

# THE 7:30 REPORT

## Democrats, Republicans do battle coast to coast

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Reporter: Kerry O'Brien

**Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama are locked in an epic struggle to gain the upper hand in the race for the Democratic Presidential nomination while Republican John McCain has swept to victory in a string of delegate rich east coast states. Kerry O'Brien speaks with Professor Geoff Garrett, the chief executive of the US Studies Centre at Sydney University Professor Geoff Garrett.**

### Transcript

KERRY O'BRIEN: American politics is poised at a fascinating historical point tonight as the results of Super Tuesday's vote amongst Republicans and Democrats across a combined total of 24 states become clear.

The outspoken and independent-minded Arizona Senator John McCain has emerged as odds-on favourite to take the Republican nomination, but the Democrat contest between Hillary Clinton and Barak Obama remains a cliff-hanger.

Obama has won 13 of the 22 Democrat states up for grabs on Super Tuesday, but Clinton picked up the two biggest, New York and California. The Democrat nominee for president may not now be known until the party convention in August.

Australian-born academic, Dr Geoff Garrett, is professor of International Relations at the University of Southern California, and after 20 years in the US is about to take up a post as CEO of the US Studies Centre at Sydney University.

With the California vote still being counted, I spoke with Professor Garrett by satellite to Los Angeles just before we went to air.

Geoff Garrett, is it fair to say that at this stage, with the Democrats first, that Hillary Clinton remains the frontrunner after tonight but that Barack Obama is going to pursue her all the way to the Democrat convention floor?

PROFESSOR GEOFF GARRETT, US STUDIES CENTRE, SYDNEY UNIVERSITY: Kerry, I think that's absolutely the right conclusion. Hillary Clinton won big states tonight, but Barack Obama won more and I think Obama can claim, with some justification, that his march up the polls continues. He was 20 points behind Senator Clinton a few months ago, then 10 points behind after the Iowa caucuses and now it's close to a coin flip on the Democratic side.

KERRY O'BRIEN: And the California vote is still a work in progress, isn't it? I think, as we speak, with about 30 per cent, a little bit more, counted, Barack Obama's catching up. He may not pass it but it's going to be very tight there, is it not?

PROF GEOFF GARRETT: Yeah, it's very tight. All the polls leading in to today suggested it was going to be very close. I think what's probably going on in California is that the large urban areas are reporting later as well as the non absentee vote. Absentee votes were likely to be up to about half of the votes today cast in California. So Obama will do better among voters who decided later and voted later and those in big cities. So I would expect that the final results in California to be really quite close in terms of popular vote and probably even closer in the delegate count.

KERRY O'BRIEN: So in fact there could be very little in the delegate count, even though there is 370 delegate votes

in California up for grabs?

PROF GEOFF GARRETT: Yes. Yeah, that's correct Kerry and that's because the Democratic Party, in almost all states and certainly in California, uses a proportional representation mechanism for allocating delegates. The Republicans have a lot of 'winner take all' states, as happens in the presidential general election. But the Democrats have moved to a proportional system and in California, with so many congressional districts, which is where the delegates are actually allocated, trying to figure out who is getting what is pretty complicated. But the best guess we've got is that it will be pretty close to a 50/50 split.

KERRY O'BRIEN: So to distill the Clinton support base compared to Obama's, what are the key demographics for each?

PROF GEOFF GARRETT: I think there's this profound difference in the way the candidates signal what they would do as president. Obama really wants to say that he's transcendent. He transcends politics, he's beyond the divisiveness of Washington, he's multi-racial, he's post-partisan. Clinton's appeal is much more pragmatic. She says, "There's a really tough world out there, with a lot of complex issues to be decided and I'm a problem solver. I am a seasoned problem solver, I'm going to hit the ground running."

Now, you ask the question to whom those different appeals, with whom do those different appeals resonate? The Clinton constituency at the moment is women, poorer voters and Latinos. The Obama constituency is African Americans, younger voters and more affluent voters. So the Clinton constituency in some senses looks like a more traditional Democratic one. But we are seeing a fracturing of the "New Deal" coalition because of this divide between less affluent Americans and African Americans choosing different candidates.

