



'CHANGE' CANDIDATES WIN BIG IN IOWA

Illinois Democratic Senator Barack Obama and former Arkansas Republican Governor Mike Huckabee shocked the political establishment by scoring victories in their respective parties in the race for the White House by winning Thursday's Iowa caucuses.

Until recent weeks, both Obama and Huckabee trailed by significant margins behind rivals in both parties. They came into the first contest of an already hotly contested 2008 nominating process neck-and-neck with other candidates.

Wins change calculations on both sides

Obama scored a victory over Democratic rivals John Edwards and Hillary Clinton, capturing 38 percent of the vote, followed by Edwards with 30 and Clinton with 29. Edwards has been visiting Iowa since the 2004 election he lost as a vice presidential candidate, while Clinton seemed like the inevitable winner because of early support and fund raising.

"Barack Obama [is] a relative new face in American politics if you think about it," political analyst Stuart Rothenberg said Thursday night on the NewsHour. "Someone who ran on change and bringing the country together beats someone named Clinton? That's remarkable."

Huckabee emerged from nowhere to take the lead in the Republican race, breaking his party's mold by blending his Christian conservative message with a more liberal economic message. He beat former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney, who outspent Huckabee in the state by millions of dollars, 34 percent to 25 percent.

"If Obama represents hope -- and I think he did to an awful lot of people in Iowa this evening -- Mike Huckabee represents authenticity," syndicated columnist Mark Shields told the NewsHour. "There is about him just a realness, a likeability, yes, a sense of humor, self-deprecating, which is quite appealing, but a true compassionate conservative is how he came through."

The question now is whether their victories will give them an "Iowa bounce" in other contested primary states, where polls show Obama behind Clinton, and Huckabee further behind Mitt Romney, Senator John McCain and former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani.

Importance of Iowa

The Iowa caucuses are seen as an important, but not decisive first contest.

Only a small percentage of Iowans took part in the caucus, but those who did took it very seriously.

"The first test is this small state where these candidates get vetted by this very active, serious group of people, maybe only 10 percent, but quality rather than quantity. They take this very seriously, and they do a great job," presidential historian Michael Beschloss told the NewsHour.

In 2004, John Kerry beat previous front-runner Howard Dean in Iowa, a surprise victory that led to his nomination as the Democratic presidential candidate. However, other candidates have lost in Iowa and gone on to capture their party's nomination, such as Ronald Reagan in 1980 and Bill Clinton in 1992.

A special election year

The 2008 primary race is special because it is the first time since 1928 that an incumbent president or vice president was not running for the nomination of their party. It also comes at a time when the current Republican president and Democratic Congress have some of the lowest popularity ratings in modern history.

Thursday's Iowa caucuses were marked by an unprecedented turnout, especially on the Democratic side. According to the Washington Post, 236,000 people voted in the Democratic caucuses in Iowa, up from 125,000 in 2004. Obama was able to attract independents and some Republicans, while the number of Republican caucus-goers was less than half the Democrats, suggesting a lack of enthusiasm among core party members.

Moreover, young voters overwhelmingly went for Obama. Sixty percent of voters under 25 came out for the senator, while 45 percent of voters over 65 supported Clinton, the New York Times reported. More than half of Democratic voters said they were first-time caucus-goers and 40 percent of those voters chose Obama.

On the Republican side, approximately 60 percent of caucus-goers described themselves as evangelical Christians, and the vast majority voted for Huckabee.

-- Compiled by Quinn Bowman for NewsHour Extra

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