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Let the games begin

[A burning bush on the Pennsy Turnpike?]

By Terry Michael

Aging stalwarts of America's more secular political party are seeking a sign to deliver us from the presidential primary wilderness, divine intervention to get us out of campaign hell.

The graying wing of the Democratic Party is tired of this marathon. We will encounter our burning bush somewhere along the Pennsylvania Turnpike Tuesday night, even if we have to hallucinate it. Enough is enough. We've heard Sen. Hillary Clinton's claims about taking her fight to the last rodeo in Montana June 3. Yes, Sen. Barack Obama pays obligatory lip service to the right of every Democratic voice to be heard in all eight remaining states, plus Puerto Rico, Guam and galaxies far, far away. Stipulated, some "super delegates" are telling journalists everybody should get to weigh in, even if it takes until July.

Hey, we're Democrats, the inclusive party. That's how we talk.

But most of us want this damn thing over. Use whatever metaphor you like: a nuclear chain reaction reaching critical mass, or a tipping point at which buyers flock to the next new thing. But the Pennsylvania results will be embraced, by super delegates, party elders, average Democrats and an increasingly bored media, as the beginning of the end.

A rush toward Mr. Obama will get underway in the early morning hours of April 23, before we elitist Democrats grab our caramel macchiatos at Starbucks. By the time we reach Whole Foods in the late afternoon of the day after, and before we can put those French lentils with baby carrots into the microwave, the march of super delegates toward ObamaLand will be viewable on our 47-inch flat panel displays, presented by the best political teams in the cable babbling cosmos.

The mathematical impossibility for Mrs. Clinton to be victorious in popular votes, pledged delegates or states has been repeated ad nauseum, and needs no belaboring here. But it will take a miracle to reach the strong double digit victory predicted just weeks ago in Pennsylvania, which couldn't be more perfectly tailored for her focus-group-written biography and the poll-crafted neo-Clinton positions with which she has waged her quest for restoration of power.

Witness the evidence from Pennsylvania.

A blue collar, depressed, older electorate, "Ohio on steroids," and Mrs. Clinton's fourth home state. Has any American politician ever claimed more ancestral geography? To that mix, add incendiary

language from Mr. Obama's silly old-guy pastor, cabled and YouTubed throughout cheese steak and Steelers land, along with the senator's poorly chosen, elitist-sounding words in San Francisco (though one should be skeptical of media elites interpreting elitism). Yet, Mrs. Clinton's numbers have plummeted in the Keystone State, where her assets have been laser-focused and Mr. Obama's liabilities have been revealed since primary voters were last heard from March 11 in Mississippi. Just a week before Pennsylvanians were to vote, instead of a deficit of two dozen points, at least one poll showed Mr. Obama several digits ahead and two others calculated he was no more than 4 points behind (not that anyone should believe any polls this year). Obviously, if he ekes out even a one percent victory, the race is over. But if the former First Lady claims anything less than a 10-point lead, she should be regarded as toast.

The clear and present danger for Democrats allowing the battle to proceed past Pennsylvania was reflected in an amazing strategy memo — so off the wall it may have been written tongue-in-cheek — published in The Washington Post recently by Douglas Schoen, the estranged polling partner of former Clinton chief strategist Mark Penn.

Mr. Schoen asserted that Mrs. Clinton “needs to completely abandon her positive campaign and continue to hammer away at Obama,” contending that “[though] Clinton is acutely conscious... too many personal attacks will hurt her party in November, a positive message is simply not enough to alter the race at this point.” That cynical prescription appeared the same day the same newspaper released polling numbers revealing, “Today, more Americans have an unfavorable view of her than at any time since The Post and ABC began asking the question, in 1992.”

It is over. The sign is upon us, flashing brightly. To put it bluntly, the Democratic Party is not going to thumb its nose at history and deny the nomination to a black candidate in favor of a woman with Mrs. Clinton's baggage. Get ready for Obamamania, Mr. McCain.

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