

The Erie Times-News

Rendell: Pa. in play

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Circle April 22 on your calendar.

After Super Tuesday failed to crown a Democratic presidential nominee, Gov. Ed Rendell said Pennsylvania's late-in-the-game primary might decide the race.

And Rendell, a Democrat who has endorsed Hillary Rodham Clinton, said he will work on the campaign's behalf.

"Whatever they ask me to do," he told the Erie Times-News Editorial Board on Wednesday.

A Pennsylvania primary that meant something seemed unlikely in 2007 when dozens of other states moved to the front of the nominating calendar in a bid to be relevant in the nominating process.

Rendell supported moving up Pennsylvania's primary to Feb. 12, and the state House approved the bill, but the measure died in the state Senate.

But who knew that the 24 states involved in Super Tuesday wouldn't decide the nomination between Clinton and Barack Obama? They are locked in a tight race to reach the magic number of 2,025 -- how many delegates are necessary to secure the nomination.

"I think it's anybody's convention. It could go to the convention," he said, referring to the Democratic National Convention in Denver, which begins Aug. 25.

"It could even come (down) to Pennsylvania, which no one would have believed -- myself least of all," he said. "So it's a stunning development."

Political analysts have also said that Pennsylvania or a later state in the process could now be the deciding state for Democrats, while Republican John McCain appears well on his way to winning the GOP nomination thanks in part to Super Tuesday wins on the East Coast and in California.

Rendell said he told the Clinton campaign that he would do whatever it asked in the Super Tuesday states of New Jersey and Delaware. "Typical national campaign, they called me four times to do events and canceled every one of them," he said, laughing.

Clinton won New Jersey, while Obama got Delaware.

Though Rendell's name has come up as a potential vice presidential pick, Rendell said, "The good news is that I'm off the hook because I don't fit with either candidate."

Rendell said that he and Clinton, the junior U.S. senator from New York, are both progressive

politicians who represent adjoining states, which would give Clinton no geographical advantage in the election.

As for Obama, Rendell said the junior U.S. senator from Illinois needs a vice presidential nominee who is strong in foreign policy and terrorism. Rendell suggested U.S. Sen. Joe Biden of Delaware. Biden, chairman of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, dropped out of the 2008 presidential race earlier.

Rendell told the Editorial Board in a prior interview about his interest in a Cabinet position in a Democratic White House, but only after his second term ends.

"In 2011, if there was an opening. Only energy and transportation would interest me, but that's not likely to happen," he said.

As for Super Tuesday, Rendell said he was "a little surprised" by the results because "I, just like everybody else, was sort of taken in by the media's Obama surge," referring to polls showing Obama winning California, Massachusetts and New Jersey. Clinton won all three states.

"She won Massachusetts in spite of the Kennedys and the Kerrys and the Shrivvers and Oprah," Rendell said, referring to heavy hitters from the political and entertainment worlds.

Rendell said it's either candidate's race, but he suggested the media, generally speaking, has given a pass to Obama thus far. He said that would change if Obama were to win the nomination.

Rendell also said the GOP "spin machine hasn't laid a glove on him for one reason: They're not going to expend energy until he becomes the nominee, but as soon as he becomes the nominee, watch out."

The governor said he's been in the business of politics for 31 years and he has spoken to every Democrat who's run for office during that time.

"Folks, I don't have the slightest doubt that Hillary Clinton is the best prepared, most qualified, and has the best plans to govern of any of the ones I've seen, including Bill Clinton. She blows away Bill Clinton.

"Bill Clinton in '92 was nowhere close to Hillary in the level of knowledge, experience ... (and) specific plans for their presidency. She's by far the most qualified," he said. "And no offense to Senator Obama, who I think can be a terrific leader for America some day. But I've never met anybody as qualified as she," Rendell said.

Despite his support for Clinton, Rendell said he would work on behalf of Obama if he were to win the nomination.

"We're going to have to fight hard to elect either one of them," he said.

"I won't have the slightest hesitation working my heart out for Senator Obama if he's the nominee."

Gov. Ed Rendell, on other issues:

- Erie's proposed waste tire-to-energy plant: State government doesn't get involved in land-use disputes, but he believes the technology is sound and the project could qualify for state alternative-energy funding.
- On exceptions he would approve for a statewide smoking ban: Private clubs and part of a casino floor, "but not much."
- On criticism from anti-gambling groups, who say he doesn't go into the state's casinos: "He's ashamed of what he's created," Rendell said, quoting them. But Rendell said he would also be criticized if he were to visit the casinos.

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