

The numbers Hillary didn't count on

By Anne Summers

Sydney Morning Herald
June 14, 2008

A lot of people, mostly men, just don't seem to understand why so many of us, and we are not all women, are so upset about the treatment of Hillary Clinton. It is not just because she lost, although of course many - myself included - wanted her to win. Nor are we suggesting, as some commentators have speciously suggested, she lost because she is a woman.

She lost because of serious mistakes in her campaign and because she allowed herself to be outmanoeuvred by the unexpected star candidacy of Barack Obama. What we are upset about is the way the American (and much of the Australian) media became foot soldiers for the Obama campaign in vicious, hate-filled and often gender-directed coverage that denigrated and damaged Clinton's candidacy.

Rather than being congratulated as the most successful woman in American political history, she has been scarified for not leaving the race sooner. In previous contests, second placegetters Ted Kennedy, Gary Hart, Jesse Jackson and Jerry Brown all stayed in the race until the very end, longer than Clinton, but were never subjected to a similar pelting. In fact, the pressure on Clinton to be a good girl and get out of Obama's way started back in March and continued unabated despite her winning nine of the 16 contests since then.

She could not take a trick with a virtually unanimous media putting the most negative spin on her every utterance. She was accused of being manipulative for crying, of "pimping" her daughter by having her on the campaign, for denying her gender by wearing pants suits and of being racist for simply pointing out the fact that millions of white people had voted for her.

She had to endure one male television commentator calling her a "she-devil", another stating she reminded him of "everyone's first wife standing outside probate court"; one who found her "castrating, overbearing and scary" while another fine specimen of the American punditocracy said, "When she comes on television ... I involuntarily cross my legs."

None of these comments go to her policies or her political skills. They are outright misogyny. They infuriated fair-minded people who have been distressed at the way sexism has become a political weapon in a way we've never seen before - and which Obama did nothing to discourage.

Clinton ran a flawed race. From being the presumptive candidate in January, she found herself outpaced by Obama with his strategy of positioning himself as the candidate for change, of going to the grassroots and winning caucuses and by tapping millions of individuals for small donations on the internet.

Amazingly, the first woman to ever be a serious contender for US president could be portrayed as being "old politics".

Clinton's biggest mistake was her decision to concentrate on the big Super Tuesday states, virtually ignoring the caucuses, believing she would have the nomination sewn up that day. In doing so, she relied on astoundingly flawed advice from her chief strategist, Mark Penn, who, according to *Time* magazine on May 8, did not know that delegates are awarded proportionately. He said she would get all 370 delegates if she won California; instead, under the proportional allocation rules, she got 204.

Even so, she and her two-time president husband Bill ought to have known the rules, and realised that Hillary could win the Texas primary, yet still end up with fewer delegates from that contest than Obama.

Bill Clinton is supposed to be the smartest political strategist around, but his refusal to open up the finances of his presidential library and his angry, red-faced outbursts did Hillary immense harm; his constant presence allowed speculation that he would be an interfering first lad. All these factors also account for why Hillary won't be asked to be Obama's Vice-president.

Even now that she has withdrawn from the race, the scorn continues. It's as if the commentariat won't be content until she is a political corpse. But this is not going to happen. Clinton will go back to the Senate where she has the option of carving out a career as a distinguished legislator.

Clinton put a brave face on it when she conceded last weekend - "18 million cracks in the glass ceiling" - but if someone of her political pedigree, with her 100 per cent name recognition, her ability to raise millions and her finely honed and popular political message can't win the nomination, what chance does a woman have who has none of these advantages? That glass ceiling is going to be there for a long time yet.

Who will win in November? It is impossible to call it but I am inclined to agree with Andrew Stephen, US editor of the *New Statesman*, who wrote on May 22: "The danger is that, in their headlong rush to stop the first major female candidate from becoming president, the punditocracy may have landed the Democrats with perhaps the least qualified presidential nominee ever."

The race will be between the cool new candidate and the ancient warrior. Americans will have a difficult choice: however much they want to put the dreadful Bush years behind them, will they risk an unknown, untested person with less than four years in the Senate to lead them through a tanking domestic economy, and two foreign military quagmires?

At present McCain and Obama are about even in the polls, before the Republicans have even drawn their political scalpels. As they will. And who will be the primary

target? What happened the last time a presidential nominee had a smart, professional, independent wife? Michelle Obama is about to get the Hillary treatment, and it will hurt her - and him. What goes around.

Politics as a bicycle built for two

Anne Summers

June 14, 2008

THE night of the iguana in Gosford last week has highlighted a unique Labor contribution to federal-state relations: the inter-parliamentary political marriage. The federal MP Belinda Neal and her now suspended state minister husband, John Della Bosca, are far from unique - except perhaps in their approach to restaurant staff.

Anthony Albanese, the federal Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government is married to Carmel Tebbutt, the state member for Marrickville who used to be minister for education and training.

In Victoria there's Kelvin Thomson, the member for Wills and one-time shadow attorney-general; he is married to - although currently separated from - Marsha Thomson, the Parliamentary Secretary for Industry and Trade and formerly a minister in the Bracks government.

The Queensland senator Jan McLucas, the Parliamentary Secretary to the federal Minister for Health and Ageing, was married to Steve Bredhauer, a former minister in the Beattie government.

Not all power couplings survive the hurly-burly of politics. The NSW senator Steve Hutchins is no longer married to the state MP Diane Beamer, a minister in the Carr government, and Senator John Faulkner has long since parted from his former wife Sandra Nori, also a former state minister.

No Liberals on the list; this seems to be an entirely Labor phenomenon.

Anne Summers