout my childhood.'

'My grandmother's the last one left. She has really been the rock of the family, the foundation of the family. Whatever strength, discipline that I have, it comes from her.'

Asked whether he feared the impact of his break on the election campaign, Obama said the electorate would understand.

'I think most people understand that if you're not caring for your family, then you're probably not the kind of person who's going to be caring for other people,' he said.

Obama was flying to Hawaii on an eleven-hour trip from a campaign stop in the battleground state of Indiana. He was due to stay there for 24 hours before flying back for a campaign stop in Nevada on Friday night.

Independent analysts say that the trip could even play as an advantage to Barack, especially among seniors in key states like Florida.

It could humanize him and portray him as a caring grandson at a time when the rival camp is being defined by the scandal of the Republicans spending \$150,000 of campaign funds on Sarah Palin's wardrobe.

'With exactly two weeks until Election Day, the timing of Obama's absence isn't ideal, although the

image of a doting grandson with his grandmother isn't exactly harmful, either,' said Chuck Todd, the widely-respected political director of NBC News.

Republicans were doing their best to fight back however. Republican strategist Brad Blakeman, responding to a question about how John McCain could square his opposition to wasteful spending with the Palin's wardrobe spree, said that the real outrage is Barack Obama 'taking a 767 campaign plane to go visit Grandma'.

'Forget about the energy that is wasted, what about the hundreds of thousands of dollars to take a private trip when this guy should be humping his bags on a commercial plane or taking a smaller plane,' he told MSNBC. 'Taking a 767 of campaign money from people who could least afford it is more of an outrage in my opinion.'

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