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## Barack Obama Reaches Out to LGBT Voters, Talks Party Unity

By Duane Wells | 6/11/2008

Throughout the campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination, Sen. Hillary Clinton enjoyed the overwhelming support of the gay and lesbian community. But with Clinton's weekend concession and the nomination all but cinched, Barack Obama now hopes the crucial block will shift their support his way.

To help shore up support from gays and lesbians and unify the fractured Democratic Party ahead of November's general election, Barack Obama is ratcheting up his outreach to LGBT voters. Last Friday, the Obama campaign hosted a conference call with some 1,200 LGBT journalists, many of them Clinton supporters, to begin the healing process.

On the call, Elizabeth Birch, former Human Rights Campaign head and a Clinton loyalist, addressed journalists about the process of moving forward, as did David Mixner, a former Edwards supporter, and Joe Solomonese, the current president of HRC.

In essence, the call was the Obama camp's way of extending an olive branch to the LGBT community and, most importantly, to former Clinton supporters, still reeling from the events of the past week. The call also represented an attempt to bring Clinton supporters into the Obama campaign and to begin a dialogue about Barack Obama's positions on LGBT issues.

**Following up on that effort, today the Obama campaign held another conference call announcing that Dave Noble, the Director of Public Policy & Government Affairs for the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, would be leaving his post to join the Obama camp as the Director of LGBT Vote.**

In his new position, Noble will work alongside Steve Hildebrand, Obama's openly gay Deputy Campaign Manager.

LGBT voters could prove to be decisive for the Obama campaign in the 2008 election, particularly in swing states.

According to a recent report from *Keen News Service*, gay Republican voters helped George W. Bush win Florida in 2000. Exit polls showed 44,723 gay-identified voters cast their ballots for Bush in Florida that year when only a razor-thin margin separated him and Democrat Al Gore.

That same year, while exit polls across the country found about one in four gay-identified voters cast their votes for the Republican, the gay voting block was big enough to help Gore win Wisconsin, according to *Keen*.

With the Log Cabin Republicans already on track to endorse McCain this year, the Obama campaign must hope to match if not improve upon on Gore's performance with the LGBT community in 2000.

Further, as he seeks to consolidate the support of gay and lesbian voters, Barack Obama must also address an unprecedented rift in the Democratic Party that has spawned a grassroots effort to rally support around Sen. John McCain among some Democratic constituencies.

Over the weekend, following Sen. Clinton's concession speech, a number of online blogs, websites and PACs joined forces and formed [www.JustSayNoDeal.com](http://www.JustSayNoDeal.com), a coalition of Democrats bound by a singular desire to defeat Obama in the general election.

A collective of defiant former Clinton supporters calling themselves names like PUMA (Party Unity My Ass) PAC, NoWeWon't.org, DONE (Democrats Over Nominating Elitists) and ObamaWTF.com, JustSayNoDeal claims to have millions of supporters (though the number cannot be verified) and it's representatives have begun making the rounds on conservative chatfests like *Hannity & Colmes*.

The good news for Obama is that polls now show him comfortably ahead in a hypothetical matchup with John McCain in Sen. Clinton's home state of New York.

So perhaps the healing has already begun?