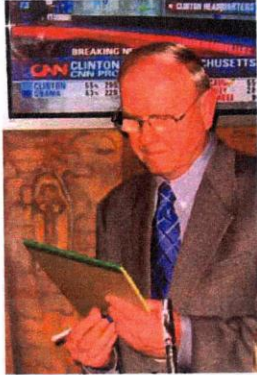


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By JACK COLWELL

SOUTH BEND - Barack Obama intends to put Indiana in play in this presidential election. Yes, he can. So he will. His decision to opt out of public finance and raise as much money as possible gives Obama the luxury of concentrating all-out on more than just the recent battleground states. He already has included Indiana among the 18 states targeted in his first and second rounds of TV spots for the general election. And why wouldn't he? After all, polls show he has a chance to be the first Democratic presidential nominee to carry Indiana since 1964.



A good chance? Maybe not good. But certainly a chance.

Obama is ahead of John McCain in Indiana by a speck in the average of results from four polls since late April that were recognized by Real Clear Politics. Obama led in three of the four polls, including the recent SurveyUSA poll. That poll, conducted late in June, showed Obama ahead by a single percentage point. While this only means that the race is a statistical tie, a tie now in Indiana makes it a worthwhile target for Obama and a worry for McCain.

Indiana won't be, as it has been for decades, a state written off by Democrats as hopeless, taken for granted by Republicans and thus ignored in terms of major campaign effort by both sides in the presidential contest. Indiana's 11 Electoral College votes could be crucial. The magic number to win is 270. President Bush won with only 271 electoral votes in 2000 and by 286 in 2004.

Let's talk red and blue, the colors the TV networks use to show which way states are voting. To win, Obama needs to retain the blue (Democratic) states of '04 and snare a red (Republican) state such as Ohio, 20 electors, or win over a couple of red states out of such targets as Indiana, 11; Virginia, 13; Iowa, 7; North Carolina, 15, and Georgia, 15.

All this said, the fact that Indiana will be in play doesn't mean that it will go blue. Color it purple. Based on past presidential voting history, including big wins by President Bush in Indiana in 2000 and 2004, it would seem that the purple should be viewed as having a shade more red than blue in the color mixture.

Still, it is a worthwhile target for Obama. Even if Obama loses Indiana, McCain will be forced to devote time and resources _ and he will have more limited funding than Obama _ to win a state that Bush was able both times to take for granted, raising funds in Indiana but spending little on a Hoosier campaign. Although the president won by a 21-percentage-point margin in Indiana in '04, he is the main reason the state is purple today.

President Bush's approval rating has plummeted in Indiana, just as it has elsewhere in the nation. One Indiana poll found that eight out of 10 Hoosiers believe the nation is headed on "the wrong track." And it's Bush who is running the train. In Indiana and in other states that will be in play, McCain must counter contentions that he would provide only a third Bush term. If he can stake out a course that convinces Indiana voters that he would provide change that is safer and surer than what Obama offers, McCain can keep Indiana in the GOP column.



A development, however, that would immediately change Indiana from purple to a shade of darn near blue is the possible selection of Sen. Evan Bayh, the Indiana Democrat who has had a positive approval rating even among Hoosier Republicans, to be Obama's vice presidential running mate.

Bayh reportedly is on the list of possible running mates. But it is doubtful that Obama is close yet to naming a choice. Why would he decide now? He has time to consider all the factors, including more than just who might help to carry some particular state.

Indiana Democrats would be overjoyed if Bayh were on the ticket, and not just because of the potential of a vice president from the state. Bayh's presence on the ticket could help Democrats win the races for governor, for Congress and for the state legislature.

Some of those Democrats were more hopeful of Bayh being selected when they heard last week that Jonathan Swain, who was Bayh's press secretary and then the Hillary Clinton communications director in Indiana, will be Obama's communications director in the state.

That may mean absolutely nothing in terms of a vice presidential selection, but it is another indication that Obama intends to put Indiana in play in this presidential election. Yes, he can. So he will. Why wouldn't he take a chance, with the audacity of hope that it could be a good chance?

Colwell has been covering Indiana politics over five decades for the South Bend Tribune. His column runs here on



Barack Obama walks to greet local residents at a house where his great-great-great grandfather lived in Kempton, Indiana, May 3, 2008. Photo: Dunand/AFP/GETTY

At a moment of economic calamity, international perplexity, political failure, and battered morale, America needs both uplift and realism, both change and steadiness. It needs a leader temperamentally, intellectually, and emotionally attuned to the complexities of our troubled globe. That leader's name is Barack Obama : The New Yorker / Editorial

As an author and online columnist ~ I appreciate the courage it takes to write not only a daily column, dedicated to the truth as I see it, but a book which entails much more time, editing and introspection.

Barack Obama has written two books but it is his first book, "***Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance***" (1995), that offers a rare insight into the man who most likely will be our next president. A president who finally reflects what is the best in ourselves and America as a whole.

Everything in Obama's life has prepared him for this moment in time and he will rise to the occasion in much the same manner as another young Congressman from Illinois ~ **Abraham Lincoln**.

The New Yorker wrote an editorial, to be published on October 13th, that picks up this important thread and declares that America now needs a leader, in this time of economic chaos, that reflects its deep moral values and spiritual roots and that man is Barack Obama; "*The election of Obama - a man of mixed ethnicity, at once comfortable in the world and utterly representative of twenty-first-century America - would, at a stroke, reverse our country's image abroad and refresh its spirit at home. His ascendance to the Presidency would be a symbolic culmination of the civil- and voting-rights acts of the nineteen-sixties and the century-long struggles for equality that preceded them. It could not help but say something encouraging, even exhilarating, about the country, about its dedication to tolerance and inclusiveness, about its fidelity, after all, to the values it proclaims in its textbooks.*"