

Extra Feature Story

Democrats Hope to Increase Obama's Support at Convention

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Democrats hold their national convention in Denver the week as the party rallies behind the Obama-Biden ticket in hopes of building momentum for the final three months of the 2008 presidential campaign.

Barack Obama revealed his choices of vice president, Delaware Senator Joseph Biden, in a text message early Saturday morning.

Biden brings a working-class background, attack dog mentality and serious foreign policy experience to the ticket, but has a reputation for making foolish or embarrassing comments. Biden was an unsuccessful candidate in the 2008 and 1988 Democratic presidential primaries.

A big campaign ad

Obama is the star of the four-day convention, which officially exists so that state delegates -- die-hard Democrats who help decide the party's presidential nominee -- can vote to make Obama the party's official presidential candidate.

Once a weighty event where party members arrived without a candidate and then debated and made deals until there was a unified choice, the Democratic convention, as well as the Republican version the following week in Minneapolis, Minn., is primarily a chance to advertise the presidential and vice presidential nominees to the nation.

Many political and media analysts agree that this year's conventions are important because voters have lingering doubts about both candidates.

"TV types generally acknowledge that, while conventions for some time have been little more than pomp-and-circumstance ceremonies, this time the shows the two parties will put on for the viewing public -- and how many people see them -- could have a profound effect on the outcome of this election," wrote Washington Post TV columnist Lisa de Moraes.

The "convention bounce"

The Democratic Party hopes to use four days of coverage to propel Obama toward victory in November with a "convention bounce," or a boost in poll numbers that comes after exposure from the convention.

This year, the Democratic convention will host 50,000 people, including 15,000 journalists, USA Today reported. For the first time since President John Kennedy's nomination, Obama will leave the convention hall and give his acceptance speech at an open-air sports stadium in front of more than 70,000 people.

Are conventions important?

Although Obama's primaries rival Senator Hillary Clinton is on the convention ballot, she plans to give her delegates to Obama during the convention - his nomination is a foregone conclusion. Obama won the majority of delegates at the end of the primary season in June.

The last time a Democratic convention came down to an actual vote between two candidates was in 1980, when Jimmy Carter edged out Senator Ted Kennedy for the nomination.

Tom Oriel helps run [DemConWatch](#), a blog that has tracked every aspect of the Denver convention since 2005. He said the fact that Obama is assured the nomination before the convention, as has been the case for many past nominees at modern era conventions, has raised the debate about whether the Denver convention might be the last of its kind.

"It's a huge question; it might be the last big convention. People have said that over and over ... it's been decades since [a nomination] was decided at the convention," Oriel said.

Oriel points out that the convention is popular with the media for other reasons.

"It's a huge story, kind of like a tradition that its widely covered and you also have the entire Democratic party in one at one time – it's a huge party."

Nearly tied

While Obama enjoyed a lead in the polls over the Republican candidate, Arizona Senator John McCain, for several months, the race has closed to a tie in recent weeks. The media are now focusing on how the Biden pick and Obama's performance at the convention will shape the race.

McCain has been on the attack, questioning Obama's judgment on Iraq and releasing TV ads that paint Obama, who is almost 30 years younger, as a shallow celebrity not ready to lead.

But Democrats hope the convention will enable them to frame their candidate and message in their own terms before a huge national audience.

-- Compiled by Quinn Bowman for NewsHour Extra

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