

The Salt Lake Tribune

Could Clinton be disaster for Dems in West?

By Thomas Burr
The Salt Lake Tribune

Article Last Updated: 12/15/2007 12:59:48 AM MST

WASHINGTON - Should Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton lead the Democratic Party's ticket next year, Western Democrats could face a lashing at the polls, one state party leader argues.

Wyoming Democratic Party Chairman John Millin says in a letter to *The Denver Post* that Clinton is a polarizing figure and could scare voters away.

"If Hillary Clinton is our party's nominee, every Democratic candidate in Wyoming will be painted with that same liberal, big government brush," writes Millin, who is backing Clinton rival Barack Obama. "We will also be the target of the locker room jokes that rightfully belong to Bill Clinton."

Millin, who said he was speaking for himself and not his state organization, calls his warning the "dirty little secret of the Democratic Party." Other Democratic leaders in the West distanced themselves from Millin on Friday.

Utah Democratic Party Chairman Wayne Holland acknowledged the idea that Clinton could harm other Democrats down the ticket but said Republicans are pushing that line to boost themselves in the region.

"I'm still surprised how well she's doing. . . . I have no qualms about any of our candidates who are running for president."

In Idaho, Democratic Party Executive Director John Foster dismissed the anti-Clinton argument.

"2008 is going to be a very good year for Democrats in the West, regardless of who is our nominee," Foster said.

Democrats have heralded a surge in voter support in recent years in the West, which has seen five of eight Rocky Mountain governor's offices flip from Republicans to Democrats since 2000. Even in Utah, arguably the reddest state in the nation, Democrats have secured more of a lock on the 2nd Congressional District seat and won the Salt Lake County Mayor's Office from the GOP.

But Millin says that a Clinton presidential nomination could hurt such party momentum, a point also made by Kirk Jowers, head of the University of Utah

Advertisement

TARGET COUPON EXPIRES 3/8/08

FREE Twenty 4x6" basic prints 

Offer available at Target One-hour Photo Labs. Go to Target.com/photo for the location nearest you. One-hour service limited to machine capacity. Limit one item or offer per coupon. Offer not available for prints made on the Kodak Picture Kiosk. Void if copied, transferred, purchased, sold or prohibited by law. No cash value. Maximum retail value \$4.40 for combined free offer.



9856-0113-2647-5849-0376-5806-89

Print Powered By 

The Salt Lake Tribune

Hinckley Institute of Politics.

"It's mostly unfair, but Hillary does have an extraordinary amount of baggage in Utah and in the West," Jowers says. "All indicators are that this should be a strong year for Democrats, but I think the biggest fear for Utah and Western Democrats is that Hillary Clinton ends up versus Mitt Romney."

Jowers is backing Romney, a GOP candidate with strong ties to Utah, including sharing his Mormon faith with a majority of residents.

He says Republicans also have a contender who could turn off party faithful in Utah and other Western states with sizable LDS populations - former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee, who has recently been criticized for playing the Mormon card.

"Huckabee has been absolutely craven in the way he has pushed religious differences as his main reason for being a contender," Jowers says.

The Clinton campaign balks at the idea her nomination could endanger other Democrats.

"She's clearly the most electable Democrat," says former Utah Democratic Party Chairman Donald Dunn, now the Utah representative for the Clinton camp.

When Bill Clinton came to Salt Lake City for a fund-raiser on Nov. 4, more than 1,500 people showed up, Dunn said, and historically, Democrats in Utah have survived other national waves of anti-Democratic sentiment.

Dunn called it "outrageous" that Millin, an Obama supporter, is engaging in "a personal, negative attack" on Hillary Clinton.

Obama's campaign, which forcefully complained about a comment from a Clinton official attacking Obama this week, distanced itself from Millin's remarks. "Comments like this have no place in the campaign from our supporters or anyone else," spokeswoman Jen Psaki said.

Pat Williams, a former nine-term Democratic congressman from Montana and now northern director of Western Progress, an eight-state, nonpartisan policy group, says Clinton actually is a good candidate for the West, mainly because as a woman she could bring in independent female voters.

"Hillary Clinton would be a stronger nominee for our party in the Rocky Mountain West than was either Al Gore or John Kerry," says Williams, describing the 2000 and 2004 nominees as "a great burden on our Democratic candidates."

tburr@sltrib.com

Advertisement

TARGET COUPON EXPIRES 3/8/06

FREE Twenty 4x6" basic prints 

Offer available at Target One-hour Photo Labs. Go to Target.com/photo for the location nearest you. One-hour service limited to machine capacity. Limit one item or offer per coupon. Offer not available for prints made on the Kodak Picture Kiosk. Void if copied, transferred, purchased, sold or prohibited by law. No cash value. Maximum retail value \$4.40 for combined free offer.



9856-0113-2647-5849-0376-5806-89

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™