KERRY O'BRIEN: There is something like 4,000 Democrat delegates up for grabs. But of those, something like 800 of them are so-called super delegates will arrive at the Democrat convention with their votes, theoretically, uncommitted right up to when the vote is counted. My question is, how do you read which way those votes are going to fall in advance of the convention itself?

PROF GEOFF GARRETT: The 800 super delegates, as you pointed out Kerry, are not elected and they're uncommitted. Who are they? They're party grandees, former elected officials and, one would anticipate, I think, given the power of Hillary Clinton and the Clinton name and the Clinton family in the Democratic Party, that the majority of the super delegates you would think, would lean naturally towards Hillary Clinton. I think the important caveat there, however, is that if by the time of the convention the party establishment was to decide that Obama really was their best candidate for the general election in November, they might go for him. And of course the reason they would do that is that all the evidence today suggests not only that Obama does better among independent voters, that is non registered Democrats, but also that he does better against John McCain, the very likely Republican opponent in November.

KERRY O'BRIEN: So on the Republican side, Mike Huckabee was something of a surprise package tonight. But Senator John McCain is now all but assured of Republican nomination isn't he?

PROF GEOFF GARRETT: I think that's exactly right and of course the irony there is that on important issues, such as his opposition to the Bush tax cuts and his authoring of the McCain-Feingold campaign finance reform bill, McCain doesn't look like the darling of the Republican establishment. Mitt Romney on policy positions certainly did, but there were just too many doubts about his authenticity. Really, whether he really believed what he was saying and about his Mormonism for him to be, to win against McCain, and Huckabee has been a remarkable story but I don't think anybody really believed that he could be the Republican nominee.

KERRY O'BRIEN: McCain does draw great political strength from his reputation that he's developed over the years for fierce independence and sometimes unpredictability. But that, as you say, is what's also made him unpopular with the big "C" conservative end of his own party. In winning the nomination can he unite his own party behind him do you think?

PROF GEOFF GARRETT: I think there's virtually no doubt that we'll see the Republican establishment rallying behind and falling in behind McCain in the coming weeks and months, if for no other reason than they know that he's the best candidate they have to win the election in the fall. He's not an heir to George W. Bush, even though he's the

staunchest supporter of the Iraq War there is. So he can claim to be a strong national security conservative, to be a big fan of small government, but not to be tarred with the George W. Bush brush and I think that's about as much as the Republicans could ask for.

KERRY O'BRIEN: So coming quickly to how it might pan out after both conventions are done and dusted. Clinton versus McCain and then Obama versus McCain. What are they dynamics that you'll see at work?

PROF GEOFF GARRETT: Well the polls today suggest that both of those races would be quite tight. But that by small margins at the moment, McCain would beat Clinton and Obama would beat McCain. But I think the differences are within statistical errors so we shouldn't read too much into them. I think the way that the fall general election might play out is if it's Clinton-McCain; Hillary Clinton is a known commodity and in a lot of respects she's like McCain. They are both tough competitors, they're smart, they know their policy. But it's between two known candidates. Obama really would be the wild card and so I think that there'd be a much bigger uncertainty surrounding how Obama would do. He might unite the country, he might win in a landslide, but there might be things exposed in his resume and his lack of experience that McCain could exploit. So more uncertainty if Obama is the nominee, but maybe a more interesting race as well.

KERRY O'BRIEN: And very quick last question, America may be ready for a woman president, America may be ready for an African American president. Would America be ready for a ticket of both?

PROF GEOFF GARRETT: Well of course, die hard Democrats I think salivate at the prospect of that as a dream ticket. But I think more hard-nosed Democrats and the ones I talk to say that the script would tell them that they should go for a swing state governor, preferably someone from the south for either, a running mate for either Clinton or Obama. So a sort of Tom Vilsack, a kind of vice presidential candidate is probably more likely I think.

KERRY O'BRIEN: Geoff Garrett, thanks for talking to us tonight.

PROF GEOFF GARRETT: You're most welcome Kerry. I've enjoyed it.

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