

Obama Draws Crowds

Talks of new spirit, unity

(AP)—Illinois Sen. Barack Obama drew large crowds curious about his presidential prospects during his first trip to the pivotal campaign state of New Hampshire while he decides whether to enter the Democratic race.

Several hundred New Hampshire voters turned out to hear Obama speak at a signing for his best-selling book, "Audacity of Hope," where he spoke about a new political spirit to unite Americans while he decides whether to enter the Democratic race.

New Hampshire's first-in-the-nation primary is over a year away and Obama hasn't even said whether or not he will join the Democratic field vying for the nomination. But he's already igniting excitement with his exploratory trip.

The freshman senator said the government should be able to help make sure all Americans have basic health insurance, alternative



U.S. Sen. Barack Obama, D-Ill., speaks Sunday at a Democratic Party celebration in Manchester, N.H. (AP photo)

sources of energy to reduce dependence on foreign oil and a diplomatic power that matches its military might.

He said American slaves, immigrants, women and workers have been able to change the country, and the current generation needs to recover that spirit.

"Certainly our politics is not expressing it," Obama said. "What

we've come to be consumed by is 24-hour, slash-and-burn, negative ad, bickering, small-minded politics."

He said he saw an awakening of American voters in last month's midterm election, and played to the seriousness that New Hampshire voters take with their responsibility as the nation's first presidential primary state.

New Caucus Leader

Black lawmakers to wield more power in Congress

(AP)—The Congressional Black Caucus has tapped Rep. Carolyn Cheeks Kilpatrick as its chairwoman for the next two years, when black lawmakers will wield more power in Congress than ever.

Kilpatrick, D-Mich., a former school teacher and the mother of Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick, was chosen unanimously. She succeeds Rep. Mel Watt, D-N.C.

"Watch for us," Kilpatrick told reporters. "We will take this caucus to another level."

Because Democrats will be in control when Congress convenes a new session Jan. 4, the 43-member caucus will take up a historic slate of leadership positions, including the third-ranking member in the House, Majority Whip James Clyburn of South Carolina.

It also will count as members four likely committee heads, up to 20 subcommittee leaders, and the only black senator, Barack Obama of Illinois, a possible presidential candidate.

"That's more power than African-Americans have ever had in the Congress of the United

States," said Ronald Walters, a political scientist and director of the African American Leadership Institute at the University of Maryland.

Kilpatrick said she would continue the organization's focus on issues such as health care, housing and education. Watt said the caucus also would seek to address racial inequities in the criminal justice system and the crisis in Sudan's Darfur province.

The shift marks a dramatic turnabout from current Republican rule; there are no black Republicans in Congress much less committee chairmen or party leaders.

The black representatives will have direct oversight on issues such as tax policy, homeland security and the legal system. With their committee gavels will come the ability to shape the public agenda through hearings and to regulate which bills get a public airing.

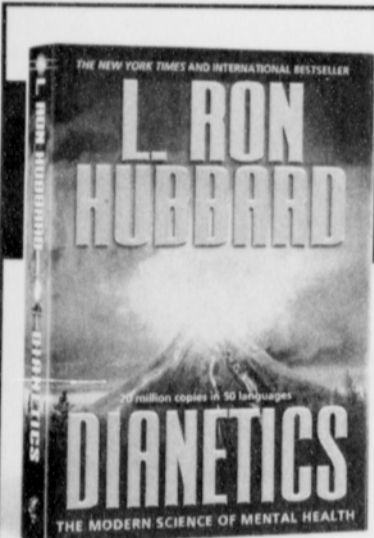
"The Congress is going to look like America. At least our side of the aisle will look like America," said Georgia Democrat John Lewis, a civil rights leader who marched alongside the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. in the 1960s before winning his House seat in 1986. "This is a historic Congress. It's amazing what we're going to be able to do."

"Our problem is going to be more than anything else to find the resources," he added.

Kilpatrick, 61, has represented a Detroit-area district since 1997.



Rep. Carolyn Cheeks Kilpatrick, D-Mich. leads the Congressional Black Caucus. (AP photo)



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Smith Turns Against War

Oregon Sen. Gordon Smith has started criticizing the Iraq war after years of backing up the Bush administration.

Smith said U.S. troops in Iraq too often find themselves "being target practice in the middle of sectarian strife" that they neither created nor can stop.

A Republican who faces re-election in 2008, Smith said he voted in favor of the use of force to overthrow Saddam Hussein, but does not support a strategy that appears to place U.S. troops in harm's way without a chance to win.

Smith called for changes in U.S. policy that could include rapid pullouts of U.S. troops from Iraq. He said he never would have voted for the conflict if he had known the intelligence that Bush gave the American people was inaccurate.



U.S. Sen. Gordon Smith, R-Ore.

Prince to Perform at Super Bowl

Funk rock veteran Prince will perform during the half-time show at the Super Bowl.

The 48-year-old Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductee who rose to fame on the strength of such tunes as "Little Red Corvette" and "Let's Go Crazy," will perform at Dolphin Stadium near Miami on Sunday, Feb. 4. The game will be televised on CBS.

It's unlikely Prince will have problems with censors from the network and the National Football League. He has become a Jehovah's Witness and disavowed the kinkier tunes that make up a hefty chunk of his catalog.

His Super Bowl performance was announced on the CBS sports show "NFL Today," three days after he received five nominations for the



Prince

Grammy Awards, the music industry's most prestigious event.