

## **Obama's stance on NAFTA is disingenuous, Clinton indicates**

She contends her Democratic rival gave the Canadians 'the old wink-wink' by secretly telling them not to be offended by his criticisms of the free trade agreement. Obama campaign disputes the allegation.

By Johanna Neuman and Louise Roug  
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Democratic Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton, embarking on a campaign marathon that will last into the wee hours, stepped up attacks today on rival Sen. Barack Obama as they headed toward Tuesday's crucial primaries in Texas, Ohio, Rhode Island and Vermont.

Saying she is "just getting warmed up," Clinton contended that Obama had given the Canadians "the old wink-wink," by secretly telling them not to take offense at his need to disparage NAFTA while campaigning in job-strapped Ohio.

During a debate last week, both candidates pledged to renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement to add protections for U.S. workers and for the environment. But Clinton's campaign cited a memo about a meeting between a senior Obama economic advisor, Austan Goolsbee, and consulate officials in Chicago reassuring the Canadians not to take Obama's message "out of context" and to view it "as more about political posturing than a clear articulation of policy plans."

The memo was written by a Canadian official. Goolsbee, a University of Chicago economist, has disputed its accuracy, as has the Obama campaign.

But Clinton sought to exploit the issue.

"I don't think people should come to Ohio and you both give speeches that are very critical of NAFTA and you send out misleading and false information about my positions regarding NAFTA and then we find out that your chief economic advisor has gone to a foreign government and basically done the old wink-wink, don't pay any attention, this is just political rhetoric," she told media members aboard her campaign plane. "I think it raises serious questions about what you expect them to believe about your position."

For her part, Clinton today sought to deflect fallout from her remarks Sunday night on CBS' "60 Minutes" in which she said that Obama was not a Muslim "as far as I know." Asked today if she meant to cast doubt on Obama's assertion that he is a Christian, Clinton said, "No. Obviously I've been the subject of scurrilous rumors for years and it's hard to get them to go away. . . . I really sympathize with Sen. Obama. It's disturbing when you turn around and see this all the time."

But Clinton, who survived an investigation into her and her husband's real estate dealings in the Whitewater scandal, said she had no comment on an investigation into an Obama supporter, Tony Rezko, who helped the Obamas purchase real estate. Obama has said it was "a mistake" for him to get involved with Rezko, a fund-raiser for the governor of Illinois who is on trial for allegedly scheming to extort kickbacks from businesses seeking state contracts.

Despite a string of 11 consecutive victories by Illinois' Obama, New York's Clinton said she plans to stay in the race at least until the April 22 primary in Pennsylvania.

"I believe I'm going to do very well tomorrow," she told reporters on her plane. "I think that's going to be a very significant message to the country, and then we move on to Pennsylvania and the states coming up."

With polls showing a close contest in Ohio, several senior Democrats, such as New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson, say that the winner in the delegate count on Wednesday morning should become the party's nominee. But Clinton advisors are hoping that an Obama loss in Ohio will demonstrate that Democratic voters are having second thoughts, and give Clinton's campaign a new infusion of financial support and electoral energy.

Obama said today that if he does well in Texas and Ohio, "the math is worse" for Clinton to win the nomination.

Responding to Clinton's "red phone" television ad questioning whether he has the experience to deal with crises in the White House, Obama called her tactics desperate. "She has got a little desperate towards the end of this campaign, and I think, has been a lot more aggressive in her negative attacks," he said during an interview on ABC's "Good Morning America." Arguing that his judgment in opposing the invasion of Iraq trumped Clinton's decision to vote to authorize the war, Obama said that his best credential for dealing with crises is that "in difficult or stressful moments, I don't get rattled. And I don't get rattled during campaigns."

On the GOP side, meanwhile, six governors planned to announce their endorsement today of front-runner Arizona Sen. John McCain, who is expected to wrap up the Republican nomination after Tuesday's contests. With former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee still in the race, governors from Alabama, Georgia, Hawaii, Louisiana, Mississippi and North Dakota planned to endorse McCain in hopes of rallying conservatives behind the party's likely standard bearer.

"It's time to remove the presumptive label from in front of the nominee," said Georgia Gov. Sonny Perdue. "John McCain can be the man who can unite the party and lead us to victory."

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