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Obama to stop in Indy before seeing ailing grandmother

By JENNIFER LOVEN
Associated Press Writer

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. (AP) — Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama is canceling nearly all his campaign events Thursday and Friday to visit his suddenly gravely ill 85-year-old grandmother in Hawaii, a spokesman said.

Robert Gibbs told reporters aboard Obama's plane that Madelyn Payne Dunham, who helped raise Obama, was released from the hospital late last week. But he said her health had deteriorated "to the point where her situation is very serious."

Events originally planned for Madison, Wis., and Des Moines, Iowa, on Thursday will be replaced by one in Indianapolis before he makes the long flight to Hawaii.

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On Friday, Obama's wife, Michelle, will sub for Obama at rallies in Akron and Columbus, in Ohio, said campaign spokeswoman Jen Psaki. Obama was expected to resume campaigning on Saturday, at an undecided location in the West, she said.

"Sen. Obama's grandmother, Madelyn Dunham, has always been one of the most important people in his life, along with his mother and his grandfather," Gibbs said. "Recently his grandmother has become ill and in the last few weeks her health has deteriorated to the point where her situation is very serious. It is for that reason that Sen. Obama has decided to change his schedule on Thursday and Friday so that he can see her and spend some time with her."

Citing the family's desire for privacy, Gibbs would not discuss the nature of Dunham's illness. Dunham turns 86 on Sunday.

It seemed likely that she was close to death, as Gibbs said that "everyone understands the decision that Sen. Obama is making."

It could be a momentous one in his bid for the White House against Republican John McCain, with Election Day just two weeks away on Nov. 4.

In a campaign ad this year, Obama described his Dunham as the daughter of a Midwest oil company clerk who "taught me values straight from the Kansas heartland" — things like "accountability and self-reliance. Love of country. Working hard without making excuses. Treating your neighbor as you'd like to be treated."



AP photo provided

This undated photo released by Obama for America shows Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama with his grandparents, Stanley Armour Dunham and Madelyn Lee Payne Dunham, during a college-days visit in New York City. Obama is canceling nearly all his campaign events this week to fly to Hawaii to visit Madelyn Dunham, who is ill.

More Information

Indiana's Dunham connection

Presidential hopeful Sen. Barack Obama, D-Ill., frequently speaks of his grandparents' influence on the campaign trail and in media ads.

What's less known about Stanley Armour Dunham and Madelyn Lee Payne Dunham, though, is their connection to the Hoosier state.

Earlier this year, Shawn Clements of Kempton, Ind., called SBT24/7 News because he'd done the research on the 1880s-era farmhouse he now calls home.

And Clements, a contractor who specializes in historic restoration, discovered that the home had a historical link to the Dunham family before they moved to Kansas.

"If you go back just a few years, you will find that three generations of Sen. Obama's fathers are from Indiana," the farmhouse Web site reads.

Obama visited Clements and the home in May while campaigning in the Hoosier state.

Obama will visit Indianapolis again this week before leaving the campaign trail to visit his grandmother, who is reported to be gravely ill.

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She's also the "white grandmother" he referred to in a speech on race.

Obama recognized Dunham when he accepted the Democratic presidential nomination at the party's convention in Denver.

"She's the one who taught me about hard work. She's the one who put off buying a new car or a new dress for herself so that I could have a better life. She poured everything she had into me. And although she can no longer travel, I know that she's watching tonight, and that tonight is her night as well," he said.

Obama last visited Hawaii in August for a week's vacation after he had clinched the nomination.

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- [The Dunham home Web site and history](#)

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