

## **Democrats Spar Over NAFTA In Ohio**

Clinton Suggests Obama Is Misleading Voters Over Her Position On Trade Agreement

Associated Press  
February 26, 2008

Former President Clinton, campaigning for his wife Monday in rural and southern Ohio continued hammering Hillary Rodham Clinton's themes of reclaiming the middle class, ensuring health care for Americans and bringing troops home from Iraq.

"You cannot expect us to grow more jobs in America if we keep subsidizing jobs overseas," he said during an evening rally at Lancaster High School, just hours after he had accused Hillary Clinton's Democratic presidential rival Barack Obama of misleading voters about her policy positions.

"A lot of the mailings sent out on her on NAFTA (the North American Free Trade Agreement) and health care are pure garbage," Clinton had said during a rally at Shawnee State University in Portsmouth, where hundreds of students lined up in 31-degree weather more than an hour ahead of the former president's visit.

Clinton campaign advisers said later in a teleconference with reporters that Obama is equating Hillary Clinton's record on NAFTA with that of her husband.

"If we want to impute everything that happened during the Clinton administration to Hillary Clinton, we'll take the fact 22 million jobs were added in the country," spokesman Howard Wolfson said.

NAFTA is unpopular in Ohio, which has lost blue-collar jobs to other countries. The treaty was signed by President George H.W. Bush in 1992; the legislation to implement it was signed by President Clinton in 1993.

Hillary Clinton said Obama's ads unfairly portrayed her as a supporter of the agreement which she says she is working to change. Over the weekend, Obama told an Ohio audience: "She was saying great things about NAFTA until she started running for president."

Labor leaders who said they had personal experience negotiating with Bill Clinton's administration on NAFTA backed Obama - accusing Hillary Clinton's campaign of likewise distorting Obama's record on NAFTA in her mailings.

Saying President Clinton personally forced NAFTA through Congress using all the political capital he could muster, UNITE Here General President Bruce Raynor added, "I refuse to believe that after all the damage is done that he should be permitted to walk away. And he is a part of this campaign, if everyone hadn't noticed."

State Rep. Tracey Heard, a Columbus Democrat, said, "Clearly, she's trying to campaign on her husband's experience, and if she's going to claim it, she's going to have to claim it all, good and bad."

In advance of a scheduled Tuesday debate in Cleveland and the state's March 4 presidential primary, both Democrats' campaigns blitzed southern Ohio on Monday.

Obama held an invitation only round table discussion on retirement security at the Cincinnati Museum Center.

"Pensions are getting crushed," Obama said at the round table. "The promise of social security may grow harder to keep for future generations. That's why my agenda for retirement security will protect Social Security, lift up savings for working people and reform bankruptcy laws to protect working people."

And at a public rally in the basketball arena at the University of Cincinnati, Mayor Mark Mallory, a superdelegate to the Democratic National Convention who had been courted by both contenders, ended his silence by announcing his endorsement of Obama. Michael White, who served as Cleveland's mayor from 1990 through 2002, also announced his support for Obama Monday.

Later Monday, Obama spoke to an enthusiastic crowd of about 11,000 at Wright State University outside Dayton.

Earlier in the day in Athens, Bill Clinton reemphasized how important the Ohio primary is.

"If she wins in Ohio and Texas, she'll win in Pennsylvania, she'll win the nomination and she will get elected president. Don't let anybody tell you she can't win.

If Hillary Clinton is elected, she'll have serious trade enforcement policies and she'll repeal provisions in the tax code that give breaks to companies that move overseas, her husband said.

He also said she wants to disengage and bring almost all the troops in Iraq home, but that withdrawal must be guided by the safety of troops and Iraqi citizens. He said she's opposed to a permanent base in Iraq, but would leave a presence in the northern part of the country to be enable a quick strike against al Qaeda in the region.

"The world wants to see the United States back in the peace business, not the war business," Bill Clinton said.

The former president, who campaigned in Bowling Green, Lima and Springfield on Sunday, started Monday's swing through the southern part of state in Chillicothe, where he told a rally at a branch campus of Ohio University that his wife is the only candidate

who has policies to help working class families.

And at Portsmouth, Clinton said his wife offers the best solutions for issues ranging from health care coverage to the high cost of financing a college education.

He urged undecideds to vote for her, not Obama, "If you believe that the fact of change is more important than the feeling of change."

In Lancaster, Clinton attacked Obama's message of change, charging that the opposing campaign wants to ignore the past, while Hillary Clinton says "we have to understand the past to make good decisions about the future."

"Their argument is that we have so much fighting that even somebody who had done a lot of good in her life and stopped a lot of bad things from happening should be disqualified from being president," he said, adding that many qualified candidates would be written off with such thinking. "The idea is that you just have to start again and all you need to do is tell people that we're all gonna get together and not argue anymore and everything's gonna be fine."

Two new presidential polls released Monday showed Hillary Clinton leading Obama. But there were indications that Obama was narrowing the gap.

A Quinnipiac University poll showed Clinton with an 11 percentage point lead, down from 21 points in a poll released a week and a half ago.

An Ohio Poll had Clinton leading 47-39, with an 18-percentage-point lead among women accounting for most of the difference.

Meanwhile, U.S. Sen. John McCain of Arizona was the lone Republican campaigning Monday in Ohio. The all-but-certain GOP nominee was in the Cleveland area, working to unify his party.

"Americans will judge my candidacy first and foremost on how they believe I can lead the county both from our economy and for national security," McCain told reporters on his campaign bus. "Obviously, Iraq will play a role in their judgment of my ability to handle national security."