



## THE BUFFALO NEWS



### FOCUS: OBAMA CANDIDACY

## Obama's history-making victory transcends Iowa

*Obama has become first credible black presidential candidate*

**By Robert J. McCarthy - News Political Reporter**

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Something happened Thursday night that far transcended Sen. Barack Obama's victory in the Iowa Democratic caucuses. A black man is suddenly the leading candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination.

In the long history of the republic, Obama now emerges as the first credible black candidate for the presidency following his convincing victory in a state with only a tiny minority presence.

His win not only marks a significant milestone, it also appears to be energizing a powerful black voter bloc that had been partially claimed by Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton — especially in New York.

“Like it or not, the world just changed,” said Henry L. Taylor, director of the Center for Applied Public Affairs Studies at the University at Buffalo. “We can't go back.

“And the single most important thing about Iowa,” he added, “is that it says: This is possible.”

Obama is far from claiming a lock on the Democratic nomination. Clinton campaign officials were quick to point out Friday that polls show the senator leading in 22 of the next 27 contests, and a new Zogby International survey indicates Clinton is ahead by six percentage points in the next crucial state — New Hampshire.

But the Illinois senator's big win on Thursday catapults him to a front-running position that political

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veterans such as George K. Arthur, a black and former Buffalo Common Council president, never dreamed would happen.

“Especially when he did as well as he did in a state where the population is 2.2 percent black,” Arthur said, predicting that blacks who out of habit supported Clinton may now be taking a second look at Obama — even in the Feb. 5 New York primary.

“On Feb. 5 you’ll find that a lot of the black vote will come out for Barack Obama and not Hillary,” he said.

The thought wasn’t much different among blacks shopping Friday at the Towne Gardens Plaza on Jefferson Avenue.

“He’s got a chance now, a real chance of taking this thing,” said Lewis Reynolds, 29, a construction worker who lives in the University District. “If you had told me before that Obama would win, I wouldn’t have believed you. But I saw it with my own two eyes.”

And Keesha Dale, an Erie Community College student having lunch at the McDonald’s in Towne Gardens, said the win is already making her rethink her allegiances.

“It’s exciting and very encouraging,” she said. “I never thought he had much of a chance against Hillary, but now he’s got my attention, and he just might get my vote instead of Hillary.”

Indeed, New Yorkers involved in the Obama campaign were quick to note the historic nature of the victory during a Friday conference call. State Sen. Bill Perkins of Harlem called it “an international victory that we can all feel proud about.”

He said he had just attended a Three Kings ceremony in Hispanic East Harlem, found tremendous enthusiasm and predicted “somewhat of a landslide” of minority votes now heading toward Obama.

“That’s the kind of response we’re seeing increasingly,” he said.

But the Clinton team put former Democratic National Chairman Terry McAuliffe and other campaign officials on a similar conference call to head off any speculation that the Obama win would threaten the New York senator’s home turf.

“Sen. Clinton was re-elected with 67 percent of the vote, winning 58 of 62 counties, said Karen Persichilli Keogh, director of her New York campaign. “We’re building on the infrastructure, support and enthusiasm she has from thousands and thousands of New Yorkers.”

And Guy Cecil, national political director, pointed to significant support from the Black Congressional Caucus and other top black leaders.

But Arthur noted that while Mayor Byron W. Brown, Assemblywoman Crystal D. Peoples and other black political leaders are all supporting Clinton, that’s what he would expect.

“Those who are in elected office go for Hillary because they’re in elective office,” he said.

Brown, the first black mayor of Buffalo, would not comment for this story.

Taylor, meanwhile, said Obama's victory stems from a new Democratic coalition of minorities, women and young voters, supplanting old Democratic alliances of various ethnic groups with labor. And because turnout in Iowa set records for the caucuses, he said the victory stems from real enthusiasm.

"He has stimulated voters who have never voted before," he said. "To me, that new and energized base is the significance."

Taylor also said that while previous national figures on the black stage like Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton ran as "black candidates" with limited success, Obama's victory points to far broader support.

"It's one thing for whites to support someone they view as a black leader," he said, "it's quite another to support someone who has morphed into a leader of the American people who happens to be black."

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